



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2000

Dimensions Training Solutions

SUMMARY

Dimensions Training Solutions provides satisfactory training in hairdressing. Trainees are enthusiastic and well motivated. They demonstrate well-developed practical skills. Trainees' retention and achievement rates are poor. The company operates an open door policy and there are no barriers to training for disadvantaged trainees. There is, however, little systematic activity to promote equal opportunities. All trainees undergo initial assessment, but the process is not always effective. Contact with trainees is frequent and adapted to meet the needs of the individual. Dimensions Training Solutions has comprehensive policies and procedures but there is insufficient evaluation of these procedures. There are initiatives to improve quality.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good development of trainees' practical skills
- ◆ no barriers for disadvantaged trainees
- ◆ frequent contact with trainees
- ◆ ongoing development of quality initiatives
- ◆ comprehensive policies and procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ little activity to promote equal opportunities
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ insufficient evaluation of procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. Dimensions Training Solutions (DTS) is a private limited company, owned by Dimensions Management Services, a family trust. DTS was formed in October 1998. For the previous five years it was part of a training company, The Syndicate Group Limited. Prior to 1993 it was part of an unincorporated partnership which has operated with government funding since 1983. DTS operates from a head office in a business park on the outskirts of Barnsley, at the centre of the company's operations. DTS provides off-the-job training in Leeds, Wakefield, Sheffield and North Yorkshire at centres owned by the company except in North Yorkshire, where it uses the careers service's premises. DTS holds government-funded contracts with Leeds, Wakefield, Sheffield and North Yorkshire training and enterprise councils (TECs). The Sheffield contract was previously held by another training provider. DTS is also subcontracted to another training provider in Barnsley. For the purpose of inspection, Leeds TEC is the co-ordinating TEC.

2. The company employs 17 staff, of whom 12 are involved in training, with the other five responsible for administrative matters at the company's head office. There are currently 146 trainees working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3. None of the training is subcontracted. Much of the practical training and assessment is carried out in the workplace, usually by DTS's trainers. Trainees attend training centres every month for theoretical training.

3. The four areas in which DTS provides training vary considerably in economic climate. North Yorkshire is a prosperous, largely rural area, where unemployment stands at 3.1 per cent, well below the national average of 4.1 per cent. The proportion of people in self-employment is well above the national average and includes a significant number of people in skilled trades such as plumbers, electricians and joiners. Thirty-seven per cent of the workforce are employed in the service sector. Less than 1 per cent of people are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 5.5 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 56.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Eighty-six per cent of year-11 students choose to remain in full-time education.

4. Leeds has one of the area's fastest growing economies. The service sector employs 78 per cent of the city's workforce. Unemployment is below the national average at 4.7 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 37 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Over 60 per cent of school leavers continue in full-time education. Five per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups.

5. Wakefield has a varied economy, which includes a thriving inner city and several deprived former mining communities. The proportion of the working population in managerial and professional occupations is lower than the national average and the proportion in manual work is higher. The main areas of decline in employment have been mining and construction; the key growth sectors have been real estate and property services. A large number of people are employed in the retail sector. Unemployment has declined during the past two years and now stands at 6.4 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups stands at 3 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 38.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Sixty-seven per cent of year-11 students remain in full-time education. Ten per cent enter training programmes.

6. The largest share of employment in Sheffield is in retailing and wholesaling, followed by business services, health and education. Employment in manufacturing and engineering has been declining for many years, and this trend is expected to continue. The service sector is growing. By 2004, seven of the 10 largest employment sectors will be service industries. The health and education sectors are also expected to account for many new jobs over the next five years. Unemployment has fallen during the past year, but is still above the national average at 6.8 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups stands at 6 per cent. Thirty-seven per cent of school leavers attained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, an increase of 1.1 per cent on the previous year. During the last year, 55.8 per cent of school leavers stayed in full-time education.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. DTS produced its first self-assessment report in October 1998 and a second in November 1999. DTS has developed an action plan as a result. The company's management team compiled the current report, and all staff received copies. The views of employers and trainees were not sought.

8. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at the company's sites during January 2000. Inspectors met staff from the training centres, managers, trainees, employers and representatives from the co-ordinating TEC. They interviewed 11 employers, visited 13 work placements, interviewed 51 trainees, conducted 39 staff interviews and observed seven training sessions, six assessments and three reviews of trainees' progress. Only four of the training sessions observed were graded. They were all awarded a grade 3.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hair & beauty (hairdressing)

Grade 3

9. Dimensions Training Solutions offers training in hairdressing at all four sites inspected. Currently there are 146 trainees and all are employed. Trainees spend one day every month at one of the company's four training centres. The rest of their time is spent in a work placement. The trainees are working towards hairdressing NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Seventy-nine trainees are modern apprentices, 41 are national trainees and 26 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. Trainees work in a variety of different salons in the four areas where the company operates. Salons range from large, high-profile city centre premises to small local salons. Many are family owned. In 1999, 16 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ. Inspectors agreed with 10 of the 19 strengths and all seven weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, although some weaknesses were duplicated within the report, and others were insignificant. Several strengths and weaknesses were in the wrong part of the report. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ enthusiastic and well-motivated trainees
- ◆ good development of trainees' practical skills
- ◆ good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ late introduction of key skills
- ◆ poor quality textbooks for trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

Employers and trainers encourage and participate in health and safety measures. Trainees are required to wear protective gloves when undertaking chemical treatments. A trainee experiencing skin irritation on the hands was required to wear gloves when shampooing.

10. Trainees are enthusiastic and well motivated. They demonstrate a high level of commercial competence given their length of time in training. They work confidently and are helped by employers to build a base of regular fee-paying clients. They are encouraged to take additional responsibilities in line with their developing competencies. Trainees enjoy their attendance at the training centres for theory training and regard this as an important part of their programme. Most would like off-the-job training to be either weekly or fortnightly. Trainees have a clear understanding of their programme. They are able to discuss with confidence the NVQ units, elements, and topics, and know exactly which units of their qualification they have gained.

11. Trainees understand the assessment process and their responsibilities within it. They are assessed in the workplace by DTS's training staff, who visit at least once a month. Assessment often takes place more frequently than that, however. Trainees work with trainers to determine when they are ready for their next assessment, which results in many trainees being assessed on a weekly basis. The training staff have appropriate occupational and assessment qualifications: two have teaching qualifications, six are qualified assessors, and one is qualified to assess prior learning. Three are currently working towards the internal verifier award. Assessments are completed in accordance with the awarding body's requirements. The company has a comprehensive monitoring system which clearly indicates individuals' achievements and progress. Trainees and trainers keep copies of progress reports. A progress wall chart is prominently displayed in all training centres showing trainees' achievements. It is kept up to date by trainers and monitored by trainees. There is no assessment plan for the programme as a whole, although trainers plan future assessments with the individual trainees they visit.

12. Both the achievement and retention rates of trainees are poor. In 1999, only 45 per cent of trainees completed their training and only 16 per cent achieved their qualification. This is an improvement on the achievement rate of the previous year, when fewer than 7 per cent of trainees achieved their NVQs. The previous year's statistics were the first produced by DTS, as this was the year when the company was formed. The trainees completing in that first year included some who had started with another company and completed their training with DTS. These trainees account for some 46 per cent of DTS's trainees, and achievement rates for 1999 still reflect the fact that there are many in training who were not originally recruited by DTS. Although achievement rates are still unsatisfactory, the company is working hard to improve the situation. There are already improvements to be seen in the numbers of trainees completing both NVQs and key skills qualifications, with 18 trainees having completed early.

13. Key skills have been introduced at the end of programmes. Trainees recently completing their programmes are only now having their work internally verified for key skills. Trainees recently starting a programme have a different experience, however. They are introduced to key skills during the induction programme and understand which key skills they will cover. Key skills training and assessment are introduced early in the programmes for these trainees. At present, two of DTS's trainers are qualified as key skills assessors. Generally, staff lack confidence in both their understanding of key skills and their ability to teach them effectively. All staff have now started key skills training, however. Key skills training in information technology is particularly poor. The only training in this area has been occasional input by the chief executive. The company currently has no usable computers, and few employers have any, so trainees have little opportunity to develop information technology skills. The company has plans for purchasing additional computer equipment, but this had not yet been delivered at the time of the inspection.

14. DTS's training rooms are pleasant and light and are equipped with a variety of appropriate learning resources and teaching aids. Trainees have access to a large number and variety of clients on which to practise their skills, and there is a good range of commercial products for them to use. Individual trainers usually prepare their own training materials. Textbooks are reproduced centrally for each of the training centres, but are often poorly copied and collated, making them difficult to read and follow. Although training sessions are well planned and taught, there are neither standardised schemes of work nor lesson plans. The company has recognised the necessity for improvement, however, and has developed draft schemes and plans, although these are not yet in use.

15. Individual trainers usually prepare their own training materials. Textbooks are reproduced centrally for each of the training centres, but are often poorly copied and collated, making them difficult to read and follow. There are neither standardised schemes of work nor lesson plans. The company, however, has recognised the necessity for improvement and has developed draft schemes and plans. It is intended that these will be implemented from February 2000, with trainees and employers as well as trainers receiving copies, so as to improve co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these measures.

16. Trainees enjoy a supportive learning environment within their workplaces. Most of the salons have a structured approach to training. They designate training periods, and employers and supervisors provide good learning experiences for trainees. There are examples of good practice in several salons. One salon regularly frees a senior stylist to work with the trainees. Other employers set specific tasks for trainees to complete within agreed time limits. Some trainers also plan short training programmes on specific skills to enable trainees to work towards a particular competence. Employers complete a questionnaire indicating which practical skills have been taught to trainees in their salon. The results of the questionnaire are used by trainers to identify where extra training is required. For example, if a salon is unable to provide training in perming, this is taught through

additional sessions at the training centre. Other than this, there is little co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training, however. Employers receive a timetable outlining the content of the theory programmes, but this does not provide sufficient information about their trainees' off-the-job training to enable them to plan practical work to coincide with work undertaken at the training centre. Thirty per cent of employers are training as assessors. Some employers who have achieved this qualification are able to complete trainees' assessments in the salon. During their visits to trainees' salons, not only do trainers make assessments but they also provide one-to-one training for individual trainees. Trainees feel well supported by both employers and trainers.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

17. DTS has recently reviewed its equal opportunities policy. The company identifies itself as an 'equal opportunities organisation' on its letterhead and marketing materials. There are written procedures for recruitment and dealing with grievances. Trainees and staff receive a copy of the policy and grievance procedure at induction. Review recording sheets include a space for monitoring equal opportunities in the workplace. Employers agree in writing to comply with DTS's policy. Information is collected on gender, ethnicity and disability. Nine per cent of trainees are men, and 3.5 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. The training team consists of ten women, none of whom are members of minority ethnic groups. No trainees are counted as having disabilities. The self-assessment report identified four strengths. Inspectors considered two to be no more than normal practice, disagreed with the other two and identified other strengths. Three weaknesses were identified by DTS. These were generally accurate and were incorporated into the inspection findings, but inspectors identified additional weakness. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective discouragement of discrimination by staff and employers
- ◆ good support for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ comprehensive grievance and appeals procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities legislation among staff and employers
- ◆ little active promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ unclear documents

18. DTS publicly declares its commitment to equal opportunities on its stationery and marketing materials. Staff at DTS have positive attitudes to equal opportunities. Employers support this ethos. Trainees reported no incidence of discrimination, at work or during off-the-job training. Sexual harassment is taken seriously and actively discouraged. Conscious efforts are made to present non-stereotypical images in marketing materials

19. DTS's staff have little knowledge of equal opportunities legislation and its implications. Although the chief executive has attended a two-day course, other staff have received no training. In particular, they have little knowledge of more recent developments, such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. Those staff who recruit staff and trainees and operate the grievance procedure are not sufficiently aware of their legal obligations to be effective in these roles. Most salon owners also have little knowledge of legislative requirements. As a result, trainees are not receiving the training they need in this area.

20. Although staff and employers have positive attitudes towards equal opportunities and are responsive if problems occur, there is little systematic activity aimed at promoting equal opportunities. DTS is aware of the under-representation of men and people from minority ethnic groups among both its trainers and trainees, but has not tackled this effectively. Most activity focuses on changing marketing materials, so that images of men and minority ethnic groups are included. However, no targets are set for addressing the imbalances in recruitment, either of staff or trainees. No use is being made of the provisions for positive action allowed by the law. The data collected on under-represented groups is not used to throw light on any disparities in progression and achievement. DTS acknowledges the importance of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Employers are given a copy of the equal opportunities policy and compliance with this is referred to in the agreement that they sign. However, equal opportunities issues are not discussed regularly with employers.

21. DTS operates an 'open door' policy and interviews all applicants. Motivation is considered more important than academic record. It backs up this policy by making sure that any trainees who experience disadvantages, illnesses or disabilities are given the encouragement and the practical help and support they need. Trainees with disabilities such as epilepsy and asthma are given effective support to help them to successfully complete their training. In those cases where a disability may on occasions affect a trainee's work, the employer is fully informed of the support and actions needed to help the trainee. A trainee with Crohn's disease was given additional time on their training programme to make sure that they had a chance to complete their qualification. DTS provides scribes for those trainees whose first language is not English, so that they can dictate their work without having to struggle with the difficulties of written English. Trainees with physical disabilities, who may find standing for long periods tiring, are accepted for training and are allowed to use stools, whenever practical, to complete tasks in the salon. Trainees with hearing impairments are provided with additional support to help them complete areas of their qualifications where it is more difficult for them to demonstrate good communication skills. Trainees who do not already have a job in a salon are given every assistance

to obtain suitable employment. The training programme aims to increase interpersonal skills and self-esteem. This is of particular benefit to trainees who have suffered from a lack of success in the past.

22. Managers have developed a set of grievance and appeals procedures covering all areas of activity. As well as a general grievance procedure, which allows trainees to complain about anything which is hampering their progress, and a procedure for appealing against assessment decisions, there is also an equal opportunities grievance procedure enables them to address any infringement of the equal opportunities policy. Trainees are issued with these procedures at induction and are aware of their rights.

23. DTS has developed a range of documents relating to equal opportunities including a policy statement, implementation and grievance procedures and an employers' agreement. None of these documents specifies the legislation to be complied with. Nor is it clear which matters are DTS policy, rather than legal requirements. This has led to confusion regarding the treatment of different forms of discrimination. For instance, the policy contains no reference to sex or nationality, but does include 'responsibility for dependants' and 'age'. Religion is not mentioned in the policy, but is mentioned in the implementation procedure. There is no definition of disability in any of the documents. DTS has not recognised that it has a number of trainees with disabilities which fall within the scope of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. These flaws weaken a potentially useful raft of documents.

Trainee support

Grade 2

24. DTS recruits trainees through the careers service and other agencies. A trainer is assigned to each applicant, who interviews them and tests their basic skills. Most trainees attend a two-day group induction given by the trainer at the training centre. This includes health and safety matters, details of their programme, and policies and procedural matters. All trainees have regular formal and informal review meetings. Three of the strengths highlighted in the self-assessment report referred to the same thing. Two of the strengths and one of the weaknesses belonged within the occupational aspect of the report. The strengths and weaknesses were recorded succinctly. The inspection team agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by DTS and gave this aspect the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction programme
- ◆ frequent contact with trainees
- ◆ good pastoral support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

The information given during the induction programme is reinforced on a planned quarterly basis, ensuring that trainees are regularly reminded of their rights and responsibilities.

25. Most trainees are introduced to organisational procedures, policies and programme requirements during a structured and well-planned two-day induction. This is supported by comprehensive documents covering the roles, rights and responsibilities of trainees. The process introduces trainees to the content of their programme, the requirements of assessment and the role of internal verification. The agenda includes organisational rules and regulations. Provision is made for individual trainees to join a programme between group inductions by giving them a condensed induction on a one-to-one basis. Trainees progressing from level 2 to level 3 receive an effective introduction to their new qualification. They understand its requirements and the need for a suitable client base to help them complete more advanced practical tasks.

26. Trainees benefit from frequent and effective meetings with their trainers. Their progress is reviewed more frequently than contractually required, with all trainees having two reviews each month. One meeting is conducted at the workplace and, in most instances, involves the employer. Trainers use these visits to help trainees complete theory work and practical assessments, and to liaise with the employer. Progress reports are used to record the work a trainee has done, any issues or concerns, and to set short-term targets. Most trainees' reports are fully completed, describing in detail what the trainee has achieved since the previous visit, and stating precisely the short-term targets for the next visit. Some few reports are incomplete or poorly detailed. Although there are examples of good additional support being given, they are not recorded on progress reports. In addition to the workplace review, trainees also have a progress review with their trainer during their monthly visit to the training centre. This takes the form of an individual tutorial and allows the trainee time for both pastoral support and help with any matters relating to their training. This meeting covers continued target-setting and portfolio development, and gives the trainee an opportunity to discuss any concerns or grievances.

27. Pastoral support is good and covers a wide range of activities relating to individuals' personal and social experiences. Trainers offer a high degree of flexible support to trainees. There are weekly visits to trainees requiring additional help with literacy or numeracy. Two trainees who reached their 25th birthdays before completing their programmes were offered continued support by DTS to enable them to qualify fully. Employers also share in responsibility for trainees' personal welfare and general well being.

28. All trainees undergo formal initial assessment of their basic skills at interview, using a recognised test. The results of the assessment are used to direct the trainee to their programme. Some trainees are unsure as to the purpose of this assessment and regard the content of the test as unrelated to their chosen career. After the basic skills test, most trainees complete a key skills assessment. It does not always

identify trainees' needs in full, with some learning difficulties becoming apparent only on completion of trainees' first written assignment. Trainees' prior learning and achievements are recorded on their application form. Most trainees are school leavers with little or no experience of the occupational area. Accreditation of prior learning for other trainees is carried out in a satisfactory manner. Trainees who have moved to DTS from another provider, for example, are given full credit for any prior achievements, thus ensuring that they do not have to repeat any work which they have already completed. Trainees who have previous experience of hairdressing are given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to a trainer. If they are competent, they are assessed straight away without having to undergo further training.

Management of training

Grade 3

29. The strategic direction of DTS is provided by the chief executive, who reports to a board of directors and who takes a 'hands-on' approach to management. Day-to-day operations are managed by the general manager, based in the head office in Barnsley. DTS provides government-funded training in North Yorkshire, Leeds and Wakefield and, since June 1999, in Sheffield, where it took over another training provider. DTS is also subcontracted to a large training provider based in Barnsley. DTS has 40 trainees in Sheffield, 38 in Leeds, 22 in North Yorkshire and 46 in Wakefield. Off-the-job training takes place in three purpose-built training salons, and at one other centre. The company employs 17 staff. Five staff are based in the head office, with the remainder providing training and assessment in the various areas. DTS has long-term relationships with 94 salons with which it contracts to provide employment and training for its trainees.

30. The self-assessment report identified a range of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses but regarded most as no more than normal practice. Strengths and weaknesses were identified during inspection which had been overlooked in the self-assessment. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given by DTS.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective target setting for trainers
- ◆ comprehensive policies and procedures
- ◆ good development opportunities for work-placement staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of strategic development planning
- ◆ insufficient training for staff on new procedures and staff appraisal

31. The company sets targets for all its trainers for trainees' recruitment, achievement and performance, based on the requirements of the TEC contracts. However, no targets are set for the wider aspects of business performance, such as improvements in the retention of trainees, a better gender balance or greater participation by employers. Progress towards the targets is regularly monitored throughout the year and feedback is given to individual members of staff during monthly meetings and at their annual appraisal. Staff all understand the importance of these business targets and are able to quote accurate details of their own progress towards meeting them.

32. DTS produced a business plan in October 1998 when the company was first established, with the help of an external consultant. The plan did not specify any key strategic objectives and has not been kept up to date. The company has no mission statement and business objectives are not communicated to staff, many of whom are unaware of the focus of the company

33. The company has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that cover many of the key training and management processes. These include a staff development policy, a communications policy and guidance to staff on various aspects of training and assessment. Many procedures are new. Although all staff have a personal copy of the procedures manual, many are unfamiliar with its contents. Management has done little to promote staff's understanding of these procedures. DTS has also recently developed a staff appraisal document. Most staff have been appraised using this document but the process focussed on quantitative data and not on the quality of individuals' performance. DTS's staff have not received any formal training in appraisal techniques and this is hindering appraisers in identifying development needs other than those linked to targets or organisational requirements.

34. Salon owners, managers and senior stylists are encouraged to take part in training and assessment in the workplace. DTS offers staff development opportunities for employers and salon supervisors, including training for the NVQ assessor award free of charge. Thirty percent of salon staff have contracted to undertake this training. Salon staff are also invited to training workshops designed and led by DTS, and to presentations given by manufacturers. Plans are in place to restart semi-social events of a type DTS has offered in the past. These include 'wine and cheese evenings' where salon staff will be briefed on the hairdressing NVQ, on key skills and on employers' responsibilities when providing work-based training for young people.

35. The company has recently introduced several management changes. These include the installation of a comprehensive software package to monitor and analyse data on trainees, better record-keeping, and better communications with staff and employers. They are providing better records of what trainees have done in the workplace, of staff appraisal, and of assessor visits. As yet, however, it is too early for the company to assess the full impact of these changes.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

36. The general manager is responsible for quality assurance. The company has a quality assurance manual and a range of procedures. The manual is available to all staff and covers all training and administrative processes. Trainees are informed of quality assurance procedures during induction. The company is subject to regular external audit by its two awarding bodies and the four TECs with which it contracts. DTS is meeting the contractual requirements of the TECs. DTS produced a self-assessment report in October 1998 and another in November 1999. The reports were written by the chief executive, the general manager and the training manager. Staff received copies. Trainees and employers' views were not sought.

37. The November 1999 self-assessment identified four weaknesses in quality assurance. One of the four strengths was confirmed during inspection. Two of the others were not significant. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors, who awarded the same grade as the self-assessment.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive internal procedures
- ◆ effective response to self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient evaluation of some key processes
- ◆ poor internal verification

38. DTS's system of quality assurance is described in detail in its manual. It sets out the purposes and required standards of performance for a wide range of activities. Procedures are clearly written and cover all areas of the company's activities. All staff have a copy. While all staff understand the concept of improving quality, some are not fully conversant with the company's systems. Procedures for health and safety, the production of individual training plans and contractual targets have been synchronised so that DTS produces all relevant information in time for the regular TEC audits. This has helped to ensure that there is regular monitoring and evaluation of quality in these areas. However, some other procedures are not subject to systematic review and evaluation. The manual stipulates that the views of trainees and employers on the quality of training should be collected and analysed every six months. The information is neither systematically collected nor used to improve training. DTS identified this as a weakness during self-assessment and has taken action to address it, including the purchase of a computerised package to help gather and analyse this information in future. The early leaver rate is high, at 55 per cent. The general manager produces a statistical analysis of each training centre's

early leavers. This analysis is discussed at the monthly staff meetings. Some specific areas of concern have been identified but there is no overall strategy, nor targets set to improve staying-on rates.

39. The company is experiencing significant problems with internal verification. The part-time occupational internal verifier left in September 1999. The training manager, a full-time member of staff, took over in December 1999, and is now also responsible for improving the quality of internal verification. None of the hairdressing staff holds the internal verifier award. Currently the training manager and two other occupationally competent staff are preparing to work towards it. The external verifier recommended changes to the process of portfolio verification in December 1999. The company is now working closely with its external verifier and a consultant internal verifier to ensure that awarding body requirements are met.

40. In response to the self-assessment, DTS has developed new initiatives to improve the quality of training. A pilot programme is currently being tested in one centre under which trainees attend the centre fortnightly rather than once a month, and training includes practice as well as theory. This enables trainees to practise skills they are unable to complete in the salon. A further initiative is the contracting of several salons as satellite assessment centres. Staff in these salons assess trainees in the workplace, ensuring that full use is made of naturally occurring evidence and increasing trainees' opportunities for assessment. The training manager observes training sessions given by DTS's staff, and gives them feedback. This helps individuals to improve their performance, and is intended to help disseminate good practice.

41. The November 1999 self-assessment report is the second produced by the company. The report is concise and informative. It is self-critical but some of the weaknesses are written so that it is not easy to decipher the point being made. The structure and content show considerable improvement over the first report. A number of the strengths and weaknesses are in the wrong area of the report. A significant omission is a description of how the training is organised. The high percentage of early leavers was correctly highlighted as a weakness but the low percentage of trainees achieving their target qualification was not identified. The report was written by the three senior managers, who have produced a detailed action plan and begun to implement a considerable number of initiatives in response to the report. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the report and with three of its grades, but gave lower grades for hairdressing training and for management of training. Some of the strengths identified in the report are no more than normal practice. The report contains an action plan with appropriate strategies and realistic timescales. At the time of inspection, work had begun to address some of the weaknesses.