



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1998

NACRO

SUMMARY

The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders provides work-based training for over 2,500 people in 12 of the occupational areas, as outlined in *Raising the Standard*. It has contracts with 21 training and enterprise councils (TECs). NACRO's clients now include many people who are not former offenders. Most have special learning needs; many are following foundation for work programmes. Training is thoughtfully structured and delivered effectively. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job learning is weak. Arrangements for sharing good practice across the organisation are not fully developed. Work-based assessment opportunities are not widely used. Trainees are enthusiastic and often take great pride in their work. They receive attentive support from caring staff throughout their contact with NACRO. Managers have developed good working relationships with other organisations. Many trainees achieve and progress to employment. Equality of opportunity is promoted strongly. Access to training for people from disadvantaged groups is very good. Managers have developed good working relationships with other organisations to enable them to offer comprehensive assistance to trainees with a wide range of disadvantages or disabilities.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	2
Health, care & public services	2
Media & design	3
Foundation for work	1

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements, suited to trainees' goals and ambitions
- ◆ excellent working relationships among trainers and trainees
- ◆ well-structured training
- ◆ good teaching
- ◆ strong support from caring and well-qualified staff
- ◆ good achievement rates and progression to jobs
- ◆ enthusiasm and motivation among trainees
- ◆ thorough reviews which include target-setting for progression
- ◆ access for people from disadvantaged groups
- ◆ strong promotion and thorough implementation of equality of opportunity
- ◆ strong working relationships with external agencies



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ low awareness of NVQ requirements among some employers
- ◆ some ineffective use of opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice across the organisation

INTRODUCTION

1. The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. NACRO has been active for over 30 years in the development of policies for criminal justice and penal matters and in the provision of practical resettlement opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders. In recent years, NACRO's work has emphasised crime prevention and promoting community safety. NACRO now works with unemployed people whose disadvantage in the labour market places them at risk of social exclusion, whether or not they have been involved in the criminal justice system. The links among unemployment and crime are complex. However, research indicates that having a job and somewhere decent to live are important factors in preventing offending, and NACRO seeks to fulfil these needs.

2. NACRO has a training division called NACRO New Careers Training, funded mainly through contracts with 24 TECs, of which 21 are in England. However, NACRO also receives public funds through New Deal, the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the National Lotteries' Charity Board. In March 1998, NACRO established a new education and employment directorate, bringing its training activities under unified national management. A principal objective of the directorate is to promote consistency of training, irrespective of variety in funding and differing contractual terms. NACRO's main training activities are in prevocational programmes for adults and training for young people endorsed as having special training needs. NACRO has 22 main training centres in England and Wales, each responsible for many sites where trainees are located. The range of programmes is intended to match the needs of the client group with local labour markets. All of NACRO's training centres are accredited by the appropriate awarding bodies.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Responsibility for self-assessment in NACRO's directorate of education and employment lies with the quality manager. Self-assessment extended over several months and culminated in a report in October 1998. All of NACRO's training centres carried out self-assessment, highlighting regional emphases in provision. Evidence was collated nationally and evaluated by senior managers. A single national grade was proposed for each occupational area. A draft self-assessment report was circulated to all centre managers for their consideration. Self-assessment led to identification of local differences in practice and achievements. It resulted a plan to share good practice across the organisation and address areas of weakness. NACRO's self-assessment report is detailed and comprehensive. It identifies regional differences in occupational areas, as well as features common to all sites and in all occupational sectors. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly stated. The nature and location of supporting evidence are given in every case. A detailed action-plan accompanied the report. The self-assessment report is deeply analytical and self-critical in identifying weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of NACRO's findings. Some weaknesses, found through the self-assessment process, had been addressed by the time inspection took place. In several areas, NACRO had undervalued its performance. Inspectors awarded higher grades than had been proposed in seven of the 13 aspects evaluated, agreeing with the remaining six grades.

4. A team of 16 inspectors spent a total of 82 days at NACRO in November 1998. Inspection covered training provision in the nine largest occupational areas offered by NACRO. Inspectors made 58 visits to 23 training sites throughout England. They assessed 125 work placements, interviewing 383 trainees. Visits were made to further education colleges which subcontract for off-the-job training. A total of 96 sessions of training and assessment was observed. Meetings were held with the director, the quality manager, regional managers, centre managers, placement supervisors, trainers, assessors, internal verifiers, work-based supervisors, employers and administrators. A wide range of documents was examined, including management files and quality assurance manuals, TEC contracts, audit reports by external agencies, trainees' achievement and progression data, trainees' personal files and work portfolios, training schemes, assessment and internal verification documents and staff qualification details. Learning resources and accommodation for on- and off-the-job training were evaluated.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture			2			2
Construction		2	1			3
Engineering	1	1	12	1		15
Manufacturing		2	7			9
Business administration		3	6			9
Retailing & customer service		5	2			7
Health, care & public services		2				2
Media & design	1		2			3
Foundation for work	6	19	19	2		46
Total	8	34	51	3	0	96

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 3

5. There are seven trainees following programmes in agriculture, five in animal care, two in floristry, six in forestry, five in equine studies and 12 in amenity horticulture. For agriculture, NACRO contracts with four TECs: Cambridgeshire, Greater Peterborough, Shropshire and Surrey. Training is available leading towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in animal care, equine studies, floristry, forestry, horticulture and agriculture. Forty-four per cent of trainees following programmes in agriculture were endorsed as having special training needs. Inspection was carried out in Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Shropshire. Inspectors visited NACRO training centres at Huntingdon and Shrewsbury. In Shropshire, only equine studies were inspected. Trainees also live at their work placements, with both training and assessment entirely work based. In East Anglia, all trainees are in work placements, with off-the-job training, assessment and internal verification subcontracted to a local college of further education. Trainees attend the college for one day each week and are taught alongside Further Education Funding Council-funded (FEFC) students. Inspectors verified the grade proposed by NACRO in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention, achievement and progress to employment
- ◆ trainees take pride in their work
- ◆ good work placements suited to trainees' goals and ambitions
- ◆ strong support for trainees
- ◆ effective arrangements for trainees' review

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no provision for work-based assessment
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ low awareness of NVQ training requirements among host employers
- ◆ individual training plans not used to chart or encourage progress
- ◆ inconsistent practice among NACRO centres

6. Trainees' enthusiasm is great and they show much determination to succeed progress to permanent jobs. Achievement levels are good. In 1997-98, 92 per cent of leavers achieved NVQ qualifications; 80 per cent of trainees went to employment. Retention was also high at 94 per cent. The quality of trainees' work is generally good. Notes and records of evidence are complete, up to date and well written. Trainees take pride in the standard of presentation of their portfolios.

7. Most trainees are referred to NACRO through the careers service. They are given initial interviews to assess training needs. Placement in work is thoroughly considered, and trainees are in jobs which are well matched to their abilities and ambitions. They feel well cared for by employers and NACRO staff alike. NACRO has recently developed a 'placement pack' which is given to all work-placement providers. It helps to raise their awareness of the NVQ learning process and of the appropriate rôles and responsibilities which should be expected in relation to health and safety, equal opportunities and the management of training. The resources used by trainees at work are very good indeed. Stableyards and the sites for learning amenity horticulture are well equipped. Trainees are given appropriate clothing. Training arrangements comply with the health and safety regulations. Equipment and tools are sufficient to ensure that trainees receive a comprehensive breadth of experience. Trainees work well when they are unsupervised. They build up a high level of occupational competence. Demonstration of competencies in the workplace is not used as evidence for NVQ awards. Assessment takes place entirely at college. The limited time which trainees spend at college places considerable pressure on them to fit in the necessary assessment sessions. College staff are experienced and hold the appropriate NVQ assessor and verifier awards.

8. In East Anglia, links with college trainers are maintained by NACRO's own college liaison officer. Frequent visits are made to the college. Visits to trainees at work take place monthly or more often still, if required. There are clearly defined

procedures for carrying out training reviews, which are effective in prompting progress. In Shropshire, on the other hand, reviews are carried out by the careers service. Review records are detailed and comprehensive. The necessary amendments are made to individual training plans, following reviews. Copies of trainees' reviews are given to college staff. NACRO's staff rely on subcontracted trainers, trainees and internal and external verification reports to allow them to make judgements about the quality of training. However, external verifiers' reports are not always sent to NACRO's staff. On- and off-the-job training is poorly coordinated. Work-based supervisors do not have thorough knowledge of NVQ training. Real awareness among college staff and employers of the implications of trainees' individual training plans is low. These plans are not used as working documents to focus attention on the differing needs of each. College staff do not visit work placements and are unaware of the learning which goes on at work. Off-the-job training, in some cases, does not reinforce the skills which are required at work. Work-based training is thorough, but is not deliberately related to the requirements of the NVQ. There is no system to ensure that the curriculum, covered through off-the-job training, is known to employers.

Construction

Grade 3

9. There are 206 trainees in construction. NACRO contracts with nine TECs: Birmingham, FOCUS, Kent, Sheffield, Shropshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Tees Valley and Tyneside. There are programmes in building crafts, carpet-fitting, general construction, painting and decorating, wood trades and electrical installation. Eighty-four per cent of trainees were endorsed as having special training needs. Construction was inspected in the Medway and Tees Valley areas. Inspection covered over 60 per cent of trainees on the programme. The centres visited offer training in wood trades, painting and decorating, electrical installation and carpet-fitting. Of the 87 youth trainees at these centres, 84 work towards NVQ level 1 and three towards NVQ level 2. The 33 adult trainees work towards NVQ level 2. Inspectors identified both strengths and weaknesses, in addition to those in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by NACRO.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of achievement
- ◆ well-qualified and highly skilled staff
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ realistic working environments
- ◆ excellent working relationships among trainers and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor linkage among on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient constancy in the delivery of training

10. Trainers are well qualified in their trades and have the appropriate training and assessment qualifications. All training staff have taken additional courses which help them to serve NACRO's clients, such as drug and alcohol awareness. Much emphasis is placed on health and safety in NACRO's workshops and at work. Eighty-five per cent of trainees are ex-offenders. Many have long experience of disaffection and disappointment. Staff build strong working relationships with these trainees. Trainees are encouraged to discuss their needs openly with trainers and receive individual guidance. Trainees take pride in their work. Their portfolios of assessment evidence contain many photographs of the projects which they have completed. In 1997-98, 87 per cent of trainees achieved NVQs. Construction training is used to develop trainees' confidence and self-esteem. It is a means of establishing good working habits, rather than a direct route to employment. Only a few trainees take jobs in the construction industry, but the training is ideal for those people for whom study in a classroom, elsewhere, is inappropriate.

11. In Shropshire, all trainees are in work placements. Elsewhere, 60 per cent of trainees work in simulated job conditions. NACRO's centres have spacious workshops which are well equipped with the tools and machinery needed for the job and the award. Assessment is carefully matched to the working environment. Centres carry out projects for their local communities, so that trainees can experience site work. Whenever possible, trainees are placed with companies for work experience, and those who complete their primary NVQ targets progress to higher levels. There is a lack of opportunities for work experience in the construction industry. Where placements are available in construction, learning opportunities are missed because the links between on- and off-the-job training are flimsy. On-the-job training does not form a solidly integrated part of the learning programme. Work schemes are not well enough developed to assure consistency in the mode and quality of delivery of training.

Engineering

Grade 3

12. There are 298 trainees, almost all of whom are young people and 93 per cent of whom are endorsed as having special training needs. Trainees follow NVQ level 1 and 2 programmes in motor-vehicle engineering, accredited through three awarding bodies. NACRO has contracts for engineering training with 12 TECs: Birmingham, Bolton & Bury, CambsTEC, FOCUS, Greater Peterborough, Leeds, Suffolk, Northumbria, Sandwell, Shropshire and Sheffield. Eight training centres in East Anglia, Lambeth, Tees Valley, Birmingham, Sandwell and Sheffield were visited by inspectors. All trainees receive initial screening to identify learning needs. They receive help with literacy and numeracy. All eight sites visited have training classrooms for teaching motor-vehicle theory, while seven have training workshops. NACRO offers entry on demand to all applicants. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ caring and well-qualified staff
- ◆ good occupational training
- ◆ carefully selected work placements
- ◆ good additional support
- ◆ well-motivated and enthusiastic trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ widely varying achievements levels
- ◆ some poor accommodation and equipment
- ◆ some inappropriate vehicles
- ◆ trainers too involved in assembling NVQ assessment portfolios
- ◆ unco-ordinated on- and off-the-job training and assessment

13. Training staff are occupationally experienced and well qualified. Health and safety are carefully controlled. Trainers are skilled in supporting disadvantaged clients. Trainees are placed with those employers which provide an appropriate learning environment. Arrangements for reviewing trainees' progress are effective. Trainees are visited at work by NACRO's staff once a month or more often, when required. Comprehensive information about the NVQ programme is given. Training in the classroom is generally well structured, with trainers using a wide range of techniques to hold attention. In some lessons, trainees' interest is lost. Motor-vehicle training workshops are too limited in both training materials and facilities. Tools and equipment have not been updated recently. The poor quality of tools and machinery holds back the development of occupational skill. Many vehicles used in training workshop are old and in bad condition. They lack modern automotive systems, so that trainees cannot acquire all the skills in the NVQ programme. Trainees work on NACRO's own vehicle fleet and on customers' vehicles at work. Assessment of trainees' practical skills is systematic.

14. Trainers impose strict control on the compilation of trainees' portfolios. Most portfolios, uniform in presentation and content, are kept in training centres and do not reflect trainees' individual development. The link between on- and off-the-job training is weak. Some work-based supervisors are unaware of the training programme. Levels of achievement vary considerably among regions. In 1997-98, an average 50 per cent of leavers achieved NVQ qualifications. Seventy-two per cent of trainees gained an NVQ in East Anglia. Only 11 per cent achieved an award in Birmingham, compared with 48 per cent in neighbouring Sandwell. Achievement is poor, at 34 per cent in Lambeth, but the proportion of trainees gaining awards in this region has doubled in the last two years.

Manufacturing

Grade 3

15. There are 42 trainees, of whom 73 per cent are endorsed as having special training needs. Of 38 trainees, 10 are learning entirely off the job in NACRO's training centres, until suitable work placements are found. The remaining 28 trainees learn at work. NACRO has contracts for manufacturing programmes with four TECs: Sandwell, Sheffield, Shropshire and Tyneside. All of them commission youth training programmes in assembly and fabrication, furniture and wood, metal operations, tailoring textiles and shoes. Three centres were visited at Sandwell, Shrewsbury and Sheffield. Host employers are small, with between 10 and 50 employees. All trainees seen by inspectors are working towards NVQ level 1 or 2, or their equivalents, in machining, assembly and processing skills or manufacturing operations. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the organisation in its self-assessment report, although the strengths and weaknesses found differed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible training to meet clients' needs
- ◆ effective recruitment and induction
- ◆ frequent and well-structured reviews
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to achieve additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ shortage of appropriate work placements
- ◆ poor facilities for trainees' on-the-job portfolio-building
- ◆ poor progression rates to employment

16. Initial interviews and assessments are thorough. All prospective trainees are interviewed carefully to find out their aptitude and ambitions. Trainees' basic skills are diagnosed and support offered accordingly. Trainees follow a comprehensive induction programme and understand the requirements of training and work placement and their rights and responsibilities. Trainees are well cared for in NACRO's centres and at work. NACRO's staff visit trainees at their work more often than TEC contracts require. Staff and workplace supervisors work as a team to provide consistent training. Some work-placement providers do not give trainees enough time or quiet space for portfolio-building. As a result, their work falls behind schedule. Of 138 leavers, 51 achieved an NVQ and 42 trainees found employment or progressed to further training.

17. Arrangements for reviewing trainees' progress are thorough. Formal reviews occur at least monthly. Work-based supervisors are fully involved in the reviewing process. Training programmes are well organised and flexible. There is a shortage of suitable work placements in some regions. Trainees on sewing-manufacturing

programmes on Tyneside study entirely at NACRO's centre, in a simulated working environment. In Sheffield, 11 out of 24 trainees are taught entirely off the job. Local problems prevent trainees from showing employers how well they can do the job.

18. Trainees take additional qualifications in areas such as first aid at work. This helps their employability, not only enabling them to acquire additional skills, but also raising self-confidence. NACRO's staff are well qualified and occupationally experienced. Many also hold additional qualifications in first aid, counselling, drugs awareness and health & safety. All staff are qualified assessors, and there is a sufficient number qualified as internal verifiers. Resources at training centres and employers' premises are generally good. Equipment and machinery are modern, offering trainees the necessary opportunity to acquire occupational skills which are relevant to the NVQ award. Health and safety at work are rigorously controlled. Trainees are supplied with protective clothing and equipment, which they use properly.

Business administration

Grade 3

19. There are 239 trainees in this area, of whom 143 are at centres covered by inspectors. Forty-one per cent of trainees are endorsed as having special training needs. NACRO contracts for business administration and information technology programmes with 11 TECs: CambsTEC, Greater Peterborough, Kent, Leeds, Sandwell, Sheffield, Shropshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Tees Valley and Tyneside. Inspection covered four sites: Shropshire, Sandwell, Darlington, and Cambridgeshire. Inspectors saw modern apprentices, national trainees, people on other youth training programmes and adults. Programmes are largely work based, with additional training at NACRO's centres. Information technology programmes are taught mostly at training centres, using simulated working environments to help with the acquisition of occupational skills. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in NACRO's self-assessment report and found additional strengths to commend. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

Great care is taken in placing trainees with employers. Trainees' individual needs are considered. Many employers thoroughly understand both the training and the support needed by these trainees. They offer opportunities to acquire specific occupational skills. Many employers set time aside for trainees to complete portfolios.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ realistic individual targets for achievement
- ◆ frequent reviews enhance trainees' progress
- ◆ appropriate work placements
- ◆ an appropriate diversity of resources
- ◆ sound assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ only satisfactory NVQ achievement levels

20. Initial assessment is thorough and comprehensive. Care is taken to assess trainees' ability and aptitudes accurately. Most trainees are placed on programmes which are appropriate to their interests. All trainees take part in a formal induction programme, retaining and understanding the topics covered, including health and safety, equal opportunities issues and the content and structure of NVQ programmes. Procedures for monitoring clients during training are effective. There are frequent opportunities for trainees to evaluate their own performance and receive advice on how best to progress. Targets for achievement are discussed with trainees and work-based supervisors. They are amended as time goes on. Targets are challenging, but realistic, taking account of both trainees' abilities and personal circumstances. Results of review sessions are systematically recorded. NVQ achievements for the past two years have been just satisfactory, given the proportion of clients with special training needs. In 1996-97 and 1997-98, NVQ achievement among leavers was 42 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively. A significant proportion of trainees progresses from programmes at NVQ level 1 to 2.

21. Work placements are chosen with care. Employers are rigorously vetted to ensure that they meet health and safety requirements. Training resources are generally satisfactory. The range of computers and software available to trainees satisfies the demands of NVQ programmes. At some NACRO centres, the quality and range of information technology equipment are well below that provided by employers. An absence of commercial software prevents some trainees from consolidating the computing skills which they have acquired at work. There is a wide range of learning materials available to trainees. Some are produced by NACRO's staff to satisfy the specific needs of trainees. Specialist equipment is provided for trainees with learning difficulties and other special needs. Staff development programmes have raised the understanding of training and assessment of key skills. Key skills are not integrated with the rest of the training programme. Less than 5 per cent of trainees learn key skills through an integrated programme. Procedures for assessment of trainees' competence are clear. Records of assessment are carefully maintained and used effectively to chart and promote trainees' progress. Links between on- and off-the-job training are insufficient. Assessors do not make enough full enough use of the opportunities to evaluate competence in the workplace.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

22. There were 82 trainees: six adults, 72 youth trainees, two national trainees and two modern apprentices. Fifty per cent of trainees in this occupational area are

endorsed as having special training needs. NACRO contracts for training in retailing and customer service with eight TECs: Bedfordshire, CambsTEC, Greater Peterborough, Kent Sandwell, Shropshire, Suffolk, and Tyneside. Inspectors covered provision in Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Sandwell and Shropshire. Trainees work towards NVQs in distributive operations at level 1, retailing and warehousing at level 2 and customer service at levels 2 and 3. There is also training in fork-truck driving. All trainees are placed with employers. NACRO's staff carry out assessments. Literacy and numeracy classes are available. Off-the-job training is delivered at NACRO's training centres. Inspectors considered that NACRO had undervalued the quality of its provision for retailing and customer services, and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by NACRO in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement levels and progression to jobs
- ◆ enthusiastic and well-motivated trainees
- ◆ clear targets for progression
- ◆ additional learning opportunities to broaden trainees' experience
- ◆ job placements meet trainees' individual needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ weak assessment-planning
- ◆ poor integration of basic skills training

23. Arrangements to identify trainees' support needs are good. All trainees complete initial assessments on entry which is used to match trainees to appropriate work placements. NACRO's staff have excellent working relationships with work-placement providers. There are suitable placements for trainees of all abilities. Work-placement providers train well, but their knowledge of the NVQ standards is not always sufficient to ensure that the links are clear between the job and the award. Many clients are trained beyond the requirement of the NVQ, significantly broadening their experience and improving employability. Examples include training in the use of cash-tills at level 1, fork-truck work and achievement of qualifications in health and safety and first aid. Frequent reviews are held to set challenging, yet realistic, targets for learning. Most reviews also involve guidance and encouragement. Accounts of review sessions are generally well documented. Trainees and employers receive copies of the new learning targets after each review. Some records are too brief and lack sufficient informative detail. Trainees are keen to achieve. They understand their training programmes and are able to contribute to their direction. Of 235 leavers, 116 achieved an NVQ and 110 found employment or progressed to further training.

24. Co-ordination on- and off-the-job training is slight. Training topics covered at work are frequently repeated at NACRO's centre. In other cases, off-the-job training does not reinforce the occupational skills needed at work. In Shropshire, there are open-learning materials which help trainees to study on their own. Trainees also use them to learn at their own speed at work. Arrangements for planning assessments are weak. Some assessment-planning meetings do not involve employers or work-based supervisors. Opportunities for assessment at work are overlooked. Provision for giving help with literacy and numeracy is good, but the capacity to assess at work has not been developed.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

25. There are 165 people in training, of whom 80 per cent were on youth programmes. Fifty-two per cent of them were endorsed as having special training needs. Programmes in health, care and public services are purchased by five TECs: Bedfordshire, CambsTEC, Greater Peterborough, Shropshire and Sandwell. In Shropshire, Sandwell, Bedfordshire and Cambridge, the areas visited by inspectors, 138 trainees learn care, childcare and housekeeping. All trainees are in work placements. About a third has a permanent job. A wide range of work locations is available, including day nurseries, residential care and nursing homes, hospitals, nursery schools and institutions offering provision for adults with learning difficulties. Training and assessment, everywhere, are carried out by vocationally experienced, well-qualified assessors and internal verifiers. There are marked differences in the ways in which training and assessment are carried out at the three centres visited: at Sandwell and Cambridgeshire, assessment is done at work by peripatetic assessors and formal training is carried out in off-the-job NACRO workshops; in Shropshire, both training and assessment are work based. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly supportive work placements
- ◆ good standard of work among trainees
- ◆ good learning materials
- ◆ extensive initial assessment
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ trainees progress well

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poorly planned training in care
- ◆ unco-ordinated on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficiently tight internal verification
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training

26. Trainees receive the help of NACRO's staff whenever they are working. Trainers make frequent visits to trainees at work, giving them high levels of support and pastoral care to progress. The selection of host employers is rigorous. Work placements are carefully matched to each trainee's needs. Employers also take great care of trainees. Arrangements for initial assessment are well planned and effective. Any need for extra basic skills training is promptly diagnosed. Effective use is made of programmes below NVQ level 2 to develop trainees' confidence and self-esteem. They have an opportunity to experience early success. Many trainees are initially guided towards the vocational qualifications in practical caring skills or NVQ level 1 in housekeeping. Afterwards, they progress to NVQ level 2 in care or childcare. Trainees' achievements and progress are monitored carefully. The National Records of Achievement is used to record progress and new qualifications. Trainees have the opportunity to gain qualifications in addition to the NVQ and broaden their learning experience. These include manual handling, first aid and food hygiene.

27. Training at Sandwell and Cambridge's NACRO centres is well planned and effective. Links between on- and off-the-job training are sometimes frail. Tasks performed at work do not relate to NVQ programmes' requirements. There is no provision for off-the-job training at Shropshire's centre, except through independent learning materials. These packs of material are good and help to give trainees the theoretical knowledge needed in childcare. There is nothing similar for care programmes.

28. Good practice is not shared among NACRO's centres. Arrangements for monitoring training at work depend on the trainee review system. This approach is not sufficiently rigorous, and weaknesses have been slow to emerge in some provision. Assessment-planning is good. Trainees are well prepared for assessment and understand the NVQ approach. Some work-based assessors do not keep to their schedules, and arrangements for internal verification are not sufficiently uniform. Assessment documents are monitored, and the guidance to assessors, given by internal verifiers, is sound. There are no procedures for sampling assessment records or for observing assessment sessions.

29. The quality of work in trainees' portfolios is high. Evidence of competencies is detailed and comprehensive. Portfolios are well presented and properly indexed. Effective use is made of evidence cross-referencing among NVQ units. Key skills are integrated with occupational training in neither modern apprenticeships nor national traineeships. The accommodation and equipment at NACRO centres are good. Of 203 leavers, 84 achieved an NVQ and 140 found employment or progressed to further training.

Media & design

Grade 3

30. There are 61 trainees, 68 per cent of whom are endorsed as having special training needs. NACRO has contracts for media, arts and design with four TECs: Birmingham, FOCUS, Leeds and Sheffield. There are programmes in printing and

graphics, fashion and interiors. Inspection was carried out in Birmingham and Lambeth, where 45 trainees are following graphic art and design programmes. Nine clients are engaged in prevocational and occupational training; 27 are in mainstream youth training; six New Deal trainees; three taking taster courses. Training leads to NVQ levels 1 and 2, together with literacy and numeracy development. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by NACRO in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of a commercial studio at NACRO
- ◆ trainees manage project work
- ◆ high-quality work
- ◆ excellent learning partnerships between trainees and staff
- ◆ integration of key skills with project work
- ◆ good basic skills training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor record-keeping for assessment and internal verification
- ◆ inadequate work placements
- ◆ some poor accommodation and resources
- ◆ low rates of progression to employment

GOOD PRACTICE

Birmingham trainees have a production room for commercial contract work. They are involved working out cost and timescales for projects. They prepare estimates for potential clients. Finished work from the production team meets the commercial standards required. Trainees have recently designed a calendar and Christmas cards for NACRO.

31. Trainees' technical skills in design, freehand drawing and perspective skills, computer graphics and three-dimensional work are good. The quality of work reflects commercial standards of presentation. Trainees in Birmingham work in teams to provide graphic design services to businesses. They manage the teams themselves and are keen to succeed. Staff and trainees work easily together to draw out ideas and stimulate creativity. Project work is used to provide closely integrated learning opportunities in practical skills and theory. Trainees in London benefit from visits to exhibitions and museums. Trainees' achievement levels are satisfactory, with 53 per cent of leavers in 1997-98 gaining NVQ level 1 and 2. Progression to employment is poor. Less than 10 per cent found full-time jobs last year.

32. The standard of training is good. Lesson plans are thorough, relating closely to NVQ programmes. Trainees are not at ease with the terminology used in the NVQ standards or with NVQ statements of competence. Trainees negotiate their learning targets with trainers, but much of the discussion is informal and not recorded. Assessment is carried out throughout training. Records of assessment and internal verification are haphazard. Assessment results are not kept in trainees' portfolios to help them to plan programmes. Project work does offer flexibility to plug gaps in knowledge or practical experience. Through careful selection of work, trainees acquire information technology skills through design projects. Basic skills training is good and carried out in the vocational programme, rather than separately.

33. There are not enough work placements for every trainee to experience a commercial setting. Only one quarter of trainees in Lambeth was on a work placement. All media training and assessment in Birmingham takes place in a simulated working environment. The absence of on-the-job training denies trainees access to the latest technology. Resources at NACRO's centres are sufficient to meet the demands of the NVQ programmes. At Birmingham, there is good, modern computing equipment, a photographic processing laboratory and screen-printing facilities. In Lambeth, the facilities are barely adequate. All training is conducted in a single studio. Fifteen trainees have only a single computer to use.

Foundation for work

Grade 1

34. There are 979 trainees on foundation for work programmes, all of whom have been assessed as having special training needs. Among them are young people who had underachieved at school and long-term unemployed adults. NACRO delivers prevocational training at all its centres under contract to 21 TECs. Inspectors covered the provision in 15 TEC areas: Birmingham & Solihull, CambsTEC, Tees Valley, Cumbria, Greater Peterborough, Focus, Kent, Sandwell, Shropshire, Sheffield, Staffordshire, Surrey, Sussex Enterprise and Tyneside. Trainees work towards individual targets and entry-level qualifications. Some work on key skills and vocational qualifications at NVQ level 1. The length of their programmes varies according to contractual arrangements and personal needs. Clients are referred to the programme by a wide range of external agencies, but mostly by the careers services. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded by the company in its self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

The centre at Brighton has developed the 'key-in' magazine project, funded mainly through the SRB, with the aim of developing vocational skills and basic skills among young people producing a national magazine. Training activities include graphic design, computing, creative writing and editing, interviewing, marketing and retailing. The flexibility of the project has enabled staff to draw in many more young people from disadvantaged groups.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent working relationships among staff and trainees
- ◆ staff respond fully to trainees' diverse needs
- ◆ level and pace of learning suited to trainees' abilities
- ◆ well-planned training sessions with a variety of activities
- ◆ thorough and well-documented reviews
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good trainee achievement rates and progression

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work placements in some areas
- ◆ ineffective use of assessment opportunities

35. Staff are well qualified and experienced. They are expert in training people from disadvantaged groups. They have strong links with local employers. A record of good working relationships has extended the range of opportunities for training.

The rapport between staff and trainees is good. Most training plans meet trainees' aspirations and abilities and also take careful account of their support needs. Trainees are set short-term targets in personal matters, such as appearance, attendance and cleanliness. Challenging, but realistic, longer-term targets may include NVQ qualifications. Trainees have many opportunities to achieve qualifications in addition to their primary learning goals, including computer literacy and information technology, first aid at work, basic food hygiene and health and safety. These supplementary programmes widen the range of the learning experience, offer extra opportunities for achievement and give more scope for future employment. Training sessions are carefully planned and well delivered. Information is given clearly. Teaching is at a level and pace suited to trainees' abilities. Training sessions, often lively, creative and interesting, include a sufficient variety of activities to sustain trainees' interest. Trainees participate willingly. There is an absence of formal structure in some learning programmes. Although responsive to trainees' needs, they lack planning and clear objectives. Basic literacy and numeracy are taught by experienced and well-qualified staff, using appropriate learning materials. Trainees with learning difficulties are helped with additional teaching which addresses individual needs.

36. Procedures for reviewing trainees' progress are thorough. Records of review sessions are routinely kept and clear. Trainees are fully involved in their progress reviews. They agree on action-plans and amend individual training plans accordingly. In a few cases, where review arrangements are poor, trainees are too passive and do not receive a copy of the new targets for learning. Trainees receive substantial support at work from supervisors. NACRO's staff maintain strong partnerships with host employers. The support is particularly good in helping trainees to adapt to the demands of work routines. Placements are carefully chosen to meet each individual's needs. Some do not offer occupational experience which is related directly to qualifications; they invariably give trainees the opportunity to foster good working habits and build self-confidence. In some areas, too few work placements are available to satisfy demand. Where training is entirely off the job, the learning experience is weakened.

37. Assessments are generally well planned, and trainees understand the process. Most assessment of occupational competence takes place at NACRO's training centres. Evidence of progress produced at work is underused, and achievement of awards is sometime unnecessarily slow, as a result. The quality of presentation in trainees' portfolios is poor. There are no clearly documented strategies for internal verification. Arrangements are too informal and they do not ensure a continuous process of verification throughout training programmes. Trainees' achievements and progress to occupational programmes and jobs are good, bearing in mind the difficulties which they have to overcome. In 1997-98, 35 per cent of leavers achieved an NVQ qualification; 24 per cent progressed to occupational training or education; 15 per cent found jobs.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

38. Responsibility for implementing equal opportunities policies and procedures lies with senior managers. NACRO's mission is clear. Staff give priority to providing equality of opportunity, reaching out to people from a wide range of disadvantaged groups. The organisation has a national reputation for providing training and employment opportunities for ex-offenders and other socially excluded people. Recruitment policies target disadvantaged people, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. The organisation is decisive about its commitment towards preventing discrimination and harassment of any kind. The equal opportunities policy applies equally to staff and clients. The policy was reviewed and amended in early 1998, and the updated document was included in a handbook issued to all. Policies and procedures are detailed and comprehensive. They meet contractual requirements and comply with legislation. Some weaknesses, identified in the self-assessment report, were remedied before inspection. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective promotion of equality of opportunity by senior managers
- ◆ equal opportunities are endorsed by staff
- ◆ ready access to training for disadvantaged people
- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ systematic monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ good range of additional support facilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor facilities at some training centres for those with impaired mobility
- ◆ procedures for vetting and monitoring host employers are not robust
- ◆ routine monitoring of equal opportunities performance not fully operational

39. A major organisational review of equal opportunities policies and procedures has resulted in the formation of a new national equality review group. This group will monitor performance throughout the organisation, reporting directly to the board of directors. This initiative has resulted in refinement of procedures for analyses and evaluation of performance. These formal systems are not yet fully developed or operational. Performance indicators will be used at local, regional and national level. Staff development programmes include training in equal opportunities issues. Staff fully support the company's policies and have a thorough understanding of equal opportunities issues. NACRO is developing computerised management information to enable closer monitoring and analysis of trainees' recruitment and achievement patterns by gender, ethnicity, disability and offending status, by geographical areas

and occupational programme. Equal opportunities monitoring forms are systematically completed every month, and data are used to evaluate performance and inform managers' actions.

40. Most trainees are keenly aware of equal opportunities issues. Equal opportunities are included in the induction programme. Discussion of equal opportunities matters forms an important part of some prevocational training, especially for young people. Posters publicising the organisation's equal opportunities policy are clearly displayed in training centres, alongside copies of NACRO's trainee's charter. NACRO's commitment to equal opportunities and its intolerance of discrimination and harassment are clearly stated in the training agreement entered into by all trainees. The agreement includes sections which clearly explain the policies and procedures for resolving grievances and complaints. All prospective placement providers are vetted to ensure that they are committed to equal opportunities, but the process lacks sufficient rigour. The emphasis is on measures to assure health and safety. Each placement provider is given a copy of NACRO's equal opportunities policy and is required to assent to it. Recruitment and selection procedures for staff are included in the equal opportunities policy. Equality of opportunity is guaranteed for those from disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities. On several training sites, access is difficult and is problematic, to such facilities as lavatories, for those with restricted mobility.

Trainee support

Grade 2

41. All training programmes include a significant element of trainee support. Trainee support is an integral part of the work of all of NACRO's staff. Throughout their programmes, trainees are assigned to one particular member of staff for advice, guidance and additional learning support. Training schedules are arranged to allow formal support sessions. Most NACRO trainees have learning or personal support needs. Eighty-four per cent of adult trainees are following foundation for work programmes. Eighty per cent of youth trainees are endorsed as having special training needs. Recent surveys of support provision in the organisation indicated that well over 90 per cent of trainees were satisfied with the level of support given to them. Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report, but awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and impartial interviews
- ◆ effective use of initial assessment to inform training plans
- ◆ tailored induction programmes
- ◆ close support during in work placements
- ◆ good arrangements for specialist advice and care
- ◆ excellent provision for pastoral care

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no standard procedures for recording trainee support
- ◆ no structured programme for support of trainees on leaving

42. NACRO has strong connections, with specialist support agencies, used to provide trainees with ready access to a full range of care and help when they need it. All prospective trainees are interviewed. They are given accurate information and impartial advice about training and employment opportunities. Each trainee's aptitude and aspirations are carefully measured. Assessment of trainees' basic skills abilities is thorough. Prior learning is not always assessed or accredited well. Initial assessment findings are used to guide trainees. In some training centres, new clients are given the opportunity to experience occupational training as part of a 'taster' programme. Trainees' performance on 'tasters' is reviewed and used to evaluate their suitability. All trainees are guided to training through comprehensive and well-structured induction programmes which include a summary of opportunities for achievement of qualifications, rights and responsibilities, training support services, health & safety and equal opportunities.

GOOD PRACTICE

Extensive induction helps disaffected young people through the transition to vocational training. In Cambridge and Bedfordshire, the two-week 'workstart' programme offers assessment of individual needs and occupational tasters. In Birmingham, 'the bridge' tackles barriers to training, such as a lack of basic skills and confidence, homelessness and behavioural difficulties. Other centres have vocational 'taster' programmes aimed directly at excluded pupils from schools.

43. Arrangements for review of clients' progress and satisfaction with training are part of all programmes. Staff make very frequent visits to work placements to interview trainees. NACRO provides high levels of on-the-job support, benefiting trainees and placement providers alike. Host employers are carefully matched to clients' needs. Trainees receive good support from employers and work-based supervisors. Many employers are involved in monitoring and reviewing trainees' progress, enabling problems to be picked up early and prompt remedial action. Staff are caring and understand individual trainees' needs. Support encompasses learning difficulties, disabilities and personal problems. Computer packages and literacy and numeracy training help clients to achieve the essential basic skills to prosper in life and work.

44. There are marked differences in the quality of documentation of procedures for trainee support across the organisation. Much trainee support is informal. In some cases, records of the support given are not routinely kept. While support is good, it does vary among individual members of staff, sites and occupational areas in ways for which there is no obvious justification. Trainee support is responsive, rather than delivered in clearly defined procedures. At some centres, interviews are conducted with trainees when they leave programmes. Clear guidance on progression is given. Trainees are made aware of opportunities for further training and employment prospects. Progression guidance is not standard across the organisation, and the help given to trainees is insufficient in some cases.

Management of training

Grade 2

45. NACRO was reorganised in early 1998. Two divisions now take responsibility for housing and for education & employment, respectively. NACRO is divided into six directorates. Responsibility for the management and delivery of work-based training lies with the 'education and employment directorate'. The directorate has its own senior management team, comprising the director, the national quality manager, the publications information officer and four regional managers. Area managers are responsible to regional managers for training contracts and local sites. Area managers take responsibility for recruitment, appraisal and development of the staff in their centres. There is a clear management structure, understood by all, which is similar in all of NACRO's training centres, making allowance for local variations among TEC contracts and economic conditions. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses found through self-assessment, but awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open and effective communication
- ◆ clear operational targets for all areas of activity
- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ effective deployment of staff with clearly understood duties
- ◆ comprehensive procedures for staff recruitment, induction and appraisal
- ◆ strong working relationships with external agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice across the organisation
- ◆ no formal mechanism to review or improve delivery of training
- ◆ some training centres operate in isolation from others

46. Regional and area managers work well with their staff. Great emphasis is placed on teamwork at all levels. Staff are set individual, regularly reviewed targets, linked to each centre's TEC contract. Amendments are discussed and agreed on by staff with their managers. Staff recruitment, induction and appraisal are clearly documented and uniformly applied at all centres. All staff have detailed job descriptions. Staff appraisal interviews managers and staff opportunity to discuss progress, to review job descriptions and set new targets for achievement [leaving that one with you!]. Emphasis is placed on continuing staff development. Many additional courses are provided to extend staff awareness and knowledge, especially in trainee support and equal opportunities. Courses include drug and alcohol dependency, workshop safety and support for trainees from disadvantaged groups, with specific learning difficulties or acute pastoral needs.

47. Staff meet regularly in local teams. They discuss general issues about the organisation, exchange information and deal with matters specific to their own centres. Staff meetings are held weekly at many centres. Staff are enthusiastic and well motivated. They value NACRO's open-style management. Regular management meetings are held at area and regional level. Clear and effective lines of communication connect all levels of the organisation, vertically and horizontally. Targets are reviewed by senior managers. All managers are informed about the current financial situation of NACRO at any one time. Information from surveys of trainees, staff and employers are carefully collected. The results are collated and evaluated and routinely circulated to all sites. This information is used to influence decisions. Informal programme review meetings take place among regional and area managers. These arrangements are effective in identifying areas of strength and weakness at local level. However, the present informal arrangements do not encourage sharing good practices across regions or among training centres in any systematic way. Procedures for gathering, collating and analysing data are not fully developed.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

48. The organisation has a comprehensive quality assurance policy and well-documented procedures. Responsibility for the development and implementation of quality assurance procedures in the education and employment directorate lies with the national quality manager. Managerial procedures for quality assurance are new. There is a quality review group, comprising the senior management team and training staff representatives. The quality review group meets monthly. Dependency on audit reports from external bodies has been superseded by a focus on clear and comprehensive internal procedures in the revised quality manual. Arrangements for quality assurance and individual staff responsibilities are clearly set out in the manager's handbook, copies of which have been issued to all training centres, so that they are readily accessible to staff. The revised document makes good use of flow charts, for clarity. Several training centres have ISO 9001 quality standards or the Investors in People Standard. Inspectors agreed with the findings in the organisation's self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good monitoring of quality assurance
- ◆ effective systems for the collection and evaluation of performance data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ new quality procedures not yet routine across all training sites
- ◆ internal verification practices not standardised

49. The recent review and evaluation of quality assurance arrangements have been effective. Inadequacies in previous arrangements for quality assurance were clearly identified. Quality assurance at local level was judged to be insufficient to assure consistency in training and assessment. Plans for improvement have resulted in the appointment of local quality co-ordinators. The manager's handbook contains clear and comprehensive procedures for quality assurance. Lines of communication between quality co-ordinators and managers are good. They are maintained through regular monthly meetings. Quality is monitored through a systematic programme of internal audits. Staff have been trained as qualified internal auditors to help them to evaluate procedures' effectiveness. Written feedback about audit findings is sent to all managers. Internal audits reports are used by the quality review group to help to address weaknesses. Staff's awareness and understanding of quality assurance arrangements are good. The national quality manager makes visits to training sites. Quality assurance procedures are not yet routine in all training centres. They have yet to create the necessary consistency to guarantee high-quality training on all sites and in all occupational areas.

50. Dissemination of management information to staff throughout NACRO is effective. All managers receive detailed performance data about contractual targets and achievement goals. Data are used systematically to inform management decisions and to influence strategic planning. Arrangements for monitoring trainees' achievements and destinations meet contractual requirements, but a new data-collection system has yet to be fully implemented. Finer discrimination of trainees' performance levels in individual occupational areas is not yet possible. National surveys of client satisfaction are conducted effectively. The data derived from them are used to inform self-assessment. There is an emerging culture of continuous improvement in NACRO. Policies and procedures for quality assurance are still at the developmental phase, and the benefits have yet to be seen. Procedures for internal verification of awards are not sufficiently consistent. There are unhelpful differences, among sites and occupational areas, in the arrangements for assessment and internal verification and in the detail to which outcomes are recorded. Formal procedures for evaluating assessment practices are not routinely used on all sites. The process of self-assessment is incorporated in quality assurance arrangements. Self-assessment has led to identification of areas of weakness and improvements. NACRO's work to enhance its quality assurance capability is well conceived, and there are promising early signs of effectiveness.