

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1998

Newcastle-under-Lyme
College

SUMMARY

Newcastle-under-Lyme College is a tertiary college in north Staffordshire. Training in business administration is good and the accountancy training programme is a particular strength. Hairdressing training is good and the college has strong links with local salons. Training in engineering and in sport and recreation is satisfactory. Trainees receive good support from college staff. Initial assessment arrangements differ in their depth and sophistication. Equality of opportunity is promoted successfully. Management systems are effective, but there is no specific planning for their future development. Quality assurance arrangements are basically sound.

GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS | GRADE |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Engineering | 3 |
| Business administration | 2 |
| Leisure, sport & travel | 3 |
| Hair & beauty | 2 |

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates in accountancy
- ◆ high proportion of employed trainees
- ◆ supportive employers
- ◆ well-planned hairdressing training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no structured arrangements for obtaining feedback from trainees
- ◆ lack of strategic planning
- ◆ too many early leavers in some programme areas

INTRODUCTION

1. Newcastle-under-Lyme College is a tertiary college in Newcastle-under-Lyme, north Staffordshire. The vast majority of the college's work is funded through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), although the college has also been involved in work-based training of young people for several years. Training is organised and co-ordinated through a separate team which, in turn, forms part of the college's commercial development unit. Most trainees come from the Newcastle-under-Lyme area, although many are from Stoke-on-Trent and other parts of north Staffordshire.

2. The college offers work-based training for young people in a wide variety of occupational areas. Most trainees follow business administration, accountancy, engineering, hairdressing and sport & recreation programmes. Other specialist areas include pharmacy and laboratory technician work. Most trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4, through modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and youth training programmes. Some trainees work towards other nationally recognised qualifications. All training work with young people is funded through a contract with Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There were 223 young people in training at the time of inspection.

3. North Staffordshire has an international reputation for its ceramics industry and many renowned companies are based in the area. The Staffordshire area, as a whole, still depends heavily on manufacturing which provides nearly 30 per cent of employment. Several large companies, including multinationals, are a significant local presence. Full-time jobs for men are in decline. In January 1998, unemployment in Staffordshire stood at 4.4 per cent compared with the average for the West Midlands of 5.2 per cent and the national average of 5.3 per cent. Local unemployment in Newcastle-under-Lyme stands at 3.7 per cent. Those from minority ethnic groups make up 2.6 per cent of the Staffordshire population and are concentrated mainly in the Stoke-on-Trent and east Staffordshire areas. Minority ethnic groups make up just 1 per cent of the population of the Newcastle-under-Lyme area.

4. The level of attainment by school leavers varies considerably across Staffordshire and it is particularly low in Stoke, Cannock and Newcastle. The overall level of educational achievement of persons in Staffordshire is in line with the foundation learning targets of the National Targets for Education and Training. In 1997, the number of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 46.3 and 30.3 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 53 per cent. In 1997, staying-on rates in full-time education stood at 67.6 per cent in Staffordshire and 59.7 per cent in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Few local schools have sixth-form provision. The college competes with a wide variety of other further education and private training providers for trainees.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The college produced its first self-assessment report for this area of its work approximately one month before inspection. Several staff were involved in producing the report and this covers some areas in detail. Inspectors considered, however, that the strengths stated in the report in respect of other areas, were no more than normal practice. They agreed with most of the judgements in respect of hairdressing, accountancy and engineering and with the grades for these areas. Inspectors found weaknesses in other areas, which were either not mentioned, or were understated in the self-assessment report.

6. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 20 days at the college during November and December 1998. The four main occupational areas offered by the college were inspected. Other areas with smaller numbers of trainees were not included in the inspection's scope. Inspectors examined a wide range of documents generated by awarding bodies, subcontractors, Staffordshire TEC, and the college itself. Interviews were conducted with 49 trainees, 24 workplace supervisors and employers, and nine staff. Inspectors visited 22 workplaces and observed four training sessions. Trainees' portfolios, assessment records, individual training plans and learning materials were also scrutinised.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Hair & beauty | | 2 | 2 | | | 2 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

7. There are currently 14 vocational trainees, 14 national traineeship trainees and 43 modern apprentices on vocational training programmes, national traineeships and modern apprenticeships in mechanical & electrical engineering and manufacturing occupations. Approximately 95 per cent of trainees are employed by local employers. Assessment is undertaken by a combination of the college's staff, subcontractors and assessors employed by work placements. Vocational trainees are placed with local employers to carry out work-based training, supplemented by day-release vocational studies at the college. National traineeship trainees are placed with local employers for work-based training, supplemented by day-release training at the college's premises to enable them to achieve Engineering Marine Training Authority's Foundation in Engineering qualification. Thereafter, national traineeship trainees attend the college one day per week to continue their vocational education. Modern apprenticeships are delivered in a combination of ways to suit local employers' needs. Most trainees spend their first year of training at the college and

this consists of practical workshop-based training and technical studies. Thereafter, modern apprentices take work-based training with their employers, leading to NVQ level 3. Many continue with day-release technical studies. The inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report but they disagreed with others or considered that they were no more than normal practice. They awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high proportion of employed trainees
- ◆ high standard of work placements
- ◆ provision of relevant additional training
- ◆ flexibly arranged work-based training programme
- ◆ high standard of the well-planned off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' lack of awareness of the need to gather evidence of key skills attainment in the workplace
- ◆ failure to make key skills an integral part of workplace training
- ◆ lack of structured training in the workplace
- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ one subcontractor's poor NVQ assessment procedures

8. Over 90 per cent of the trainees currently on engineering programmes have found employment with companies which provide them with their work placement. Trainees are given access to training and development opportunities beyond their programme requirements, and they are highly motivated. Trainees are enrolled on a range of other complementary courses not directly related to their NVQ programmes, including courses in languages and interpersonal skills. Several trainees have been given the opportunity to change the level and direction of their training programmes to meet their individual aspirations and the changing needs of employers. Training with employers is of a high standard, although it is often unplanned. Trainees' portfolios contain evidence of work performed beyond the requisite NVQ standard. Most portfolios are of a high standard. Resources at the college are good, although there is currently no welding and fabrication tutor.

9. Trainees are unaware that they are required to record evidence of their attainment in key skills. Trainee co-ordinators miss opportunities to help the trainees to collect such evidence and trainees often have to repeat activities and tasks in order to obtain it. Work-based supervisors are often unclear about their duties and responsibilities. Most do not understand the basic requirements of NVQ assessment. There are no structured training plans with clear learning objectives and trainees and work-based supervisors do not have mutually agreed goals. Assessment of the trainees' competence in the workplace lacks rigour and an insufficient variety of assessment

methods is used. In one placement company, trainees working towards NVQ level 4 have generated large amounts of evidence which have not been cross-referenced or assessed. This company did not make external verifiers' reports available to inspectors. Trainees in their second year of training had only recently been issued with their NVQ standards, and they had missed opportunities to collect appropriate evidence. There are poor retention rates in engineering. Thirty-seven per cent of trainees left the programme early without gaining a qualification.

Business administration

Grade 2

10. There are 33 trainees currently on the business administration part of the programme, 17 of whom are on national traineeships, five are on vocational training programmes and 11 are modern apprentices. Eight modern apprentices are employed by one company; in this instance, review and assessment arrangements are subcontracted, rather than being undertaken by college staff. Training leads to qualifications in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), information technology and business administration at levels 1 to 3. There are a further 61 modern apprentices studying accountancy. Seven trainees are studying at level 2, 20 are studying at level 3, and 34 trainees are studying at level 4, 13 of whom have completed the central assessments and are undertaking work-based projects. In 1997-98, there were 28 early leavers, and this number represents a reduction on the previous year. However, 24 of them left without any achievements and this is an increase on the previous year. Inspectors considered that many of the strengths in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found strengths which were not identified by the provider, and they agreed with the weaknesses and the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support given by employers to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ accountancy trainees' exceptionally high levels of achievement
- ◆ accountancy trainees' success in progressing to, or within, employment
- ◆ frequent and thorough visits from staff to trainees on employers' premises
- ◆ effective processes to track and review trainees' progress on business administration programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some employers' poor understanding of their role
- ◆ weak key skills provision on business administration programme
- ◆ failure to use accountancy trainees' reviews for action-planning.

11. Work placements and employers in this vocational area are extremely supportive and provide good-quality training opportunities. The business administration team and its subcontractor use effective systems to track trainees' progress towards gaining the qualification. The subcontractor provided excellent handouts for trainees, detailing progression routes and outlining the standards in plain language. The frequency of visits to employers' premises varies, depending on trainees' needs. The subcontractor visits trainees weekly, and the NVQ co-ordinator visits whenever the need arises. Reviews were clearly explained and documented. An action plan is designed, following review, and trainees are advised on ways of collecting evidence, often in conjunction with the work-based supervisor. Key skills provision in business administration is weak, and most staff lack training in this area. Trainees miss opportunities to collect evidence of their attainment in key skills.

12. Accountancy trainees receive clear guidance about the NVQ level towards which they are working but this is not documented. There are three modes of delivery to meet trainees' and employers' preferences. Tutors provide effective teaching and thorough feedback on assessments. Accountancy trainees' achievement is high. Over the past two years, all trainees have obtained NVQ level 2, 83 per cent and 87 per cent, respectively, gained level 3 and 63 per cent and 96 per cent, respectively, gained level 4. These success rates are significantly higher than the national average and the average for students in the college. Retention rates are also good and in 1997-98, they were 85 per cent. The trainees' progression rates are excellent. Evidence of the trainees' performance in the workplace is used for NVQ level 2 assessment but there is less use of such evidence at levels 3 and 4, apart from the evidence associated with key skills. No on-the-job assessment is carried out. Reviews of trainees' progress are carried out every twelve weeks but the work-based supervisor is not always involved in these. Trainees, supervisors and tutors do not receive a copy of the progress review, and there is no subsequent action-planning. Issues raised are dealt with informally by the lecturer and the workplace assessor or tutor, but action on them is not recorded. Useful documents to monitor trainees' effectiveness are included in trainees' profiles, but they are largely neither understood nor used by trainees and supervisors.

13. In this vocational area, work-based supervisors are unclear about their rôles and responsibilities. Almost all expressed a wish to understand the NVQ process better. Accountancy work-based supervisors also wanted regular formal feedback on trainees' progress.

Leisure, sport & travel

Grade 3

14. There are 11 young people on training programmes. Six are on national traineeships and attend the college for one day a week for off-the-job training, including key skills. Five are in the second year of the local version of youth training and all their training occurs in the workplace. All trainees work towards sport and recreation NVQ level 2 qualifications in facility operations or operational services. Trainees are visited in the workplace by a member of the college's staff. This same person also undertakes workplace assessment for some units of the NVQ.

15. The self-assessment report for this occupational area was insufficiently detailed and it described, rather than evaluated, working practices. Inspectors did not agree with many of the strengths and considered some to be no more than normal practice. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ provision of additional training opportunities by employers
- ◆ varied and effective assessment practices
- ◆ frequent monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ good-quality work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to allow trainees to complete NVQ units progressively
- ◆ insufficient industrial experience of some staff
- ◆ no use of workplace assessors
- ◆ too many early leavers

16. Trainees are located in a range of suitable workplaces, including sports centres and private fitness clubs, and these provide them with good opportunities to develop the skills required for employment in the industry. Everyday work tasks allow them to demonstrate most of the competencies needed for their NVQ assessment. Assessment practices are rigorous and fair. Assessments are well planned, and trainees clearly understand what is expected of them. Evidence is collected from different sources, including both witness statements and direct observation of work. Workplace supervisors contribute well to this process. Trainees are visited frequently by their training co-ordinator from the college. Reviews are detailed, systematic and well recorded. Workplace supervisors are often involved in them and they keep themselves up to date with the trainees' progress, which, in most cases, is steady. In one instance, where the supervisor is less supportive of training, the trainees have made slow progress.

17. Many trainees have been able to complete additional industry-specific qualifications through arrangements made by employers. Examples of this include the national pool lifeguard qualification, emergency first aid certificate and the football association junior team manager award. Trainees are aware of the type of skills which increase their employability and receive support from their placements to obtain them. Provision for the key skills of communication and information technology for national trainees forms part of the off-the-job training. There is no training related to the application of number.

18. Although most workplace supervisors are highly supportive towards trainees, none is currently used as an assessor. Trainees have few opportunities to be assessed in the workplace. In most instances, the training co-ordinator lacks the necessary

industrial experience to assess some NVQ units. Trainees do not acquire NVQ units in stages but they complete them all at the same time towards the end of the programme. They are not always clear about how much progress they have made and they go through their training without experiencing the sense of achievement which comes from the progressive acquisition of units. Internal verification does not take place until all units of the NVQ have been completed. Trainees leaving the programme early have little to show for their efforts.

19. Figures for the last three complete contract years show that 24 trainees have completed the programme, and 34 left early. In 1997-8, trainees' performance improved. In 1996-7, the success rate was 26.3 NVQs per 100 leavers and in 1997-98 it was 62.5 NVQs per 100 leavers.

Hair & beauty

Grade 2

20. There are 34 trainees taking NVQs in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3 through TEC-funded programmes. All are employed in local hairdressing salons. There are four modern apprentices, 25 trainees on national traineeships and four on vocational training. The NVQ level 2 trainees attend one day's off-the-job training a week, at the college, during the academic year. NVQ level 3 trainees have individual learning programmes. In the previous academic year, there was a discrete NVQ level 3 group, attending the college one-day a week. The college is open during the summer holiday for interviews, initial assessment sessions, pre-course salon workshops and catch-up assessment workshops. Inspectors considered that some strengths in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found, however, both strengths and weaknesses which the college had not identified and they awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ enthusiastic and supportive employers in a good variety of small local salons
- ◆ effective teamwork by staff
- ◆ good off-the-job training to meet employers and trainees' needs
- ◆ trainees' clear understanding of NVQ and key skills evidence-gathering process
- ◆ comprehensive NVQ assessment and progress-tracking systems
- ◆ flexibly arranged off-the-job training to meet individuals' needs and those of industry

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no unit accreditation for early leavers or trainees not completing their NVQ
- ◆ late development of key skills assessment and verification systems
- ◆ no co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training
- ◆ failure of current off-the-job training facilities and resources to meet trainees' needs fully

21. Trainees are all employed in a good range of local salons. Employers are enthusiastic and supportive towards trainees. Many trainees have opportunities to work on clients, both in normal working hours and on model client training evenings. Many salons are of good quality and offer high standards of hairdressing. They are well resourced with modern equipment, products and retail lines. The college holds a variety of pre-entry activities to show young people the different aspects of hairdressing. These include Wednesday-afternoon sessions at the college's hairdressing salons for year-11 school pupils and summer-holiday workshops. The summer workshops help the co-ordinators to match trainees without a work placement, to suitable salons. Trainees then have a range of interviews at local salons. If trainees subsequently want to change salons, the co-ordinators help them to find a new employer. Salon employers value the college's training, are supportive of it and specifically request trainees from the college. Standardised initial tests in English and mathematics are given to trainees at the start of their course in order to identify additional learning support which they may need. Trainees are often given additional support by the hairdressing trainers, although the college has specialist support staff who can be used for this purpose, if required.

22. The good support given by the trainers, assessors and co-ordinators meets the needs of trainees and is valued by them. The staff work as a closely knit team and are responsive to trainees' needs. The off-the-job team comprises well qualified and experienced hairdressers. Those co-ordinators visiting the salons every 12 weeks are the same hairdressing trainers who see trainees weekly during off-the-job provision. Trainees can explain the NVQ range required and its application to on-the-job salon work. They can also explain how they use opportunities for key skills evidence-gathering from their salon work. Trainees use formative hairdressing assessment books to record NVQ work while in their salons, helping understanding of the NVQ requirements. NVQ summative assessments are all carried out by college assessors, mostly during the off-the-job attendance. There is a comprehensive assessment and tracking system to record trainees' progress. The off-the-job training attendance can be negotiated to meet individual trainees' or employers' needs. If required, trainees can attend additional summer sessions or change attendance days. The hairdressing and beauty trainees regularly receive talks from a variety of visiting speakers. The employers of those trainees who are absent from college, without prior arrangement, are contacted the same day.

23. Achievement and retention rates have consistently stood at approximately 50 per cent per year for the past three years. Destination data are kept on early leavers. Trainees who leave early or do not complete the full NVQ do not receive a certificate for the NVQ units which they have completed. There are no formal sessions to inform trainees of further qualifications, training schemes and hairdressing career progression and opportunities available to them. They can, however, obtain such information informally if they ask.

24. The recording systems for key skills assessment have only recently been devised and have not been used yet. The key skills internal verification documents have also only recently been prepared. For those trainees starting to gather key skills evidence,

assessors write the relevant key skills references on their work. On- and off-the-job training operates separately and is insufficiently integrated. Many employers said that they had to rely on retrospective information from trainees to know what is happening during off-the-job training in college. Employers are not given the off-the-job training schemes or copies of trainees' reviews or action plans. Training in the salons is left to employers to organise. Currently, opportunities are missed to assess trainees during assessors' or co-ordinators' visits to salons. An off-the-job trainee progress report form has very recently been devised. This is to be sent to employers three times a year, and its first issue was scheduled for December 1998. The views of employers and trainees about the quality of training are not formally gathered as part of the review and evaluation of hairdressing provision.

25. The current hairdressing accommodation is in a college annexe approximately ten minutes' walk from the main site. This has been used since hairdressing provision started at the college about 15 years ago. There is one hairdressing salon, an integrated reception area, small dispensary and a theory room. The salon is a busy thoroughfare and the trainees, staff and clients passing through it distract trainees watching presentations, demonstrations or technical videos. The theory or project room and reception area lack stimulating displays, posters and other promotional materials. The hairdressing research resources are insufficient for theory and project work. Trainees and trainers make little to no use of computers. The NVQ level 3 portfolios include a good range of photographs to support practical work. The self-assessment report recognises that provision has outgrown its accommodation and is no longer large enough or sufficiently well equipped. If trainees wish to use library, computing and specialist support facilities, they have to travel to the college's main site. Inspectors saw architects' plans for the relocation of the hairdressing and beauty provision to the main site and were told by staff that these should be put into effect from September 1999.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

26. The college operates an equal opportunities policy, with a clear set of aims and objectives. Information about this is given to each trainee in an induction pack. There is an equal opportunities subcommittee which meets regularly to review current practice and propose future action. The college produces a specific disability statement each year and has been accredited as 'Positive About Disabled People' since 1995. Many of the strengths in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice, although inspectors found one strength which the college had not identified. They agreed with all the weaknesses in the self-assessment report and they awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good provision for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ annually reviewed equal opportunities action plan

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective monitoring of subcontractors' implementation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no specific targeting of under-represented groups

27. Commitment to equality of opportunity is well publicised through the prospectus and various handbooks and directories, aimed at both trainees and employers. There are clear systems for promoting equal opportunities in terms of review of policy and action-planning. Employers are asked to sign to say that they have received the policy and that they are willing to abide by it. An equal opportunities subcommittee meets regularly to review the equal opportunities action plan annually. The college has excellent facilities for trainees with disabilities, including ramps, wide entrances and accessible lavatories.

28. Work-based supervisors have insufficient knowledge of the equal opportunities policy. During their visits to employers' premises, college staff do not check on the work-based supervisors' awareness of the policy.

29. Although minority groups are well represented in the college as a whole, there were few trainees from them on the programmes under inspection. There are few trainees with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups. There is also a clear gender imbalance in the areas of engineering and business administration. The college has not taken specific action to encourage young persons from minority ethnic groups to join training programmes. Marketing material concentrates on the benefits to be derived from training but gives insufficient emphasis to the excellent facilities and the good support available to trainees.

Trainee support

Grade 3

30. Selection and recruitment procedures vary among occupational areas. In some areas, trainees take a selection test, used to determine their training and placement needs. All trainees follow a standard induction programme and are given a pack containing details about health and safety, equal opportunities, travel costs, entitlements and grievance procedures. Trainees are also given a student charter, outlining their rights and responsibilities. The inspectors considered that many of the strengths in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found some strengths, however, which the college had not identified. They agreed with the one weakness stated in the self-assessment report but they found several weaknesses which the college had not identified. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematically collected data on early leavers
- ◆ extra support for trainees with special needs
- ◆ termination of contracts with unsatisfactory providers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unsatisfactory assessment of key skills
- ◆ no standard procedures or practice for progress reviews
- ◆ lack of systematic initial assessment in some vocational areas

GOOD PRACTICE

Additional support was offered to a trainee who was extremely shy and was due for imminent interview. The NVQ co-ordinator agreed to make a special trip to the work placement to offer individual coaching.

31. The selection process for business administration programmes includes a specially designed test which is sent to a basic skills expert and marked by using a matrix. The test results are taken into account when developing training plans and choosing suitable placements for the trainees. Initial assessment procedures in some occupational areas are less effective. For example, engineering staff use a college-devised training programme and assessment for this is not related to clear criteria.

32. The quality of progress reviews and procedures varies among occupational areas. Some areas use a review sheet which is then copied to the trainee and employer; some use the same sheet, but do not copy it to the employer; others do not use a review sheet at all. Copying review sheets to employers allows the work-based supervisor to become involved in regular review and enables problems or gaps in training to be dealt with quickly and effectively. Trainees with special needs are helped and supported in a variety of ways. For example, a trainee with cerebral palsy received extra support in the workplace. In another instance, a trainee with dyslexia was given help with handwriting and spelling, and is now top of the year.

33. The college takes its responsibility to protect trainees' rights seriously. In some instances, it has terminated employers' contracts because it considered that the employers in question had treated the trainees unfairly. A trainee, left without payment for two weeks, was paid from college funds. The funds were later retrieved from the employer and the contract was terminated. In another case, a contract was terminated because the company refused to pay for a previously agreed holiday. In another case, the employer's contract was terminated because of serious breaches of health and safety regulations in the workplace.

Management of training

Grade 3

34. Work-based training is organised by the business development unit which is part of the commercial development section of the college. The unit manages the college's own TEC-funded work and co-ordinates the provision of part-time training

for other local training providers. It also manages the college's New Deal work. The business development manager is in charge of the unit and is supported by five administrative staff and seven tutors and workplace assessors. Most aspects of training and assessment are delivered by the college's staff, although four subcontractors are used for specific aspects of workplace assessment. A corporate plan and annual operating statement form the basis of for college's planning. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report but they found weaknesses which the college had not identified. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured staff development
- ◆ extensive involvement of the college with the local community
- ◆ accessible management information
- ◆ strong internal communication across the college

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some instances of poor communication with employers
- ◆ little medium-term planning
- ◆ no sharing of good practice across occupational areas

35. Staffing policies and procedures are well developed. Staff training needs are monitored regularly from the perspective of the college and each individual staff member. Staff training opportunities relate to an overarching set of development areas which, in turn, reflect the college's aims. Managers and staff set objectives for training and subsequently evaluate the extent to which these are met. Staff who do not hold a teaching or training qualification are expected to achieve one. All staff participate in an appraisal system. Staff acting as appraisers are appropriately trained. Internal communication is generally effective. There is a weekly staff newsletter, supplemented by sector meetings and termly briefings by senior staff. The college is active in its local community and works with many organisations, including employers, schools, local authorities and community groups. It is involved in Single Regeneration Budget and European Union work through local partnerships.

36. A good range of management information is available but this cannot always be retrieved promptly for a specific purpose. Administrative support is well organised and efficient. The business development unit holds regular meetings to disseminate information and review progress. Staff have internally generated recruitment targets and their progress towards meeting these is regularly monitored. Good practice in one occupational area is not shared with other areas. For example, the effective practice resulting from key skills developments in accountancy has not been used on other training programmes. Liaison and communication with employers also vary in effectiveness. Some employers are not adequately informed about trainees' progress

and do not fully understand how they can best contribute to the training process. Others are closely involved in training and influence the programme positively.

37. The college's mission and overall aims are set out in relevant strategic documents and they are updated regularly. These documents make little reference to TEC-funded work, except for a reference to an income target. There is no clear plan for TEC-funded work, in terms of an overall strategy for it, or in the context of the college's operational priorities for the coming year.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

38. The quality assurance manual, which is currently being updated and rewritten, describes detailed quality assurance procedures. Responsibility for quality assurance across the college rests with the professional development and quality manager. Responsibility for meeting the requirements of the TEC lies with the business development manager. The college is subject to audit against TEC quality assurance supplier management by Staffordshire TEC, which also undertakes health and safety audits. The college also meets the requirements of the awarding bodies in relation to quality assurance, as confirmed by external verifiers' reports. The college does not have a system for collecting feedback from trainees or employers. The inspectors identified more weaknesses than were mentioned in the self-assessment report and they awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ college's commitment to continuous improvement
- ◆ regular course reviews
- ◆ continuous review of quality assurance issues

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no mechanism for ensuring common standards in internal verification
- ◆ no process for evaluating trainees and employers' views
- ◆ insufficient quality assurance of workplace training

39. The quality assurance manual covers all aspects of the college's work. It is well laid out and the college's commitment to continuous improvement is clear. The manual does not, however, include procedures for subcontractors. A subcommittee on quality assurance meets every term and, the agenda for its meetings is determined by current priorities. A professional development and quality manager has recently been appointed to review and improve the quality assurance systems. A short-term working group has also been set up to review the quality manual and to rewrite some of the policy. This group is to report its proposals by February 1999. Formal course reviews are carried out annually. Informally, however, issues are addressed far more

frequently. In general, staff understand their part in quality assurance and adhere to formal procedures, but these are not always carried through to the workplace. On one occasion, the college failed to comply with its own system of health and safety monitoring, and a trainee was placed at a company which had not undergone the required health and safety audit. The self-assessment process has led to the identification of areas for improvement. For example, the college identified monitoring of subcontractors as an area of weakness. Yearly targets for achievement are set and progress towards reaching them is monitored monthly. Statistics on leavers are obtained by an exit form and are also monitored monthly but they do not reveal any significant trends.

40. The college's internal verification process does not extend to subcontractors, and there are no procedures to ensure that assessors apply assessment procedures consistently across the college and subcontractors. There is no co-ordination of internal verification systems or sharing of good practice. In some occupational areas, there are few links between workplace supervisors and the college's assessors. There is a systematic process for collecting trainees' and employers' views on the quality of training. All trainees are interviewed when they leave. Their views are not collated and summarised, however, and they are not sufficiently taken into account when planning the improvement of provision.