



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

REINSPECTION MARCH 2000

Writtle College



SUMMARY

Writtle College offers satisfactory training in land-based industries. The college has good resources. Staff are well qualified and occupationally knowledgeable. Achievement rates and the quality of off-the-job training vary across the range of qualifications offered. The college has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity, although there is limited understanding of the policy in the workplace. At the time of the first inspection, trainee support, management of training, and quality assurance were all less than satisfactory. Arrangements for the initial assessment of trainees are now good. Trainees are set appropriate targets during their progress reviews. There is good support for trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities. Management of training is now satisfactory and procedures are clearly stated. There are good arrangements for monitoring trainees' progress and achievements. Employers have a poor understanding of NVQs. New quality assurance procedures are clearly stated in a manual. Internal verification is carried out well. The college, however, has been slow to implement quality assurance and there is still insufficient systematic action planning. The new procedures are beginning to be effective but their overall impact has yet to be evaluated.

As a result of the reinspection of Writtle College, the original published report text for trainee support, management of training, and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. The summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report which have not been subject to full reinspection have been left in their original form.

GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS | GRADE |
|--------------------|-------|
| Agriculture | 3 |

| GENERIC AREAS | GRADE |
|------------------------|-------|
| Equal opportunities | 2 |
| Trainee support | 4 |
| Management of training | 4 |
| Quality assurance | 4 |

| REINSPECTION | GRADE |
|------------------------|-------|
| Trainee support | 3 |
| Management of training | 3 |
| Quality assurance | 3 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ commitment to equal opportunities
- ◆ good support for trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities
- ◆ good staff development programme
- ◆ clearly written procedures for work based training



- ◆ good internal verification arrangements
- ◆ continuous improvement in quality of training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment planning and monitoring in the workplace
- ◆ poor awareness among trainees and employers of training programmes
- ◆ limited management of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ failure of training plans to include demanding targets
- ◆ slow implementation of quality assurance system
- ◆ no evaluation of new procedures



INTRODUCTION

1. Writtle College has been delivering practical training in farming, horticulture, parks and gardens, the horse industry and agricultural machinery for over 100 years. In 1993, the college was incorporated as a further education college and, since 1994 has been a higher education institution. The main campus is just outside Chelmsford in Essex. The college is set in a 220-hectare estate, 135 hectares devoted to farming practices and production, 130 landscaped borders and a collection of over 7,000 plants. In 1996, the college took over the management of Shuttleworth in Bedfordshire, part of the Shuttleworth Trust.

2. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses, including national vocation qualifications (NVQs), national certificates and national diplomas, as well as higher national diplomas and degree courses. Government-funded training is contracted through Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). Essex TEC has had the role of co-ordinating TEC since April 1999. Since the first inspection, the number of trainees on government-funded programmes has increased significantly from 68 to 121. The retail training programme was not inspected. Trainees are on youth programmes, national traineeships and modern apprenticeship programmes. Trainees attend off-the-job training at either the Shuttleworth or the Writtle sites. All trainees are based in the workplace.

3. Although the college recruits trainees for its full-time further and higher education courses from all over the United Kingdom, the main catchment areas for government-funded qualifications are Essex and Bedfordshire. A few trainees come from Cambridgeshire, Kent, Norfolk and Suffolk.

4. Unemployment in Essex and Bedfordshire is low, at 3.5 and 3.8 per cent respectively, both lower than the national average of 5.1 per cent. The proportion of those aged 16 staying on in full-time education in Essex and Bedfordshire is 69 and 71.5 per cent respectively. In Essex, those leaving full-time education at minimum school leaving age and entering employment with training primarily enter manufacturing, retail or business administration occupations. Only 3 per cent enter agriculture and horticulture. In Bedfordshire, young people leaving full-time education enter employment with training, predominately in unskilled occupations and business administration. The proportion of school leavers in Essex and Bedfordshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 49 and 44.3 per cent respectively, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997. Those from minority ethnic groups constitute less than 3 per cent of the population in Essex and 10 per cent in Bedfordshire and Luton.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The college produced its first self-assessment report three months before the first inspection. After an initial presentation to the teams responsible for delivering training, each team self-assessed its own occupational sector. Staff attended several workshops to discuss the self-assessment process, and a presentation was made to the further education academic board. The college's TEC contract co-ordinator collated the self-assessment report. The first inspection team identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded lower grades in the occupational area, and in the generic areas of trainee support, management of training and quality assurance than those proposed by the college. Following the inspection, an action plan was produced which addressed the strengths and weaknesses identified. Writtle College produced a second updated action plan in August 1999. A second self-assessment report was produced in February 2000 for the reinspection. Many staff and employers were involved in the self-assessment process, but trainees were not. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the new self-assessment report and with the grades given by the college.

6. During the first inspection, a team of four inspectors spent a total of 12 days at Writtle College during October 1998. Inspectors visited both sites, examined company records, awarding body documents and trainees' files. They interviewed staff, 29 trainees, 14 workplace supervisors and employers and visited 14 workplaces.

7. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors for a total of six days in March 2000. They visited both sites, interviewed six trainees and 23 members of staff, and visited four placements. They looked at internal and external verifiers' reports, management information and documents and procedures relating to management, trainee support and quality assurance.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions during the first inspection

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Agriculture | | 1 | 2 | 2 | | 5 |
| Total | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 5 |

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 3

8. There are 17 trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in horticulture, 14 working towards level 2 in small animal care and equine and 24 working towards NVQs in live stock, crop production and service engineering. Trainees are on national traineeships, modern apprenticeships and other work-based training

programmes for young people. All trainees are based in the workplace and attend college one day a week in term-time, either at the Shuttleworth or the Writtle sites. Trainees are placed in a range of companies throughout Essex and Bedfordshire, including zoos, farms, animal care parlours, livery yards, country clubs, machinery dealerships and landscape garden companies. Achievement data are not available to analyse trends in retention and achievement in agriculture. The college has only been offering modern apprenticeships and national traineeships since April 1998 and has already recognised the need to develop and implement key skills in these training programmes. The inspection team awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ off-the-job training tailored to meet trainees' needs in service engineering
- ◆ strong commitment by employers to the training process in service engineering
- ◆ good facilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor awareness of training programmes by trainees and employers
- ◆ poor planning and monitoring of the assessment process in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient off-the-job training in equine

9. Trainees on work-based training programmes attend lectures alongside part-time and full-time further education students at the college. Trainees benefit from highly qualified and knowledgeable staff. Lecturers have a wealth of experience in their vocational areas and are occupationally competent. Resources to deliver training are good. At the Writtle site, there is a fully equipped equine centre, with an indoor arena, outdoor maneges, a jumping paddock and a cross-country course. Although the Shuttleworth site has extensive training resources, there are no riding facilities, and trainees are able to access only off-site riding. All agricultural service engineering trainees now attend college at Writtle, where the facilities are good. They used to attend at Shuttleworth where the machinery is out of date and irrelevant to modern-day service engineering practices. The extensive grounds include new and mature plantings of trees, shrubs and seasonal bedding, all maintained to a high standard. These provide an excellent resource for the development of practical horticultural skills. Training accommodation is also good and promotes a professional image.

10. In both service engineering and agriculture, individual training plans are negotiated with employers based on trainees' needs. This process ensures that off-the-job training is designed to fit with work-based opportunities. As a result, trainees attend only those sessions which are relevant to their training programme. There is a strong commitment by employers in service engineering companies to the NVQ



training process. Review sessions involving the trainee, employer and college's staff result in a close liaison between on- and off-the-job training. However, where employers do not demonstrate this commitment, there is no link between on- and off-the-job training. In many cases, employers are unaware of which qualification trainees are taking and lack understanding of trainees' programmes. For some trainees, there is little structure to on-the-job training. Trainees have a limited understanding of their training programmes. They do not always know the qualification framework, assessment procedures or when they are expected to complete the programme.

11. Assessments are not planned, but are carried out sporadically. Trainees working towards animal care qualifications are not assessed or visited in the workplace regularly. In agriculture, trainees are given inadequate support in portfolio compilation, and progress has been slow. Action has now been taken to address this situation. In equine, there is no structured training in the workplace, and the number of training sessions and riding lessons planned for trainees is inadequate to ensure completion of the award. Off-the-job training is carried out by the college in term-time only.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

12. Writtle College has a regularly reviewed, comprehensive equal opportunity policy, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements. It is published in the college charter, academic regulations and student handbook. The college has appointed an equal opportunities officer, and a steering group meets monthly to discuss equality issues. The college's complaints procedure has recently been reviewed, and the college has developed a range of policies which supports the equal opportunities policy, including an admissions policy, code of practice and disability statement. Documents covering equal opportunities are given to trainees at the start of training programmes. Ethnicity and disability are not identified until enrolment. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ commitment to equal opportunity embedded throughout the college
- ◆ good staff response to the diverse requirements of trainees with special needs
- ◆ equal opportunities reinforced by effective staff development
- ◆ rigorous complaints procedure
- ◆ effective review of equal opportunities issues

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities are not promoted to employers
- ◆ no analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities policy among some trainees

13. The promotion of equal opportunities is part of the college's culture, pervading everything which staff say and do. Staff have a thorough understanding of equality issues and, where trainees have special learning needs, respond positively by providing appropriate support. The comprehensive staff development programme is readily accessible to staff, ensuring that staff are fully aware of the range of equality issues. Staff development includes equal opportunities awareness, supporting trainees with mental health problems and understanding dyslexia.

14. The college has a rigorous complaints procedure. All complaints are sent to senior management, each one being investigated promptly, supportively and thoroughly. Where there are problems in the workplace, trainees are supported in a move to an alternative placement, if appropriate. The equal opportunities steering group meets monthly to monitor equality issues. The group comprises representatives from further and higher education, personnel, student services and students. The group focuses on college policy and practice.

15. Some workplace supervisors are unaware of the college's equal opportunities policy. Trainees all receive equality information, but this is not reinforced and they have only a superficial understanding of their rights and responsibilities with respect to equality issues. The college does not monitor equality in the workplace. Management information is not used to monitor equality issues. The steering group recognises this issue and is currently working on ways to improve management data.

Trainee support

Grade 3

16. The TEC projects co-ordinator and occupational programme managers interview prospective trainees to assess their suitability for the training programme. During induction, all trainees are given an initial basic skills and key skills assessment. Key skills are assessed at the start of the training programme. Trainees are given feedback on their performance. Staff who monitor trainees in the workplace are informed whether a trainee has any additional learning needs. Trainees identified as having learning support needs are provided with additional support. Trainees have access to tutors and support staff when they attend college. Training takes place both on and off-the-job. Most trainees attend college one day a week. Some trainees attend by block release to suit their employer.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ some trainees do not receive appropriate guidance
- ◆ ineffective induction across some areas
- ◆ no initial assessment of occupational skills
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of trainee progress
- ◆ poorly co-ordinated support for trainees

17. Inspectors identified some strengths and weaknesses not identified in the updated self-assessment report, and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment of trainees
- ◆ good support for trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities at Writtle
- ◆ good target setting during reviews of trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to implement accreditation of trainees' prior learning across all programmes
- ◆ failure to include demanding targets in training plans
- ◆ poor arrangements for provision of weak learning support at Shuttleworth

18. All trainees undertake a comprehensive initial assessment. They receive an assessment of their basic and key skills when they join the training programme. Any trainees identified with additional learning support needs are referred to the learning support tutor. The learning support tutor interviews the individual trainee and a programme of additional learning support is agreed for him or her. The agreed learning support is timetabled into the trainee's off-the-job training programme, or additional off-the-job training time for it is agreed with the trainee and employer. Staff responsible for providing the additional support at Writtle are well qualified in this specialist educational area. Trainees with learning disabilities and difficulties are given good support. Provision of learning support across the two sites is not co-ordinated well. Arrangements for providing support at Shuttleworth are not systematic and it is often left to programme tutors to ensure that trainees' additional learning support needs are met. There are no qualified learning support staff at Shuttleworth. A record is not always kept of any additional learning support provided.

19. Trainees are visited in the workplace by monitoring officers. During these regular, eight-weekly progress and monitoring reviews, trainees, employers and college staff discuss trainees' progress. The focus of the review is on trainees' achievements in the previous period and the agreement of an action plan for the coming period. All parties to the training process are involved in the reviews. Suitably qualified college staff carry out additional visits to monitor compliance with

health and safety regulations in the workplace. The frequency of such visits depends upon the risk assessment banding of the occupational area. In agriculture, the visits usually take place every three months. Monitoring officers also grade attributes such as initiative at work, self-confidence, timekeeping and attitude.

20. All trainees receive a formal induction. Induction usually takes place at college and in the work placement. The induction is comprehensive and covers equal opportunities, health and safety, the training programme operation and assessment arrangements. For those trainees who start the programme at a time other than the commencement of the academic year, induction can be less formal and not as thorough. The programmes are mainly roll-on roll-off, although most trainees are recruited in the summer prior to the commencement of the Autumn term. After induction, both trainees and employers complete a checklist to indicate that they have understood the wide range of topics covered in the induction programme.

21. Accreditation of trainees' prior achievement is carried out effectively in some programme areas. It is not applied consistently across all programme areas. Some trainees do not have their prior achievements in both vocational and key skills recognised promptly and they have to repeat work through which they have already proved their competence.

22. Training plans are not individualised and most relate to a standard two-year training programme. The individual training plan is not completed by an occupational programme area specialist. Some individual training plans were not up-to-date and did not accurately indicate the NVQ programme the trainee was following. All training plans state the same dates for the achievement and coverage of NVQ units and elements. Dates are not set to take account of trainees' aptitude. The plans do not contain demanding targets. During their eight weekly progress review, however, trainees are set targets for completing NVQ units and elements but their training plans are not updated to reflect their achievement of these.

Management of training

Grade 3

23. Government-funded training at Writtle College takes place in the further education department. In June 1997, the college's academic board established the further education academic panel. This is part of the college's realignment of further education and training. The main aim of the restructuring is to establish a strong occupational structure, devolving responsibility for the delivery of training to programme teams. In 1998, the college took over the management of Shuttleworth site in Bedfordshire. To aid communication between the two sites programme managers spend at least one day a week at Shuttleworth. There are 52 members of staff involved in delivering training at Writtle and Shuttleworth, any one of whom could be training trainees at any one time. Since the first inspection, the college has established the new post of a TEC project co-ordinator who is responsible for the management of work-based training. In each of the 10 areas, the TEC project co-ordinator is supported by training officers and administrative assistants, all of whom have also been appointed since the first inspection. At Shuttleworth, work based

trainees are managed by the academic manager. New procedures have been introduced which describe the scope and responsibilities of all involved in work-based training. There is an organisation chart showing lines of responsibility. Another diagram shows the committee structures and the relationship between each committee. Staff roles have been published. The TEC project administrator produces management information. Staff are appraised bi-annually. Staff development is supported both internally and externally.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor internal communication
- ◆ limited management of on-the-job training
- ◆ lack of action-planning to address some outstanding issues
- ◆ no use of statistical data to inform management decisions

24. In its new self-assessment report prepared for the reinspection, Writtle College identified five strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with three strengths and one weakness, identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough staff induction
- ◆ comprehensive staff development programme
- ◆ clearly stated procedures for work based training
- ◆ good management structure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ employers' poor understanding of NVQs
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice among staff

25. New staff are taken through a thorough induction process and receive support throughout the probationary period. Induction covers the structure and contents of the training programme, support available for trainees, the college's complaints procedures and equal opportunities. At the end of 12 weeks, new staff have a signed checklist completed which ensures that all staff are aware of all college policies and procedures. Although staff development is not linked intrinsically to the college's strategic plan, management is highly responsive to staff development needs. The college has a comprehensive internal staff development programme which staff can access. Management support those staff taking external courses, including long-term commitment to staff studying for higher education qualifications.

All staff benefit from staff development, and technicians involved in supporting the delivery of work-based training are supported in achieving assessor awards.

26. Since the first inspection, the college has produced clearly written and comprehensive administrative procedures. Copies of these have been issued to staff concerned. The procedures are subject to annual review, and contain instructions on marketing, processing of details about trainees, health and safety, induction, review and assessment and claims procedures. A clear organisational chart shows the role of the 10 newly appointed training officers. The training officer's role includes building the link between the college and employers, and carrying out work-based assessment and trainees' progress reviews. This new role is beginning to prove effective in providing a more regular and better service to trainees and employers. Trainees have a better understanding of the NVQ process and employers comment on the increased contact they now have with the college. Another document clearly outlines the committee structure within the college, showing the relationships between committees and their relevance to work based training. Handbooks summarising some of the procedures and explaining work-based training have been published and issued to trainees and employers. These systems and procedures are all new, and they are showing signs of being effective.

27. Management and administration are effective. The management information system can produce data on trainees' achievement and retention rates, to enable management now to make decisions based on statistics. There is an up-to-date database on trainees and placements. This contains accurate information on trainees' progress reviews and health and safety checks in the workplace. Currently, the college is piloting an extension to the database system that aims to provide information on trainees' progress in terms of assessment of NVQ units. Hitherto, such information has only been available from trainees' files. Government-funded training features in the college's five year strategic plan. There are effective advisory panels for most subject areas, and employers are members of these. Subcontracting arrangements are sound and subcontracts contain service level agreements. Staff concerned with government-funded training meet regularly and there is good communication between them.

28. Some trainees do not receive any structured training, except at the college. Many employers are unaware of the training programme which trainees are on and have a limited understanding of their role in the training process. They have little knowledge of the NVQ process. They do not have copies of the trainees' programme of the college. There is poor co-ordination of the trainees' experience in the workplace and training at college.

29. Staff at all levels at Writtle and Shuttleworth frequently visit each other to attend meetings and discuss issues and trainees' progress. The academic manager of Shuttleworth attends meetings at Writtle almost weekly, and the TEC projects co-ordinator visits Shuttleworth fortnightly. There are opportunities for staff from different teams within the colleges to meet, for instance, at internal verifier meetings and at training officer meetings. The staff who provide the training have little opportunity to share good practice across areas. There are no systematic



procedures whereby staff can share good practice.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

30. Writtle College TEC projects department has a newly written and published quality assurance manual covering work-based training. Review procedures for its work-based training have been introduced. Programme reviews at academic year-ends culminate in end-of-year reports. These reviews take account of both internal and external reports and trainees' surveys. Audits are carried out each year. Internal verification and satisfaction surveys have been audited. The college has produced an updated self-assessment report and action plan following the first inspection.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no formal evaluation of NVQ programmes
- ◆ no direct feedback sought from employers
- ◆ unmonitored trainee retention and achievement rates

31. Action has been taken to rectify most of these weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses identified in this area are accurate. However, inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college in its updated self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly written quality assurance procedures
- ◆ clear and comprehensive internal verification procedures
- ◆ continuing improvement across most aspects of provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow implementation of quality assurance procedures
- ◆ no evaluation of the new quality assurance system
- ◆ insufficient action planning

32. The college has developed a set of clearly written quality assurance procedures covering all aspects of work-based training provision. The procedures are comprehensive. The procedures are new and their use is not yet fully established across all sites and programmes. Some new documents and files have been introduced. The new procedures do not incorporate an annual review and evaluation cycle. The procedures have not yet been evaluated. The TEC projects team has been slow to implement the new procedures. There have, however, been



a number of recent staff changes and new appointments.

33. The new quality assurance processes and systems have led to continuing improvement in the monitoring of trainees' progress and achievements, deployment of staff, internal communications, and management information systems. Staff meetings are now held with greater regularity. The college sends out annual satisfaction surveys to all students, including NVQ trainees, the results of which are recorded and available to the TEC projects co-ordinator. Employers are sent questionnaires and can offer comments and views to TEC projects team on the quality and relevance of the training programme. Arrangements for involving employers in trainees' progress reviews are in the early stage of implementation. Although reliance is placed upon feedback from employers during the reviews, little information has been received from them so far. The college's internal verification procedures are comprehensive and ensure that there are regular internal verification meetings and that internal verification is systematically applied across all occupational sectors. External verification reports are held centrally and dealt with effectively. There are no outstanding action points.

34. There are regular team meetings and proceedings at these are recorded. Little evaluation of the college's work-based training courses is undertaken annually. A review of trainees' progress is carried out on a termly basis. Each term, tutors are requested to provide the TEC projects team with details of trainees' progress towards completing NVQ units. In this way the TEC projects co-ordinator is able to monitor trainees' progress effectively. Retention and achievement rates are reviewed annually. Data on trainees' achievements are collated and analysed. This process of data collection is still in its infancy and is not yet fully established. Processes for reviewing and analysing data and for action planning are not yet fully established within the quality assurance system.

35. Self-assessment is new to the TEC projects team. The second annual report had been completed by the time of reinspection. The report contained many strengths and weaknesses with which inspectors agreed. They also agreed with the grades given by the college. An action plan was produced as an addendum rather than an integral part of the report. It was also drawn up several months after the report had been written. Although progress has been made in implementing the plan, action planning is not an established part of the self-assessment process. Self-assessment and action planning are not part of an annual cycle and the effectiveness of the action plan is not subject to frequent review.