



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1998

Construction Industry Training Board

SUMMARY

Through its managing agency, the Construction Industry Training Board is a major national facilitator of construction craft training. It has a comprehensive recruitment network, supported by widely distributed high-quality literature and promotional materials. The board is committed to equality of opportunity, although the image of the industry mitigates against attracting larger numbers of underrepresented groups. Sound training facilities are arranged mainly with colleges of further education, which also undertake the integration and assessment of key skills in the training programme. Training officers support young people well, but large workloads diminish the regularity of visits and reviews in the later years of training. Links between activities at college and on site are weak, and opportunities for gathering assessment evidence from the workplace are underdeveloped. Achievement by trainees who complete their studies is good, but retention in the first year is poor. Quality assurance arrangements are not uniformly developed across all areas of the country and best practice is not shared

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ supportive working relationships among training partners
- ◆ well-delivered training at off-the-job centres
- ◆ strong support for trainees from training officers
- ◆ disciplined environment with sensitive awareness of trainees' needs
- ◆ flexibility of training to meet training needs
- ◆ close links and initiatives with local schools and careers service for recruitment
- ◆ high-quality promotional material

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of work-based assessment and evidence gathering
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job experience
- ◆ infrequent formal reviews
- ◆ large workloads of some training officers
- ◆ unmonitored subcontractors' quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ poor sharing of best practice in organisation
- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ low priority for equal opportunities issues by field staff

INTRODUCTION

1. The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) was formed in 1964 as a non-departmental public body under the Industrial Training Act 1964. The CITB's mission is to promote and facilitate the training of sufficient people in the skills needed for a world-class construction industry. Through a system of statutory levy payments in return for grants and training provision, the cost of training is shared among employers. The CITB is also the lead and joint awarding body for construction crafts and operative vocational qualifications. It has recently been awarded National Training Organisation (NTO) status for the construction sector. To deliver its mission and strategic objectives nationally, the CITB is split in eight areas: North, Yorkshire & Humberside, Northwest, Midlands, East, Southeast, South and Southwest. Each area is primarily divided into four functional sectors: new entrant training (NET), advisory, prevocational and finance. Responsibility for these services lies with the area manager who reports to the director of training. The managing agency function in the Southeast is undertaken by the East and South area offices. Each area office has a new entrant training manager and an advisory service manager in post.

2. The construction industry is the largest single manufacturing industry in the country and is responsible for £1 billion of work every week. It employs 1.4 million people – one in 14 of the country's workforce. Adult unemployment in Autumn 1997 was 8 per cent of the workforce, although, in some trades, there are skill shortages. Self-employment accounts for over 40 per cent of total construction employment. The industry is concerned with the construction of bridges, tunnels, railways and other vital infrastructure projects, in addition to new buildings and housing. Many of the industry's skills are based on the maintenance of present buildings and their refurbishment, renovation and restoration. The rise in lottery-supported private commercial work is expected to moderate as the preparations for the millennium come to an end. Increasingly, operatives are being registered to practice through the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS). This has been supported by some training and enterprise council (TEC)-funding, particularly in the East region, which accounts for a quarter of all current registrations in the country. Local partnerships with schools and colleges have helped to establish 122 curriculum centres, which work with young people of all ages and their teachers to introduce construction as a context for learning.

3. The CITB managing agency is part of the Training Directorate national field services. Through its new entrant training activity CITB is currently contracting with 51TECs in England. In each area of the CITB, a link TEC has been identified with LAWTEC taking the overall responsibility of national co-ordinating TEC. A team of 74 training officers, who between them report to the seven new entrant training managers, deliver the contracts. At the time of inspection, CITB's in-training total for TEC-funded trainees was 11,740. The advisory service teams work closely with employers providing advice about training programmes, financing of training through the CITB grant scheme as well as determining training needs within



a company, and more broadly, within their areas. Advisory teams work closely with the training officers particularly when subcontract arrangements are being set up with a training centre to deliver off-the-job training and with the recruitment of trainees. The CITB direct training division consists of three training centres in England at Bircham Newton, Birmingham and Erith, Kent. The activity undertaken at the Bircham Newton training centre in Norfolk has been reported upon in a separate report. The scope of this inspection included the Birmingham Training Centre, which subcontracts off-the-job training for specialist craft areas such as build-up felt roofing, roof slating and tiling, scaffolding and civil engineering through CITB's regional and local offices. Field staff are responsible for the recruitment of trainees and placing them onto appropriate programmes.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. When inspectors arrived to commence the inspection the CITB tabled a revised self-assessment report, and inspectors ignored the earlier edition. Inspectors reduced the grade proposed for the occupational area and agreed with the grading judgements for the generic aspects. The report lacked identification of evidence to support the weaknesses, and many statements were only descriptive. Cross-referencing was not used. Regional variations were not reflected in the report. Action points were included, but not targeted. The views of training staff were sought in the early stages of the reports' development.

5. With the agreement of the CITB, inspectors' judgements were based on a representative sample centred on the managing agency activities of a training centre and four of the seven English CITB area offices. Inspectors visited the Southwest (Exeter), Northwest (St. Helens), East (Luton) and South (Eastleigh) area offices, plus the Birmingham training centre. Twelve inspectors met for a half-day briefing meeting at the CITB's offices in Loughbrough and spent the next three days gathering evidence around the country before returning to Loughbrough at the end of the week to share their findings with four CITB area managers in attendance. The CITB's field training officers accompanied inspectors on their site visits to meet trainees. They went to 38 site placements, meeting 44 trainees and their supervisors. Inspectors also visited 15 different training centres, mainly colleges of further education, meeting and interviewing 65 trainees. Each area office had copies of the CITB's policy documents which inspectors reviewed in addition to trainees' files, portfolios, reviews, subcontractors' arrangements for the delivery of training, audit reports and other related documents.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

6. Table 1 details the current numbers of TEC-funded trainees, indicating the year in which they commenced training. Most trainees are recruited to the programme through schools and the local careers service or by direct referrals from prospective employers. In most instances, trainees are interviewed and undertake an aptitude test to identify appropriateness for their chosen trade. All modern apprentices recruited in 1998 are employed and registered through the industry's Construction Apprenticeship Scheme. At the time of inspection, the highest recruitment was for carpentry and joinery.

Trade	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
Wood	27	522	1487	2087	1110	5233
Trowel	9	259	710	1020	606	2604
Paining & decorating	14	182	427	570	353	1546
Roofing	4	39	94	120	85	342
Others	13	156	402	901	543	2015
Total	67	1158	3120	4698	2697	11740

7. Trainees follow a block-release pattern of training or attend off-the-job training on a day-release basis, with training and assessment to NVQ levels 2 and 3 taking place at a college or training centre. The training officers' rôle is to facilitate training, link with employers and support trainees to ensure that they progress to achieve qualification. Inspectors identified examples of good practice, but found inconsistencies across areas in their implementation and effectiveness. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were more descriptive than evaluative. Other weaknesses were identified during inspection, and the grade was lowered from that proposed by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced off-the-job training facilities
- ◆ good-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ trainees understand the NVQ process
- ◆ trainees value their off-the-job training
- ◆ many good-quality work placements
- ◆ good on-site review process of health and safety issues
- ◆ trainees encouraged to work independently, when appropriate

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ infrequent site reviews
- ◆ on-the-job training lacks structure
- ◆ missed opportunities to use evidence from workplace
- ◆ poor use of log books to record site work
- ◆ little awareness of the NVQ process by employers
- ◆ low trainee retention rates

8. Training officers have good working relationships with off-the-job training providers, trainees and employers. They do not assess trainees, although some are occupationally qualified and also hold assessor qualifications. Training and assessment are entirely subcontracted to off-the-job providers – mainly colleges of

GOOD PRACTICE

A new roofing centre located in the Northwest area is an example of effective co-operation among local agencies to provide facilities for training. The centre has been developed as a result of an agreement with a college, the CITB and the local TEC. Each partner has made a significant financial investment in this development. Local industry also supports the centre by supplying materials either free of charge or at a highly discounted rate.

further education. Most college facilities are well resourced and appropriate for the work being carried out. The quality of college training is good. Instructors are generally well qualified and have a good understanding of the industry. Trainees value their training, particularly the rôle played by the training centre. Review of external verifiers' reports confirms that well-planned and -documented training and assessment are taking place. Trainees are able to describe the nature of the NVQ process and the importance of maintaining a detailed portfolio of evidence. Portfolios are up to date and of sound quality. A diary to record work-based evidence has been introduced to the Southwest area. Workplaces are diverse and offer a mixed range of opportunities for trainees to learn and practise their skills. Most trainees are well treated and respected in the workplace. Workplace supervisors have sufficient trust in the ability of trainees to allow them to work unsupervised when opportunity arises, and this helps to develop confidence. Training officers use a comprehensive review checklist which requires questioning about trainees' awareness of safety procedures, checks that safe working procedures are being followed and reviews the quality of employers' safety arrangements.

9. Site reviews are not carried out sufficiently frequent to meet TEC contractual requirements, especially during the spring and summer months, when training officers are busy recruiting new trainees. Despite the generally good-quality on-the-job training, this is largely unstructured and there is little opportunity for trainees to carry out an effectively planned range of activities in the workplace. Poor use of logbooks or, in a few cases, no logbook at all limits the recording of work undertaken in the workplace and details being maintained of the depth and breadth of work undertaken. Most links between on- and off-the-job training are weak, with employers having little understanding of their rôle in the training process or that NVQs are work-based qualifications. Two-thirds of the scheme is learning on-the-job, but monitoring the quality of training lacks rigour and does not follow any formal programme. Many opportunities in the workplace are consequently missed for learning and assessment, with trainees having to repeat work at college for assessment purposes. Trainees' ownership of portfolios at some colleges is lacking, as tutors carry out the cross-referencing process for them. Little formal key skills training is carried out; where it happens, it is generally integrated and poorly identified. Use of computers ranges from none, by some trainees, to one college specifically designing a carpentry assignment to be completed using this medium. There are no information technology facilities for trainees at the Birmingham training centre. Documentation in some colleges is not always current, causing some uncertainty about trainees' progress. Targets set for trainees are long term and usually relate to the time to complete the overall qualification. Short-term targets are not set. Retention rates in the first year are low, averaging 62 per cent to NVQ level 2 over the past four years and 45 per cent to NVQ level 3 between 1994 and 1996. The success rate of those retained is approximately 82 per cent to NVQ level 2 and 60 per cent to level 3. Table 2 indicates the group achievement analysis.

Year	Number of starts	Number of trainees retained at week 50	Achieved NVQ level 2 to date	Number of trainees retained at week 90	Achieved NVQ level 3 to date
1994	6102	3836	3356	2882	1899
1995	6038	3745	3348	2912	1522
1996	5754	3563	2505	2691	514
1997	6878	4241			

10. An average of 67 per cent of trainees attending the Birmingham training centre who started their NVQ level 2 programme between 1995 and 1997 achieved the award. This figure exceeds the national average of 51 per cent achieved by the construction sector as a whole. An average of 40 per cent who started their NVQ level 3 programme between 1995 and 1997 achieved the award. The average retention rate at the centre is 69 per cent – better than other parts of the occupational area.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

11. An equal opportunities policy, which meets legal and contractual requirements, is in place and widely circulated. It covers staff, craft operative and technician new entrant trainees. An equal opportunities policy analyst was appointed in 1997 and is carrying out a review of current policies and practices. Named members of management staff have responsibility for co-ordinating equal opportunities in their designated areas and for producing an equal opportunities action-plan. These staff form the national equal opportunities working group which meets twice yearly to co-ordinate and agree on equal opportunities initiatives. Staff development procedures relating to equal opportunities are being reviewed, and new draft guidance for employers is awaiting board approval. In addition, a research report has been commissioned from the university of London to investigate why people from minority ethnic groups do not enter the construction industry. The report, together with proposals for action, is due for completion in March 1999. Additional strengths and weaknesses were found to those in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors confirmed the grade proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong strategic commitment to equal opportunities
- ◆ literature and promotional materials promote equality well
- ◆ recruitment documentation developed in conjunction with Commission for Racial Equality
- ◆ area action plans develop initiatives
- ◆ targeted and organised equal opportunities recruitment activities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities are a low priority in some areas
- ◆ good practice is not formally shared among areas
- ◆ equal opportunities targets not met
- ◆ poor awareness of equal opportunities issues among trainees and employers

GOOD PRACTICE

With assistance from the Commission for Racial Equality, materials used in the selection procedures for trainees have recently been revised to remove bias.

12. The CITB is committed to providing equality of opportunity for employees and trainees and to encouraging an industry, already suffering from stereotyping, to actively pursue goals of equality. A clear policy statement, covering the employment and recruitment of those with disabilities, was approved by the board in February 1998, bringing the CITB's policy in line with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The board is closely involved with external organisations, which aim to encourage more women and members of minority ethnic groups to enter the industry. However, these groups remain under-represented in training and in the industry as a whole. Research undertaken by the board confirms the skill shortages developing in many occupational areas of the industry and the need to attract a more representative workforce. Local education initiatives have seen greater inclusion of under-represented groups in schools' construction curriculum activities. The recruitment materials developed by the CITB place clear emphasis on its commitment to equality of opportunity. Recruitment of staff and trainees is monitored for gender, ethnicity, age and disability; figures for recruitment of under-represented groups of trainees are published. Recent equal opportunities briefings for the CITB's headquarters' staff have taken place and are to be extended to area managers as part of staff development.

GOOD PRACTICE

Careers days, aimed at encouraging girls to construction, are held locally, with female professionals and trainees providing real-life accounts of what it is like for them in the industry. Opportunities to visit construction sites managed by women are arranged, and the day frequently concludes with small groups being encouraged to ask questions and additional sources being offered where advice can be sought.

13. The current targets for recruitment from under-represented groups are ambitious and not being met by the organisation. The industry has a stereotyped image, deeply ingrained in the perceptions of the population, which is difficult to change. Only 0.8 per cent of trainees are women, and these follow mainly painting and decorating as a career. Trainees from minority ethnic groups account for only 0.7 per cent of the total. There is low awareness of equal opportunities among most trainees, employers and staff. Good practice, where it exists, is not being shared, and data about equal opportunities monitoring are not disseminated to staff. Some recruitment initiatives have been carried out to address the issue of under-representation, but the results have not been monitored or evaluated for effectiveness. Chances to promote equal opportunities across the organisation are missed.

Trainee support

Grade 2

14. The application form for trainees includes a self-assessment to help them to decide whether they are suited to a career in construction. Careers literature is widely distributed to schools and careers offices. The construction curriculum centre's initiative arranges a variety of learning opportunities through local networks of schools, colleges and employers. An initial aptitude test for all craft trades is taken and the scores achieved used to establish suitability for particular trades. An interview checklist is used to inform initial assessment. Most trainees receive both a CITB and college-based induction programme. Employers are also required to give an induction in health and safety issues, when trainees commence a new placement. Additional support, and sometimes more time for assessment, is allowed to trainees taking a little longer if necessary. Inspectors confirmed most of the strengths and the weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Other strengths and weaknesses were identified but inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ current intake registered on the construction apprenticeship scheme
- ◆ additional finance enables specialist training and supports travel costs
- ◆ trainees supported to maintain full-time college courses in cases of difficulty
- ◆ strong links with schools and colleges through curriculum centre's initiatives
- ◆ good information helps trainees to make informed initial career choices
- ◆ trainees well supported by training officers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities to determine additional support needs
- ◆ good practice not always shared among areas
- ◆ needs of trainees on entry are not systematically assessed

15. An attractively presented file for schools and careers offices contains considerable amounts of quality information for young people considering a career in the industry. It includes posters, cards and a CD-ROM for use by teachers and young people. The popular construction curriculum centre's initiative was introduced in 1990 to link schools' curricula with the industry. It helps to inform and encourage young people and those from under-represented groups to consider careers in the construction industry. There are now 122 centres around the country, used regularly by primary, secondary and special schools' students. Local and national newsletters are widely circulated to celebrate the achievements of the school children and many of the projects are aimed at encouraging under-represented groups to the construction industry. Since August 1998, all new entrants, at the start of training, are registered on the Construction Apprenticeship Scheme (CAS). Trainees are employed and paid industry-recommended rates. Employers are

GOOD PRACTICE

The setting-up of 122 construction curriculum centres since 1990 has enhanced the image of construction to young people by providing opportunities for them to visit building projects and to understand the complexities of design in the environment. Evaluation indicates that under-performing boys have raised the quality of their work, after exposure to the real world of work. Many of the activities are celebrated in the quarterly Curriculum Chronicle, widely distributed by the board to local schools.

allowed up to nine months to register with the CAS, if they are to receive a CITB registration grant. The scheme has been developed in response to a survey of trainees, which showed that low pay and uncertainty were the most common cause of dissatisfaction among trainees. There is a comprehensive range of valued support arrangements for trainees with learning difficulties. The CITB uses its various sources of funding to support trainees who require travel and subsistence fees when training away from home. It also subsidises the additional cost of specialist training at various centres. If trainees are made redundant, they are transferred to the CITB's payroll, so that they can continue at college until another employer is found.

16. The needs of trainees are not systematically assessed at the start of training. Across the country procedures vary between area offices and training advisers and no forum exists to share best practice. The aptitude test, conducted by the CITB, and any basic skills test, carried out by the off-the-job training providers, are used in isolation and the outcomes not co-ordinated. Trainees who are already with an employer before they are signed to CITB do not always take the standard aptitude test; some miss out on the initial CITB interview. Results of the CITB's testing are used to identify only potential suitability for a particular trade and are not shared with the colleges which often require trainees to undertake further basic skills testing to determine ability range. Many colleges set targets and track trainees' progress, but these records are kept at college and not transferred to trainees' individual training plans. Instead, the individual training plans are used as a static form to record final NVQ achievement, and no short- or medium-term goals or other training needs are identified. Any additional learning requirements rely heavily on self-identification. Trainees are well supported by training officers in the early years of the programme, with larger components of college attendance. A training officer is usually at the college when trainees attend, to address problems or queries raised. When trainees are on the job, visits and links with their training officer are less frequent.

Management of training

Grade 3

17. In England, the CITB managing agency is subdivided in seven geographical areas, each with an area manager and two operational managers. One operational manager is responsible for the new-entrant training scheme, including the management of the new-entrant training officers and the negotiation of local TEC contractual requirements. The other operational manager is responsible for the advisory service team. Each area operates in a similar way, but maintains a high level of autonomy, with area variations in job titles, rôles and responsibilities. The areas frequently differ in the way in which they operate as a result of TEC contractual requirements. One area has recently achieved Investor in People status. The board has set a target for each individual business unit to achieve the Investors in People Standard by December 1999 and an ultimate aim of achieving one Investor in People registration for the CITB as a whole. There are 74 training officers working in the seven English areas, and their rôle is to ensure that trainees are recruited and sponsored or employed with an appropriate employer. They also monitor trainees' progress and provide operational and supportive links between the

workplace and college. Table 3 indicates the spread of training officers and the number of contracting TECs in each region of the managing agency.

Area	Number of new entrant training officers (NETOs)	Number of contracting TECs in area
North	9	6
Yorkshire and the Humber	10	9
East	12	10
Southwest	10	4
Northwest	11	6
Midlands	7	7
South	15	9
Total	74	51

18. The directorate issues a central policy standards manual, which provides the blueprint for the key operational requirements of the managing agency. The manual is then customised to suit individual requirements at each region. Area managers meet regularly and contribute to a range of CITB national initiatives linked to both managing agency and national training organisation issues. New entrant training teams meet regularly to consider operational issues and monitor the provision's performance. All new staff follow a probationary period, varying from three to six months, with a monthly appraisal. All staff undergo an annual assessment process linked to salary and an annual performance development programme to identify both personal and business staff training objectives. Each area office is supported by administration staff and an area finance officer who is also responsible for computer support systems. The self-assessment report identified several key strengths. However, some described are no more than normal practice, and one referred to arrangements which are not yet in place. Inspectors confirmed some weaknesses and identified others. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong emphasis on appraisal and staff development
- ◆ good communications and co-operative arrangements in areas
- ◆ high level of management control of health and safety issues
- ◆ comprehensive generic policy standards manual

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective use of management information
- ◆ most subcontractors and employers unaware of CITB targets and policies

- ◆ unco-ordinated on-the-job training
- ◆ uneven workloads among training officers

19. The CITB is strongly committed to staff development. Training activities engaged in by staff are extensive and effectively address personal and business objectives. In the areas, staff are clear about their rôles and responsibilities. There is close co-operation between the training and advisory teams, the subcontracted providers and employers. Health and safety policy is addressed in an active manner. Management takes a high level of control of both staff training and employers' assessments. The policy standards manual provides the management team with a comprehensive generic set of training board policies. Some areas have customised these to take account of regional variations in TEC contracts. Other areas have analysed the policy change requirements and published a minimum set of requirements, which ensure that all TEC requirements are satisfied. In the East area, a management initiative to negotiate with many TECs to reduce the variations and standardize policy requirements is being carried out. The analysis and management of trainees' review arrangements in one area has produced a review procedure and documents, which cover contractual and safety-related issues and also review trainees' progress at college and competence in the workplace. Where college subject advisory panels operate, the CITB's field staff are usually members and make a valuable contribution to the review of trainees' progress and future planning and trends.

20. Management information is available to assist the monthly monitoring of TEC contractual performance; this helps to inform the training team about performance against business targets. The analysis of other performance-related information is poor. There is little awareness about trends in trainees' retention and success rates by occupational area, and few comparisons are made from one year to the next. The opportunity to inform action by training staff and subcontract training providers is missed, and key indicators of performance are not being systematically analysed to inform management decisions. Policies, targets and the CITB's values are understood well by staff in the organisation, but this level of awareness has not been conveyed to other parties involved in the training process. While co-ordination of on-the-job training is poor, some efforts are being made to address this issue, but there is no systematic approach. Management responsibility for this aspect of the learning experience is not well developed or clearly understood. Some training officers have large workloads, ranging up to 200 trainees each, in some situations, although training advisers are available to help, and contract staff are used to carry out trainees' reviews. Health and safety issues are addressed during these reviews, but local follow-up action sometimes goes unchecked for unacceptable periods of time. There is no formal forum for developing good and poor practice sharing or to consider common issues.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

21. The organisation has subscribed to quality assurance, primarily through alignment to the ISO 9002 quality standards and to TEC and awarding body requirements. Of the seven areas, five are ISO 9002 accredited. A quality nominee in each area is responsible for implementing and monitoring the standards, but different mechanisms are in place in each area for achieving this. The self-assessment report, through its analysis of quality assurance, sometimes described normal practice, rather than exceptional practice. The strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors, although not always aligning with the judgements in the self-assessment report, do achieve a satisfactory balance, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented and strategically supported quality assurance
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements involve staff in target-setting
- ◆ regularly evaluated performance against local targets
- ◆ regular documented team meetings in areas

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ subcontractors' quality assurance systems not monitored
- ◆ lack of monitoring of strategic objectives and targets
- ◆ no formal feedback sought from employers
- ◆ feedback from trainees not yet embedded in the quality cycle

GOOD PRACTICE

The introduction of a user-friendly work-evidence-recording diary is a Southwest team initiative. It has resulted in considerable improvement to the frequency of recording achievement by both trainees and staff. It is written in language which is readily understood.

22. The CITB has a clearly stated, well-documented commitment to quality, and a self-critical culture is beginning to develop around it. The self-assessment process has provided a well-directed stimulus for improvement. There are varying degrees of awareness and interpretation of quality assurance as a concept across the area offices, including the way in which this is managed and the priority accorded to it. In the Northwest area, a quality team is established. It has a policy statement and an action plan defining what needs to be done in terms of quality and an audit schedule of how and when monitoring and reviewing of all aspects of the system will take place. Other areas have just one quality manager and hold quality meetings quarterly. They often rely on external quality systems, such as TEC contracting arrangements and validating body requirements, to assure quality, but do not, as yet, monitor their effectiveness. Most have developed planning schedules for measuring the performance of some significant activities. In the East area, the first of these audits has recently taken place. Local targets are not always agreed on, but those in place are set at realistic levels and command the support of staff who are consulted in their setting.

GOOD PRACTICE

In the Northwest, an initiative called programme review team has been developed to review the provision in colleges on a rota basis. Reviews are carried out in one day by a team addressing such issues as training, resources, health & safety and administration. Instructors attend the feedback meeting. Trainees are involved in the visits through observation and interview when their views are sought on the effectiveness of training. It has been agreed that this model will be shared in all the CITB's areas.

23. There is an over-reliance on informal communications among areas, although a forum for dissemination of good practice has developed through area managers' meetings. There are regular documented team meetings at all levels in each area. Formal quality assurance procedures to monitor delivery of strategic objectives and targets have not yet been systemised. There are clear measurable objectives established in some areas, but not in others. Two significant trainee surveys have been carried out, but this method of review and analysis is not yet embedded in the quality cycle. A formal employer feedback questionnaire has been developed and is due to be distributed at the end of the current academic year. Informal contact between employers and training officers ensures that some of their views are heard. Subcontractors' quality assurance systems are not systematically monitored, although good practice developed in the Northwest area, relating to off-the-job college provision, is to be disseminated to all areas.