



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

NLC Training

SUMMARY

NLC Training offers good training in construction and in health, care and public services. It also offers satisfactory training in engineering and business administration. NLC training is careful to ensure equal opportunities for all of its trainees, and its arrangements for quality assurance and general management of training are also good. The support available for trainees is outstanding.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Health, care & public services	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent resources in engineering and construction
- ◆ good working relationships between trainees and training co-ordinators
- ◆ effective staff training and development
- ◆ effective support systems and grievance procedures for staff and trainees
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements inform continuous improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor awareness of key skills among trainees
- ◆ no workplace assessment in some areas
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training in some areas
- ◆ low level of NVQ awareness by some employers
- ◆ underdeveloped NVQ tracking systems in some areas

INTRODUCTION

1. NLC Training is a self-supporting unit, in the operations directorate, of North Lincolnshire College. North Lincolnshire College began offering work-based training programmes in the 1970s, and NLC Training has developed from that time to become one of the largest training providers in Lincolnshire. The college operates from centres in Lincoln, Gainsborough and Louth. All of NLC Training's current work is funded by contracts with Lincolnshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). All trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4 through modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other work-based training for young people programmes. NLC Training has 497 people in training. Over 94 per cent of trainees are employed in companies throughout Lincoln, Gainsborough and Louth.

2. Lincolnshire has a population of 616,200. The largest urban area is Lincoln itself, with a population of 85,000 and the largest concentration of industry in the county. Agriculture is the predominant industry in the county, but, with the decline of traditional industries, the public sector is now the largest employer. Unemployment in the county of Lincolnshire is low, at 4.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent. However, there are pockets of high unemployment, particularly in the Lincoln and Gainsborough area, which rise up to 8.8 per cent. Those aged between 18 and 24 make up a significant part of this figure. Minority ethnic groups represent 0.8 per cent of the population. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 44.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997. NLC Training competes for trainees with further education colleges, school sixth forms and other training providers in the area.

3. A recent development by NLC Training is its involvement in the creation of an engineering training centre. This is a partnership between Lincolnshire TEC, North Lincolnshire College, Lincoln City Council and a local major engineering employer. The purpose-built training centre is operational and aims to enhance engineering training in the Lincoln area.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. As part of North Lincolnshire College, and therefore subject to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) self-assessment and quadrennial inspection process, NLC Training is familiar with the concept of self-assessment. It produced its first self-assessment report two months before inspection. All staff were involved in the process. It is clear, concise and informative. Key strengths and weaknesses had been identified, resulting in action-plans to address areas of perceived weakness. Inspectors largely agreed with many aspects of the report, but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

5. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 21 days at NLC Training during October 1998. Inspectors examined provider and awarding body documents. They interviewed 25 members of staff and 49 trainees, observed 14 training sessions and held discussions with 25 local employers. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and the portfolios being compiled for NVQs.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2				2
Engineering		2	2			4
Business administration		1	5			6
Health, care & public services		2				2
Total	0	7	7	0	0	14

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

6. There are 115 trainees in construction. Of these, 32 trainees are modern apprentices and 83 follow other work-based training for young people programmes. Trainees are working towards NVQs in the areas of brickwork, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, plumbing, plastering and electrical installation. There are also nine trainees working towards ordinary or higher national certificates in construction. Trainees are either employed or placed with local businesses, spending four days in the workplace and one day a week at college for off-the-job training. Trainees on the electrical installation programme are occasionally assessed in the workplace, although most assessment in this and other construction occupations takes place on the college's premises, under simulated conditions. The self-assessment report accurately identified several strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the provider in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality on-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ excellent off-the-job training and assessment resources
- ◆ good opportunities for progression
- ◆ additional support available throughout training programme
- ◆ strong and effective working relationships among the provider, trainees and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor awareness of key skills among trainees
- ◆ lack of workplace assessment

7. The provider arranges good-quality work placements and employment opportunities for its trainees and is quick to arrange alternatives, if they are later found to be unsuitable. Regular reviews are carried out in the workplace, but these focus on general issues and are not used to set NVQ-related targets. The provider has access to excellent training resources and uses a flexible style of delivery, enabling some trainees to achieve rapidly, while providing additional support to others. This approach is well managed and results in individually tailored off-the-job programmes. The provider encourages and supports all trainees to achieve their maximum potential. Some trainees who started, and completed, a level 2 NVQ have progressed to the ordinary and higher national certificate in construction.

8. Most assessment takes place during off-the-job training sessions. Most trainees and employers regard the training programme as a traditional college-based day-release course, rather than work-based training. Opportunities for experiences in the workplace to be submitted as evidence towards the NVQ are missed. Assessment does not generally take place in the workplace. However, the provider has identified that communication with employers, for arranging such visits, is an area which requires immediate action. While trainees have a good understanding of the NVQ framework, they are not as well informed about key skills.

Engineering

Grade 3

9. The provider has 140 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in engineering and manufacturing and 120 trainees working towards NVQs in motor vehicle. Of the 140 trainees, 52 are modern apprentices, with the remainder on other work-based training for young people programmes. All engineering and 95 per cent of motor-vehicle trainees are employed and attend one day's off-the-job training each week. Provider training co-ordinators review all trainees in the workplace. While inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses to those proposed by the provider through self-assessment, the grade awarded is the same.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent working relationships among trainees, employers and training co-ordinators
- ◆ wide range of appropriate resources
- ◆ frequent and effective work-based assessments in engineering
- ◆ good-quality training in engineering

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor key skills awareness
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment in motor vehicle
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ low level of NVQ awareness by employers

10. In engineering, all trainees receive an initial assessment of their basic skills which helps to highlight any additional support requirements. Where this is the case, additional support is well integrated in off-the-job training sessions. All trainees are employed by supportive employers in good-quality work placements. While at work, all trainees receive regular review visits from NLC Training's co-ordinators to monitor both on- and off-the-job progress. The visits exceed the frequency demanded by the TEC contract and, where necessary (and particularly in engineering), can take place out of normal working hours. In both areas, the original individual training plan (ITP) is not updated to reflect these visits, but the TEC 'amendment to ITP' forms are used, where appropriate. Engineering trainees attend off-the-job training sessions each week, at which they receive a high standard of training in well-equipped workshops. The facilities are appropriate to trainees' needs and meet the requirements of the awarding body. They are of a particularly high standard at the Lincoln site. Following the completion of a level 2 NVQ, engineering trainees are given an individual induction to NVQ level 3 and, together with employers and training co-ordinators, select the most appropriate NVQ units to meet their individual needs.

11. All trainees gather evidence, in the form of witness statements, from the workplace. In engineering, there are thorough work-based assessments carried out by NLC Training's co-ordinators. In motor vehicle, work-based assessments occur only for some vehicle-body trainees, but there are additional portfolio-building sessions regularly delivered by motor-vehicle tutors. In all areas, there are good working relationships among training co-ordinators, employers and trainees.

12. Trainees in both areas generally have a poor awareness of key skills, and, in many cases, late integration has resulted in missed opportunities for evidence collection. In engineering, there is a backlog of NVQ level 3 work-based assessments waiting to be carried out, owing to staff shortages; this is being addressed, as a matter of urgency, by the provider. Links between on- and off-the-

job training are weak and, in motor vehicle particularly, rely on verbal feedback between the training co-ordinator and tutors. In the areas where assessment does not generally take place at work, employers do not have a full understanding of the NVQ system.

Business administration

Grade 3

13. NLC Training offers work-based training for young people programmes in administration, accounting and information technology. There are 16 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in administration, including one modern apprentice. Four trainees are working towards NVQs in accounts at levels 2 to 4, and 10 trainees are working towards information technology NVQs at level 2. Trainees work in a variety of local businesses, such as car dealerships, solicitors, retailers, manufacturers and schools. All but two trainees are employed. In general, four days' training takes place in the workplace each week, with a further day spent attending off-the-job training at either Lincoln or Gainsborough, where trainees gain additional skills and knowledge for their NVQ. In administration and information technology, assessment is carried out during off-the-job training sessions, by tutors, using evidence drawn from the workplace and from off-the-job sessions. In addition, training co-ordinators visit the workplace, from time to time, to carry out direct assessment by observation. Accounting trainees have the opportunity to achieve the examination-based association of accountancy technicians (AAT) qualifications. The self-assessment report claimed some strengths which are no more than contractual requirements, but inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ frequent and regular reviews
- ◆ good-quality learning resources in information technology
- ◆ good-quality off-the-job delivery in accounting

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ tutors, work-based supervisors and training co-ordinators do not work effectively as a team
- ◆ insufficient staff resources in some areas
- ◆ poor key skills integration and achievement

14. Work placements offer good learning opportunities across all areas. Employers are fully supportive of the training process and have a good range of resources. Trainees receive good support in the workplace from training co-ordinators who visit frequently, allowing both progress and general welfare to be monitored. Employers receive regular written reports on trainees' progress in off-the-job

training sessions and contribute to the overall review process. NLC Training's staff notify employers immediately when a trainee does not attend off-the-job training. As a result, work-based supervisors have a good understanding of the progress which their trainee is making towards the NVQ.

15. In administration and information technology, off-the-job training is generally satisfactory, with trainees working at their own pace, using relevant and good-quality learning guides. In some sessions, however, the trainee-to-tutor ratio is too high, with 28 trainees divided in two training rooms, with just one tutor. This results in the tutor being unable to deal with the volume of requests for assistance and a delay in progress for some trainees. Off-the-job training in accounts is thorough and well structured, with clear aims and objectives.

16. In administration, one employer has worked closely with the provider to produce a detailed training programme. This has clear objectives linked to the content of the NVQ to ensure that all units can be assessed using evidence from the workplace. Opportunities for assessment and review are frequent and integral to the programme, but this is an exception, most employers not being actively involved in planning on-the-job learning opportunities, resulting in missed opportunities for evidence collection and assessment. The co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is not well structured. Tutors have little or no contact with work-based supervisors and are not systematically briefed on trainees' experiences or the learning opportunities available to them in the workplace. In administration and information technology, the training co-ordinator has started to assess trainees in the workplace, by direct observation. This has yet to be integrated with the overall assessment process which is currently led by the provider's tutors.

17. Between April 1997 and 1998, 60 per cent of all leavers achieved at least one NVQ. However, all 17 modern apprentices who started between April 1995 and 1997 have now left, without one achieving the full modern apprenticeship award. NLC Training, however, recognises that lack of integration and achievement of key skills is an important weakness and has already started work towards a comprehensive action-plan.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

18. There are 47 trainees in health, care and public services, of whom 11 work towards NVQs at level 2 in direct care, 32 work towards levels 2 and 3 in childcare and four trainees work towards dental nursing qualifications. Direct care trainees are either employed or placed in local residential homes for the elderly and centres for people with a disability or additional learning needs. They attend one day's off-the-job training every two weeks. Eight out of the 11 trainees are employed. Childcare trainees are either placed or employed in day nurseries or infant schools. Trainees working towards childcare level 2 NVQs attend one day's off-the-job training each week, level 3 trainees attend half a day's training each week. Dental nursing trainees attend evening off-the-job sessions each week. In care and childcare, assessments are carried out in the workplace. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report and found additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors

awarded the same grade as that proposed by the provider in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ effective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent working relationships among trainees, tutors, training co-ordinators and workplace supervisors
- ◆ effective individual support for trainees with additional learning needs
- ◆ training programmes effectively planned and delivered to meet individual trainees' needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient assessment by direct observation in childcare
- ◆ workplace supervisors not well informed about the NVQ system

19. Off-the-job training sessions are professionally delivered, using a variety of techniques, including lectures, small group workshop sessions and individual tutorials, together with opportunities for trainees to work alone. Trainees are encouraged to reflect on their own work practice, as well as being given new ideas and sharing good practice with other group members. All training and assessment is carried out by well-qualified and experienced tutors. There are a few work-based assessors who can regularly assess their own trainees. NLC Training has, however, taken the decision not to use work-based assessors, in an effort to maintain a standard approach to assessment practices.

20. Training co-ordinators interview all potential trainees, complete individual training plans and review trainees in the workplace. The co-ordinators are not occupationally competent. There is regular and effective communication between training co-ordinators and tutors/assessors. Trainees with additional learning needs are identified at the start of the programme, and a basic skills co-ordinator agrees on an individual training plan, which effectively integrates additional support in the main NVQ programme.

21. In childcare, each trainee is allocated five assessment visits for the whole qualification. This policy has resulted in insufficient direct observation in the workplace. Some workplace supervisors would like more information about the NVQ system, and which units their trainees are working on, so that they could support them more effectively.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

22. NLC Training, as part of North Lincolnshire College, takes its responsibilities for ensuring equality of opportunity for its staff and trainees seriously. Set in the heart of rural Lincolnshire, with an overall population from minority ethnic groups of 0.8 per cent, the provider has had to work hard to raise awareness and ensure that under-represented groups are attracted to training programmes. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, supported by an active and influential equal opportunities implementation group. Some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report have already been addressed. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the provider in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effectively monitored and promoted equal opportunities policy
- ◆ effective support systems and grievance procedures
- ◆ effective staff training and development in equal opportunities
- ◆ regularly collected and evaluated equal opportunities data
- ◆ good equal opportunities practice central to staff recruitment activities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ not all marketing materials effectively promote equal opportunities

23. North Lincolnshire College has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which is reviewed annually. Each department is responsible for producing its own policy statement and targets. NLC Training has carried out this responsibility effectively, reviewing progress towards its own targets and the effectiveness of its policy quarterly. Equal opportunities data are collected and evaluated as part of the quarterly review. Data presented to the last review meeting indicate that women are under-represented in traditional male occupations. The resulting action plan includes additional staff training, educating and informing employers, and redesigning marketing materials. Much of this action has been implemented and will be reviewed at the next meeting. All staff attend regular equal opportunities training and information sessions.

24. An NLC Training equal opportunities working party recently produced a summary of the equal opportunities arrangements to present to all employers. This is awaiting approval by the college's equal opportunities implementation group. The training provider supplies good access and facilities throughout for trainees with disabilities or visual/hearing difficulties. NLC Training distributes information leaflets about the Disability Discrimination Act to all employers. There is an effective independent support network available for any trainee or member of staff who may feel that they have been the subject of harassment or discrimination.

GOOD PRACTICE

Part of the recent awareness-raising training for staff included a session delivered by three college students with different disabilities. Two were wheelchair users, one with cerebral palsy and the other with a hearing impairment; the third had visual impairment. They talked about their experiences and about how they would like to be treated. All staff found the session to be extremely informative.

Information about this network is freely available in user-friendly leaflets and the handbook. Staff recruitment procedures have recently been reviewed, with the result that best practice in equal opportunities is a major focus of the whole process.

25. The current marketing materials are several years old and do not reflect the enormous developments which the provider has made in the area of equal opportunities practice and procedure. NLC Training is currently reviewing all materials to improve the messages which it gives to the wider community.

Trainee support**Grade 1**

26. NLC Training supports trainees from the moment they make an enquiry until they complete their chosen qualifications. In addition, it is fully integrated with the wider support system of North Lincolnshire College. All aspects of trainee support are fully documented and explained to trainees, individually, at the first stage of induction. A comprehensive, carefully and professionally designed handbook provides trainees with a further source of information and support. Inspectors agreed with the strengths claimed by the provider in its self-assessment report. They found additional strengths, but did not identify any weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the provider in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ potential trainees given relevant and objective advice
- ◆ comprehensive assessment of basic skills
- ◆ additional support carefully integrated in NVQ programmes
- ◆ effective individual induction process
- ◆ comprehensive range of support services
- ◆ clear and well-documented managerial responsibility for trainee support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

27. All potential trainees are offered an interview with NLC Training. Once their career choices are established, they are referred to the most appropriate training co-ordinator. A comprehensive initial assessment test is administered during trainees' individual induction. The results of the initial assessment inform the decision to refer the trainee to a more in-depth basic skills assessment, carried out by the provider's basic skills tutor. Where additional support arrangements are identified, the basic skills tutor informs the individual training plan to ensure that these are carefully integrated. All trainees are offered additional support, irrespective of the initial assessment results, and are then sent for a second induction with the off-the-job tutor. This is a vocationally specific induction, as well as an opportunity for trainees to register at the main college so that they can take advantage of its support arrangements such as trainee counselling, careers advice and recreational facilities.

GOOD PRACTICE

All trainees are presented with a comprehensive college handbook, in addition to the general induction information and handouts. The handbook is slightly larger than pocket size and includes a blank diary and planner for the year to encourage its daily use. The handbook contains information relating to a wide range of support services and is organised in coloured sections for easy reference. Where support is not provided directly by the college or NLC Training, the handbook provides a directory of local and national support services, together with telephone numbers. The handbook is updated each year and issued to all college students including trainees.

28. Trainees are regularly reviewed in the workplace by training co-ordinators. The frequency of these reviews exceeds the TEC's minimum requirement of every 13 weeks. Most trainees attend off-the-job sessions on a weekly basis and are encouraged to discuss any problems with either their tutors or training co-ordinators. All aspects of trainee support arrangements are fully documented and regularly reviewed by the college's senior management team. Regular internal audits ensure that procedures are followed. A charter for trainees is prominently displayed in all buildings and also in the handbook for trainees.

Management of training
Grade 2

29. The contract between Lincolnshire TEC and NLC Training is signed by the principal of the college. All NLC Training's staff are employees of the college, although their work is primarily concerned with the delivery of government-funded training programmes. Each department contributes to the overall strategic and operational planning process of the college. Many policies and procedures are, therefore, generic to the college and extend to all staff, students and trainees. Where this is not appropriate, policies and procedures specifically relating to NLC Training and government-funded work-based training have been written and are fully embedded. NLC Training provides regular off-the-job training by integrating trainees in mainstream college programmes. All trainees are enrolled on the management information services system (MIS) and can access a wide range of support services. As NLC Training is directed by the college's strategic and operational policies and, in some cases, its own procedures, inspectors identified additional strengths to those claimed in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive policies and procedures issued to all staff and trainees
- ◆ measurable targets for success are set and regularly reviewed
- ◆ staff are well trained to support trainees with diverse needs and experience
- ◆ comprehensive staff recruitment procedures
- ◆ effective staff development and appraisal system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training across and within occupational areas
- ◆ underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation of achievement data

30. NLC Training is well managed. This is enhanced by the comprehensive quality assurance and management systems of North Lincolnshire College which extend to all staff and trainees. Government-funded work-based trainees are well represented

by the unit's manager at all of the college's management and quality committees. The college is careful to ensure that all policies and procedures take account of their specific needs. A comprehensive trainee, and separate employer, handbook details all policies and service level entitlements. The fact that all trainees enrol on the college register ensures that they benefit from the comprehensive student charter and other support services and arrangements, prominently displayed in all buildings and further detailed in the annual student/trainee handbook.

31. The college carries out a comprehensive analysis of achievement and retention figures, setting challenging targets to achieve each year. These achievement and retention rates have been steadily improving over the past three years, but, while these data provide information about specific NVQ programmes, they do not differentiate between government-funded work-based trainees and FEFC students. NLC Training has recently introduced a new trainee information-management system, capable of providing this information, but it is not yet fully developed. The effectiveness of off-the-job training is regularly evaluated by the college, often resulting in comprehensive action-planning or changes in policy. The co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is not subject to the same level of evaluation and has led to different approaches across and within occupational areas. There are comprehensive staff recruitment and development procedures in place, effectively implemented by a central personnel department and extended to all staff. As a result, staff are extremely well trained to support all trainees and, in particular, those with additional learning needs.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

32. Quality assurance arrangements are well documented and fully understood and supported by all staff. Trainees and employers are also provided with comprehensive information about these arrangements. NLC Training has achieved several nationally recognised quality standards, including the Investors in People Standard and the Basic Skills Agency's quality mark. The unit also meets the quality assurance requirements of the TEC and awarding bodies. In North Lincolnshire College, there is an established quality assurance framework system which details specific quality standards for each area of the college. The framework and standards are developed and reviewed by the quality standards committee. The self-assessment report is generally accurate, and inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the provider in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ effectiveness of off-the-job training rigorously monitored
- ◆ monitoring of trainees' destinations informs continuous improvement
- ◆ regularly conducted self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped NVQ tracking systems
- ◆ not all quality systems and procedures accurately reflect the rôle of NLC Training

33. North Lincolnshire College has comprehensive and well documented quality assurance arrangements. As a unit of the college, NLC Training benefits from these arrangements and actively contributes to their continual review and development through the quality standards committee. Each division or unit produces its own quality standards which, once agreed on by the quality standards committee, are subject to regular internal (and external, in some cases) checks. Although not a requirement, NLC Training has been conducting self-assessment, as part of the FEFC inspection process, for the past four years. This has led to continuous improvements taking place throughout the college and in its individual departments. As FEFC self-assessment is naturally focused on college-based learning, rather than work-based training, NLC Training has recognised that some of its standards need revising to more accurately reflect good practice in work-based training.

34. The college rigorously monitors off-the-job training. This involves a member of the college's professional development unit observing off-the-job sessions from each occupational area. The observer gives immediate feedback to the tutor and writes a formal report, including any recommendations, on each session observed. Each report is evaluated individually and collectively, resulting in continuous improvement including, where appropriate, changes in college policy. One area which has not been identified through this process is that of NVQ tracking by college tutors. There is a vast difference in the way in which tutors record trainees' progress towards the NVQ. Some systems are particularly informative, while others are out of date and ineffective. Trainees' destinations are closely monitored by the college to identify trends in particular NVQ programme areas. The results are evaluated and discussed at the regular college management meetings. NLC Training also monitors destinations on a more individual basis, by collecting information through trainee leaver questionnaires and, where appropriate, interviews for all trainees who leave the programme.