



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1998

Basingstoke College of Technology
Employment and Training Services

SUMMARY

Basingstoke College of Technology Employment and Training Services offers excellent training in hairdressing both on and off the job. Construction and business administration training is good, and engineering and retailing training is satisfactory. The college has a wide network of employers and is working to extend it further. There is a good equal opportunities policy which is widely distributed. Trainee support and management of training are good. Quality assurance systems are excellent.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	3
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	3
Hair & beauty	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	1

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good systems and policies covering all aspects of work
- ◆ professional approach to management of training
- ◆ strong support for trainees on the part of the provider and employers
- ◆ excellent college accommodation and resources

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for on-the-job assessment
- ◆ staff rôles and responsibilities not firmly established

INTRODUCTION

1. Basingstoke College of Technology (BCOT) is a general college of further education in north Hampshire's borough of Basingstoke and Deane. Most of its work takes place on the north and south sites of the campus. There is also a management centre approximately four miles away. The college manages its curriculum through 16 schools and has approximately 1,700 full- and 12,000 part-time students. The inspection was concerned with the college's trainees on programmes funded mainly through Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There is also a small contract with the Thames Valley TEC. The college manages its provision for trainees through a specialist department called BCOT Employment and Training Services (BETS).

2. The department has a dedicated office which is easily accessible to prospective and current trainees. National vocational qualifications are offered in construction, engineering, business administration, retail and customer service, and hair and beauty at levels 1 to 4. The college, as a whole, serves a wide geographical area, but work-based training is seen as predominantly local. The aim of the work-based training is to enable young people to acquire occupational competence and to obtain and/or sustain employment, and to provide employers with the opportunity to employ and train suitable young people. Owing to the relatively low unemployment rates in the Basingstoke area, the college aims to ensure that all trainees are placed with employers on a permanent employment basis. At the time of the inspection, there were 96 employers providing employment for trainees. Six staff are employed in BCOT Employment and Training Services.

3. With the exception of Basingstoke, which has a population of 85,000, the borough is mainly rural. The population of the borough is about 148,000 and 19 per cent of inhabitants are between 16 and 29 years of age. Approximately 1.9 per cent of those aged 16 or over are from minority ethnic groups. The nature of industry in the borough is diverse. There is a larger than average distribution sector and opportunities for employment in the industrial sectors of finance, construction, manufacturing and agriculture. The economy of the borough is sound and, for the last 20 years, it has been able to maintain unemployment rates at half the national average. Currently, the unemployment rate in Basingstoke is 1.5 per cent. As well as Basingstoke College, there is a sixth-form college in the borough.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Inspectors spent 23.5 days at Basingstoke College during September 1998. They interviewed 56 trainees and 62 employers and supervisors, and observed a selection of training sessions, reviews and assessments. Management files, trainees' assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios were also examined.

5. Basingstoke College produced a self-assessment report in July 1998, based on an in-house inspection carried out by three members of the college's management team. All members of staff concerned with work-based training were involved at all stages of the self-assessment report's production. The report clearly identified strengths and weaknesses and its assessments were generally accurate. Action-plans were clear, well-structured and addressed identified weaknesses.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		3				3
Engineering	1	3	1			5
Business administration		1	1			2
Hair & beauty	2	3	4			9
Total	3	10	6	0	0	19

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

6. BETS has 32 trainees on TEC-funded courses in construction. Most trainees are taking NVQ level 2 on a work-based training for young people programme in the various construction crafts. In addition, some trainees are taking courses in handcraft furniture and interior decorative techniques. The number of trainees has increased from 17 last year in response to demand from local industry. All trainees are employed, usually attending college for one day a week. Training and assessment take place in the college and are carried out by staff employed by the college. All staff are appropriately qualified to deliver the award, and resources at the college are good. Inspectors found that some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed. They identified strengths which were additional to those mentioned in the self-assessment report, and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-standard, well-planned and fully documented off-the-job training
- ◆ well-equipped modern accommodation
- ◆ good tracking systems for NVQs
- ◆ comprehensive internal verification systems
- ◆ trainees' work exceeds required level of occupational competence
- ◆ trainees consulted about the effectiveness of the training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for on-the-job assessment
- ◆ no formal co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no workplace officer vocationally qualified in construction

7. Assessment of trainees' basic skills is carried out, with trainees being referred to college departments for extra help with literacy and numeracy where necessary. Off-the-job training and assessment are well organised, fully documented and appropriately delivered. Trainers are well qualified in their subject areas and have relevant occupational experience. There are sufficient, appropriately deployed lecturers. The training is of a high standard, and assignments are thorough, fair and cover the required skills and knowledge at the appropriate level. In all craft areas, NVQ tracking systems are displayed, which clearly show the progress of individual trainees and the samples of work that have been chosen for internal verification. There are adequate tools and materials to enable trainees to achieve the necessary work experience. Both tools and equipment are of appropriate industry standard and reflect actual work situations. Each craft area in the centre has separate rooms for theoretical and practical tuition. Practical skill levels are high, and most portfolio work is comprehensive, adequately covering the underpinning knowledge required for the particular award. Trainees are attentive and conscientious in their learning. Workplace officers visit trainees frequently, both at college and in the workplace, to carry out general reviews of progress and to provide pastoral support. These visits continue throughout college holidays. Trainees are consulted about the effectiveness of their training. Evaluation of feedback shows that trainees enjoy their off-the-job training and have a high regard for trainers.

8. Work-based delivery is underdeveloped. There are no work-based assessors. Few work-based assessments are undertaken by the company's staff. There are no formal links between on- and off-the-job training. Internal verification is carried out by college staff working in construction.

9. There is no recording of trainees application of skills in the workplace, apart from witness statements. There are no work-placement officers qualified in any of the construction craft areas. Consequently, they are unable to offer detailed advice on NVQ units, assessments and evidence.

Engineering

Grade 3

10. There are 27 trainees in engineering and 31 in motor vehicle engineering. All trainees are employed and attend the college one day each week to study the underpinning knowledge for their chosen NVQ or certificate course. In engineering, 18 trainees are taking NVQs at level 2 and nine are taking NVQs at level 3. Seventeen of the trainees are youth trainees, two are national trainees and eight are modern apprentices. In motor vehicle engineering 15 trainees are taking NVQs at level 2 and 16 at level 3; there are 17 youth trainees, seven national trainees and seven modern apprentices. Training staff, who are qualified assessors, carry out training in college and in the workplace. Work-based performance evidence is also supported by witness testimony. Achievement in terms of NVQs per 100 leavers for 1996-97 and 1997-98 respectively are 50 and 125. To date, for this year, these have risen to 164. Early leaver rates for 1996-97 and 1997-98, are 25 per cent and 42 per cent respectively and have fallen to 18 per cent for this year, to date. The retention rate in 1997-98 was 74 per cent. Inspectors considered that many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than would be expected as standard practice. They also found additional strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report, however, was accurate in its proposed grading.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and effectively delivered off-the-job training
- ◆ well-documented off-the-job assessment systems understood by trainees
- ◆ good tracking systems record unit achievement
- ◆ well-integrated key skills in motor-vehicle programmes
- ◆ identification and accreditation of prior learning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not fully integrated in all programmes
- ◆ some inadequate training and assessment planning in the workplace
- ◆ NVQ targets are not progressive or demanding
- ◆ little knowledge of NVQs among work-based staff
- ◆ some ineffective communication between BETS and the school of engineering

11. The college delivers most of the off-the-job training, which is well planned and well delivered in adequate classrooms and workshops. Theoretical and practical sessions are delivered in a manner which maintains trainees' interest. Workshops have a wide range of well-maintained equipment, and there has recently been a substantial investment in a new computer numerically controlled (CNC) machining centre. Trainees demonstrate an enthusiastic approach to their training, in both the classroom and the workshops, working productively without close supervision from early on in their training. Trainees have a good understanding of the assessment

process in engineering. There are good support materials to help collect and record evidence of competence. One example of this is the new portfolio designed for the engineering foundation NVQ at level 2. Good material has also been developed to help trainees to learn the required underpinning knowledge and to demonstrate that knowledge through computerised tests. There are effective qualification tracking systems which record achievement at unit level. Display boards have been put up in some workshops to enable trainees to easily identify their progress through the NVQ. Where possible, accreditation of prior learning is carried out. Negotiation with the relevant awarding body has led to the evidence being transferred from intermediate GNVQ to level 2 NVQs.

12. Key skills training and assessment are fully integrated in the motor vehicle engineering NVQ programme. Integration begins early at NVQ level 1 and is completed at level 3 with the attainment of the training and development unit in coaching skills (C25).

13. Key skills are not integrated in all engineering programmes, and some key skills training and assessment are taking place late in the NVQ level 3 programme. The quality of the planning for training and assessment on NVQ level 3 engineering programmes is sometimes inadequate. The planning process begins with a meeting at the college, attended by the employer, the trainee, a college representative and a BETS's workplacement officer, at which optional NVQ units are negotiated. Trainees are fully involved in this process and contribute to planning their training. After this good start, however, there is little activity in developing a meaningful on-the-job training plan or a planned assessment process which is agreed with the trainee. This situation results in trainees not being set progressive, demanding NVQ targets, against which their reviews can be carried out. This lack of planning has resulted in one trainee not gathering any evidence towards the NVQ in a six-month period, because the employer uses the trainees on activities which do not contribute to the NVQ requirement. Work-based staff have little knowledge of NVQs or the assessment process, so cannot contribute effectively to trainees' progress. The problem is further compounded by confusion over the respective rôle of BETS and the colleges' schools in relation to on-the-job training. The college has recognised these weaknesses and is introducing a programme of formal meetings to attempt to address them. A service agreement has been drawn up to establish departmental responsibilities, but this is not yet fully operational.

Business administration

Grade 2

14. The college has 25 trainees, 18 of whom are on youth training and seven on modern apprenticeship programmes. The range of qualification aims covers business administration NVQ levels 2 to 4, using information technology NVQ level 2 and accounts NVQ levels 2 to 4. All the trainees are employed. Nine business administration trainees, all accountancy trainees and one trainee on the using information technology NVQ attend college one day each week, in term time, to cover theoretical aspects of training. BETS's workplacement officer visits the trainees, either in the workplace or in college, every eight weeks to carry out a monitoring review. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses

with which inspectors mostly agreed. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good college accommodation and resources
- ◆ well-structured, -planned and -delivered off-the-job training
- ◆ flexible learning arrangements for business administration trainees
- ◆ frequent assessor visits to work-based trainees
- ◆ wide range of employers
- ◆ good progression to higher level qualifications
- ◆ good tracking systems
- ◆ high level of occupational competence shown in trainees' work

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of assessment over summer holiday period for some trainees
- ◆ non-standardised assessment process for key skills
- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

To enable trainees to keep up to date with current developments and share good practice, all business administration trainees who are totally work based have been invited to join a networking group. The group organises regular meetings and sends out a newsletter.

15. The college has good accommodation and equipment, as well as a well-resourced learning centre. The computer workshops have dedicated reception areas and attractive wall displays. All trainees, including those who are work based, have access to all facilities and can make appointments to use the computer workshops. Off-the-job training is well planned and structured. There are good tracking systems in place which are easy to access and understand, and which show individual trainees' progress and the internal verification process. Trainees on the business administration programmes have flexibility in designing their programme. After the first five-week module, covering induction and training needs analysis, trainees can design their own timetable, choosing modules which they feel will best meet their needs. The approach is successful, allowing trainees to make maximum use of training. A regular weekly tutorial slot is allocated to each trainee. Accounting trainees attend college and join regular timetabled Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) courses. The AAT programme is highly structured, designed to meet the needs of the awarding body and external assessments. Achievement of the NVQ is linked to the length of college course. Trainees who are solely work based, are visited by college staff every two weeks, at which time assessments are carried out. During each visit, realistic targets are agreed on, which must be met by the time of the next visit by the assessor. Assessors' visits are planned in advance, to minimise disruption to trainees' work, and, wherever possible, verbal feedback is given to line managers. Portfolios show a high level of occupational competence, with trainees using evidence from the workplace. In some cases, witness statements support this. Most trainees progress to higher level programmes.

16. The assessment process for trainees who attend college one day each week is mainly carried out off the job. These trainees have no assessment over the summer

holiday. Although the trainees in this occupational area work with a wide range of employers there are no work-based assessors. These two factors slow trainees' progress in achieving the NVQ. Trainees in business administration, who complete the NVQ on the job, are covering the key skills as an add-on to the main NVQ. College staff have now mapped key skills against the NVQ, and new trainees are covering key skills in an integrated way.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

17. The college has nine trainees in this vocational area, two of whom are working towards NVQs in customer service at levels 1 and 2, two are working towards retail operations at NVQ level 2, one is working towards a retail NVQ at level 2 and four are working towards distribution and warehousing NVQs at level 2. All trainees are employed, with training taking place off the job. The sample size for this inspection was very small; three of the trainees interviewed had just started the programme; two were on holiday. It was, therefore, not possible to reach a conclusion about all claims in the self-assessment report, particularly in relation to on-the-job training. The self-assessment report identified some strengths which were no more than normal practice. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough on- and off-the-job induction
- ◆ good facilities for off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ informal communication links between assessors and work-placement officers
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates in some areas

18. Workplace induction is thorough. If a trainee is the only person joining the programme, individual sessions are arranged, otherwise, trainees take part in group inductions. Trainees who attend off-the-job training receive a college induction. Along with all other trainees, those in retail operations are able to make use of the college's extensive facilities.

19. Work-placement officers and assessors do not share information on trainees' progress effectively. Communication is too informal and frequently information is not recorded. As a result, work-placement officers have to check trainees' progress with individual trainees during monitoring visits. Of the 24 trainees who started on all programmes, 66 per cent have left before completing the programme, only four trainees have achieved NVQ level 2.

Hair & beauty

Grade 1

20. There are 64 young people working towards NVQs in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3. Three of the trainees are modern apprentices taking NVQ level 3, and 34 are following national traineeships at NVQ level 2. Male trainees account for 6 per cent of the total, and 2 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. All trainees are employed and work in local salons. They receive off-the-job training in the college's school of hairdressing and beauty therapy. Trainees attend college one day each week in term time, working in salons during the holidays. A BETS work-placement officer visits trainees to complete administration procedures, when trainees start on the scheme, and negotiates with the employer and trainee, the day each week when the trainee should attend college. Monitoring reviews are conducted by a co-ordinator, who is a member of the college's hairdressing team. The reviews take place every eight weeks and are carried out alternately at the employer's salon and at the college. The regular reviews of NVQ progress in college tutorials include useful action-planning. The self-assessment report accurately identified many of the strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a higher grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality, modern, well-resourced hairdressing salons for on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ well-structured, -planned and -delivered off-the-job training
- ◆ effectively used, good variety of training strategies and aids
- ◆ individualised and flexible learning programmes aid trainees' progress
- ◆ good team teaching with integrated learning support for NVQ level 2 trainees
- ◆ regular tutorials and reviews focus on trainees' progress and action-planning
- ◆ punctual, attentive, well-motivated, enthusiastic hairdressing trainees
- ◆ key skills assessment and support well integrated in hairdressing tasks
- ◆ assessment evidence from on- and off-the-job work used for NVQ achievement
- ◆ excellent monitoring reviews of trainee, linking on- and off-the-job hairdressing work
- ◆ supportive employers value the off-the-job hairdressing training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of stimulating displays, good lighting and ventilation in theory teaching rooms
- ◆ failure to take into account trainees' previous experience in realistic training plans

21. Salons used for on- and off-the-job training are modern and well resourced, with good product ranges to use and to sell to clients. The off-the-job training salons were refurbished in 1993 to a high standard, with support from an internationally known, locally based hairdressing company. Clients arriving from the college car park enter through a modern porch entrance and take a lift and stairs to the first floor salons and reception area. Trainees can be assessed in the reception area. It is professionally equipped and includes a computerised till and retail displays. There is a large waiting area for clients, with comfortable, spacious seating and fresh coffee available. The walls have photographic displays, celebrating trainees' achievements and competition successes. The two salons have 18 working positions each in an open plan arrangement, situated either side of reception. They are serviced by a large dispensary which stocks a wide range of products. The dispensary is used for trainees' NVQ stock assessments.

22. Salons' learning resources include wall-mounted television and video facilities. Effective use of training strategies is supported by a wide range of well-produced learning materials, including manuals, task books, handouts, case studies, videos, CD-ROMs, textbooks, models and artefacts. Theory sessions take place in rooms which lack good ventilation and lighting. In contrast to the salons, these teaching rooms contain little display material. Sessions in college where trainees use a range of resources are staffed by four trainers for approximately 30 NVQ level 2 trainees. The team works very effectively. Those trainees identified as requiring additional support usually receive sufficient help due to these staffing strategies. One trainee has extra English support with her NVQ written work from the learning development centre staff. All trainees benefit from the integration of learning support by a key skills trainer and involvement of the hairdressing training co-ordinator, as they are able to see the links between key skills and theory. Initial assessments by BETS identify whether trainees are to be recommended to take national traineeships. Key skills are assessed, using work prepared for the hairdressing NVQ tasks. The information technology key skill is delivered separately, using NVQ in hairdressing project work. There are separate assessment and verification procedures for key skills.

23. Practical on- and off-the-job training is carried out competently, with due regard for health and safety. Well-structured, off-the-job training provision enables trainees to select individual programmes to meet their needs. There is no accreditation of prior learning and no account is taken of trainees previous experience in drawing up training plans at the start of the programme. Most trainees have worked in salons before joining BETS, either completing work experience while at school or through Saturday jobs. Regular tutorials, reviews and effective action-planning ensures that trainees receive sound advice and guidance in progressing towards their NVQ. Trainees are well motivated and enthusiastic and enjoy their off-the-job training at college. They are punctual for classes. Lateness is not tolerated by trainers. In 1997-98, the proportion of early leavers was high, at 62 per cent. Concern about retention is being addressed by the use of an 'at risk' list to help tutors to monitor and support identified trainees. Salons usually recruit their own trainees. BETS provides strong support for trainees and is valued by the

trainees and by employers. The monitoring reviews carried out by the hairdressing co-ordinator are excellent. Preparation for the reviews is thorough, and the co-ordinator's occupational expertise and knowledge of the hairdressing NVQ are used very effectively to identify links between trainees' on- and off-the-job work. NVQ project work, salon-specific issues, specialist manufacturers' courses and competition queries are supported effectively. Employers' involvement and the linking of on- and off-the-job training opportunities are further encouraged by leaving copies of trainees' NVQ progress charts in the salon. Trainees are encouraged to identify achievements since their last review and store certificates in their national record of achievement folders. All trainees have salon training sessions or opportunities to work regularly on clients. Hairdressing trainers encourage trainees to use appropriate on-the-job evidence of competence for NVQ assessment, and 17 salons have qualified work-based assessors. Hairdressing competition and promotions work is also used. College assessors, or the co-ordinator, will visit salons to carry out assessments in the workplace, in negotiation with trainees and employers.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

24. BETS adheres to Basingstoke College's equal opportunities policy. In addition, BETS has an equal opportunities policy which is effectively managed and regularly reviewed, monitored and updated. The ethnicity and achievement rates of trainees are monitored, although there is no formal reference to applicants who do not take up training. Procedures and responsibility for the implementation of policies are clearly defined in equal opportunities documentation. BETS produces action-plans for evaluation of equal opportunities procedures and plans for improvement. The self-assessment report did not identify all weaknesses, and the grade for this aspect is lower than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy and procedures are regularly updated and reviewed
- ◆ strong equal opportunities culture
- ◆ extensive off-the-job facilities for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ positive action to improve access issues
- ◆ analysis of equal opportunities monitoring shows trainees reflect population from minority ethnic groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ BETS's marketing literature does not promote equal opportunities
- ◆ no formal monitoring of applicants for gender or ethnicity
- ◆ equal opportunities issues and procedures are not understood or supported by all employers

25. BETS takes its commitment to equality of opportunity seriously. All staff and trainees receive information on equal opportunities at induction. Clear guidelines on the complaints and grievance procedure are given at induction. There is no specific equal opportunities training for staff. However, the college is addressing this issue, and equal opportunities will become a college performance indicator for 1998-99. The commitment to equal opportunities is shown in the college's mission statement. There is a comprehensive and clearly worded policy and well-conceived arrangements for its implementation. Information is well presented and distributed among staff and trainees. The equal opportunities monitoring committee has produced an action-plan to improve physical access to the college. It includes a ramp and handrail for wheelchair users in construction and building services. Motor vehicle engineering trainees with disabilities are also able to access college facilities. Monitoring of trainees' ethnicity is carried out, and results show that the low numbers of minority ethnic trainees reflects the local population.

26. BETS distributes a range of promotional literature which does not actively promote issues such as gender, disability and ethnic minorities. Initial applicants are informally monitored, although this will be formalised with the introduction of a new software programme in October. There is no systematic evaluation of employers' performance in guaranteeing equal opportunities for trainees. Not all employers are aware of equal opportunities issues and their relevance to them. BETS's staff have identified employers, during the initial health and safety audit, who do not have their own policy, but do not insist that they adopt the college's policy.

Trainee support

Grade 2

27. BETS is strongly committed to helping trainees achieve their qualifications. Staff visit trainees in the workplace and at their off-the-job training provision for monitoring review visits. Trainees can access the wide range of support services offered by the college. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but additional weaknesses were identified during inspection. The inspection grade is lower than proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive on- and off-the-job training induction
- ◆ good access to counselling, welfare and pastoral support during off-the-job training
- ◆ high level of occupational support throughout off-the-job training
- ◆ learning development resources available for trainees with additional support needs
- ◆ strong commitment to trainee support by trainers, employers and workplace officers
- ◆ particular care given to pastoral support in the review system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic assessment of prior achievement on entry
- ◆ no formal induction for most trainees progressing to higher-level NVQs

28. Induction is carried out both on and off the job. BETS's staff visit trainees in the workplace to complete required scheme documentation and to discuss BETS's requirements. All employers' premises have an initial health and safety assessment completed by BETS's workplace co-ordinators. Comprehensive off-the-job induction is carried out by trainers and tutors in each occupational area. This enables trainees to learn of the wide range of facilities and support staff available. They include a college nurse, counsellors, welfare officer, advice and guidance unit staff, and careers service staff. There is also a college crèche-nursery. All trainees are allocated a personal tutor at the start of their off-the-job training.

29. Off-the-job trainees receive good support, including occupational support, from a range of staff. Trainers give regular feedback on progress and assessments. There are regular tutorials at which tutors discuss off-the-job progress and help trainees draw up their action plans. BETS's staff visit trainees on and off the job. The frequency of trainees' review-monitoring visits varies across occupational areas. All are more frequent than required in the TEC contract. Particular care is given to the pastoral support offered to trainees, through the review process. Staff monitor health and safety, equal opportunities, absence, pay and general progress in training. All staff are committed to trainees' welfare and most employers are interested in trainees' progress.

30. The usefulness of tracking and discussing qualifications' progress is varied, mostly owing to the fact that the staff involved are not always occupationally competent. In most occupational areas, progress reviews are general and do not focus on achievements or action-planning. The time spent on reviews with trainees also varies, some reviews are short and sweet, aimed at completing the required documentation, while others involve additional discussions to further support trainees. Trainees with additional support needs make use the college's learning development centre's resources and receive help from staff within the centre. The college has an extensive range of evaluation processes and procedures. A

questionnaire is given to BETS's trainees to find out their views about its services. The information is valued and acted on by a college committee, to constantly improve services.

31. BETS's staff do not systematically assess and accredit prior learning on entry or use any relevant information to prepare realistic individual training plans. Many trainees already have some work experience relevant to the occupational areas in which they wish to train. There is no formal induction for most trainees progressing to higher qualifications. In many cases, it is assumed that trainees are aware of the programmes' content and qualification requirements. The difference between the various types of training are not always explained to trainees, for example, some of the trainees who have converted from traineeships to modern apprenticeships lack knowledge of the differing requirements of the two programmes.

Management of training

Grade 2

GOOD PRACTICE

Management wanted to be sure that there would be sufficient staff resources to service any increase in trainees. A manpower analysis survey was conducted and the work patterns for each member of the team were carefully examined over a two week period. A staff/trainee ratio was calculated which has now been written into the organisation's management strategy.

32. The college established a separate department for managing TEC-funded training in 1996. Trainees generally attend off-the-job training sessions at the college, but some are trained entirely in the workplace. Trainees with a need for specialist training, which can not be provided by the college, attend other colleges in the area. The provision has grown quickly. It has more than doubled in the past two years. The training department sets operational objectives to support the strategic plan of the whole organisation. These objectives are carefully monitored and regularly analysed. The staff training and development programme is clearly designed to fulfill the strategic aims of the college and staff's performance is measured against the strategic plan. The self-assessment report was largely accurate in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in management of training. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ excellent staff induction and development programme
- ◆ good use of management information system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ staff rôles and responsibilities are not yet firmly established
- ◆ internal lines of communication are not always effective

33. In 1995, college managers developed strategies for the delivery of TEC funded training and conducted research which indicated that good relationships with employers are the key to success. The existing commercial training and marketing team subsequently extended its services to include TEC-funded provision. The organisation markets its services to about 5,000 employers in the area through visits and newsletters. There is also a programme of regular open-days, exhibitions, presentations, workshops and roadshows, which involve both national and local employers. A recruitment service, developed in the BETS department, has been successful in finding young people jobs. It is the college's aim that all trainees must be employed and this was successfully achieved at the time of inspection.

34. New staff benefit from a well-structured induction programme which involves the appointment of a mentor who regularly reviews individuals' progress during the first year. A staff development programme directly supports the organisation's strategic aims. Staff are appraised against performance criteria which are clearly linked to the strategic plan. There were 579 different training activities for college staff in the past academic year, and 1.6 per cent of the staff budget was spent on development. A programme of training events is circulated each month to all members of staff who are invited and encouraged to apply for appropriate opportunities. Delegates on each course evaluate the effectiveness of their training, and the results of the evaluation form part of a thorough annual review of the staff development programme, which shapes the plan for the subsequent year. All development activities are recorded on a computerised personnel database.

35. Performance statistics across all occupational areas are readily available. There are regular analyses of achievement and information on leavers across all aspects of the contract. The college has made a good attempt to benchmark its own performance against both regional and national statistics. There are informed management meetings to discuss how to address any areas of concern arising from statistical analyses. In many cases, management responds quickly to problems which are identified.

36. There has been some confusion over the respective rôles of the training department and the schools of study. This has arisen primarily because trainees are absorbed into college classes with Further Education Funding Council-funded students who are taking different non work-based qualifications. Management has identified the difficulties and responded to the problem by designing a service level agreement between the two parties concerned. The aim is to clarify which parties have specific responsibilities for the care and progression of trainees during their time on the programme. Other measures are being discussed to make it clear that the training department needs to be recognised as an internal customer of the college.

37. The service level agreement is also aimed at solving communications difficulties which have arisen among members of staff representing both parties. For example, BETS staff's lack of clarity about trainees' progress, when visiting employers for review meetings, and school staff's lack of information about on-the-job training activities. The documentation issued to trainees contains a number of errors and

omissions and although these have been picked up through the quality assurance system, mistakes still occur.

Quality assurance

Grade 1

38. The college has a well-established quality assurance system which meets the requirements of the TEC. Information is collected from a wide range of sources. Performance is monitored and evaluated. Data are analysed and regularly communicated to management for discussion. Working groups are set up to consider areas of concern and to implement improvements. The college is critical of its own performance and achievement. Self-assessment is a regular feature of the organisation. The college has recently been re-accredited as an Investor in People. In general, the self-assessment report successfully identified strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of effective quality assurance measures
- ◆ analyses of diverse data lead to continuous improvement
- ◆ quality assurance system has a direct and positive impact on trainees' experience
- ◆ clearly understood and firmly embedded process of self-assessment
- ◆ commitment to improving the quality of provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped trainees' evaluation systems

39. Quality assurance measures are evident across the broad range of the college's activities. This includes effective internal verification procedures, complete course reviews and evaluations, support services analyses, staff training evaluations and close examination of the performance of individual schools of study. Causes for concern are highlighted and information is fed to various working parties, which have been set up to resolve particular issues. Management systems data are scrutinised on a regular basis and considered by appropriate staff at all levels of the organisation. The data are carefully analysed to identify areas for improvement.

40. The quality assurance system has led to several improvements in training. Examples include a greater involvement by employers in progress reviews, earlier review dates at the start of the programme, refurbishment of physical resources and additional information technology facilities.

41. The college embraces the concept of self-assessment as an opportunity to seek to improve its service. The college already has a firmly embedded cycle of annual

self-assessment. Constructive criticism is sought and issues are addressed in a professional manner. All members of staff have opportunity to contribute their ideas, and senior management is keen to support change which leads to improvement.

42. There are two main review and evaluation initiatives each year which give trainees the opportunity to comment on their training: one covers all students in the college and addresses issues relating to the tuition which they receive. The other is aimed more specifically at trainees on TEC-funded programmes. The response rate for this second initiative is poor and fewer responses were received this year than last year. Only 19 per cent of trainees and 15 per cent of employers replied to questionnaires in the latest evaluation. The college is already seeking ways to improve on this response. Although it recognises that the format of its questions tends to prompt favourable responses, the provider is contractually obliged to continue with this format for the immediate future.

43. The data derived from the broader cross-college evaluation do not show how separately they apply to TEC-funded trainees. This means that issues specifically relevant to these trainees cannot be addressed.

44. The results of evaluations are communicated to trainees in creative ways, for example, by using colourful and eye-catching posters which appear on noticeboards throughout the premises. There is no formal feedback to employers, although some will hear results through their involvement with subcommittees and working parties, and through changes in promotional literature.