



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

West Herts Training Consortium

SUMMARY

West Herts Training Consortium provides training in a range of occupational areas. In agriculture (veterinary nursing), there is good off-the-job training, but training in the workplace is not planned and often happens by chance. There is good assessment in the workplace and integrated training for key skills for motor-vehicle trainees. Workplace assessment is good in business administration, but there are low retention and achievement levels. There are excellent resources for training in sport and recreation, but the training is unplanned. There are good off-the-job-training facilities in hospitality but little structure to training in the workplace. There are poor retention and achievement rates in hairdressing with little assessment opportunities. There is thorough assessment in care with good training. Training is good in printing and foundation for work. The results of a good initial assessment process are not always used to establish individual training plans in foundation for work. Little is done to promote equality of opportunity, and there is an outdated equal opportunities policy. Trainee support has no structure. Reviews lack rigour and there is no initial assessment of key skills. Management of subcontractors is weak. Data are not used during strategic planning by managers. Few quality assurance measures cover training in the workplace. There is poor monitoring of assessment and internal verification.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Leisure, sport & travel	4
Hospitality	3
Hair & beauty	4
Health, care & public services	2
Media & design	2
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of off-the-job training in engineering and printing
- ◆ high retention rates in engineering
- ◆ good use of workplace evidence in business administration
- ◆ accurate and thorough assessment in care
- ◆ highly appropriate initial assessment in foundation for work

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates in hairdressing
- ◆ out-of-date equal opportunities policy
- ◆ weak analysis of equal opportunities data



- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans
- ◆ ineffective use of data in making management decisions
- ◆ no review of quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ little evaluation of work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. West Herts Training Consortium is part of West Herts College. The college is a large provider of further and higher education. The college is situated at four training sites. There are three campuses situated in Watford and one in Hemel Hempstead. West Herts Training Consortium offers programmes in agriculture (veterinary nursing), engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, leisure, sports and travel (sports recreation), hospitality, hair and beauty, health, care and public services, media and design (printing) and foundation for work. The occupational area of retailing and customer service was not inspected owing to the low number of trainees. All the training for veterinary nursing and leisure, sport and travel is subcontracted. The consortium uses other further education colleges in the area to train trainees if required. This is usually to facilitate easy travelling to off-the-job training for trainees. The West Herts College has diverse sources of income. About 67.6 per cent of its annual earnings comes from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Some 14.3 per cent comes from higher education, 2.6 per cent from adult non-vocational programmes, 3.3 per cent from business courses and grants and 7.8 per cent from other operating income. Contracts with Hertfordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and North West London TEC provide 4.4 per cent of its funding. The co-ordinating TEC for this inspection is Hertfordshire.

2. The consortium has 384 trainees in work-based training programmes. There are 148 modern apprentices, 144 national trainees, 82 trainees in other work-based training programmes for young people, and 10 trainees on work-based learning for adults programmes. There are also 12 New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. The unemployment rate in the county in May 2000 was 1.5 per cent, which is lower than that in the eastern region at 2.6 per cent, or the national rate at 3.8 per cent. The percentage of unemployed people between 18 to 24 years of age in the eastern region in May 2000 was 21.9 per cent, and in Hertfordshire was 18.8 per cent. In 1998 in Hertfordshire, 81 per cent of school pupils completing year 11 stayed on in full-time education and training. Of the 10 per cent going into employment, 6 per cent did so with training, and 3 per cent progressed to work-based training programmes, while 6 per cent became unemployed. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 54.9 per cent in Hertfordshire and 49 per cent in the north-west London TEC area, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The minority ethnic population in the county makes up 4.1 per cent of the local population while in Watford, this rises to 8 per cent (1991 census). The main industries in the area are the service industries, distribution, hotels and restaurants, banking, finance and insurance and public administration, education and health.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. West Herts Training Consortium produced its first self-assessment report for inspection in February 2000. The self-assessment process for the Training Standards Council (TSC) was separate to that for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) which was inspecting the college at the same time as the TSC inspection. Subcontractors were asked to contribute to the self-assessment report through a series of questionnaires. Trainees were not involved in the self-assessment process. All areas of the college were consulted, and the director and manager of the consortium compiled the report. The self-assessment report was accurate for the occupational areas of hospitality, health, care and public services, media and design, and foundation for work. The consortium had given more than one grade for engineering and business administration, but the average grade is the same as the single grade given by inspectors. Further weaknesses identified by inspectors resulted in lower grades being awarded for agriculture (veterinary nursing), leisure, sport and travel, hair and beauty, equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance.

4. A team of 10 inspectors spent a total of 38 days at West Herts Training Consortium. Inspectors shared their findings with inspectors from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). They met with 150 trainees, visited 50 employers and held 37 interviews with employers' staff. They visited five subcontractors and held 55 interviews with members of staff from the college and the consortium. The training consortium provided a comprehensive range of paperwork including trainees' portfolios, assessment records and internal and external verification reports for inspectors to examine. Inspectors observed and graded 11 formal sessions of training as given in the table below.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture			1			1
Engineering		2	1			3
Business administration		1	1			2
Hair & beauty			1			1
Health, care & public services		2				2
Foundation for work		1	1			2
Total	0	6	5	0	0	11

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture (Veterinary nursing)

Grade 3

5. There are 43 trainees all training to become registered veterinary nurses. They are all on work-based training programmes for young people. All are employed at veterinary practices which are approved by the awarding body to be training and assessment centres for veterinary nursing. Trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 or level 3 in veterinary nursing. Those trainees who do not have the necessary GCSE entry qualifications required by the British Veterinary Nursing Association are working towards a pre-entry qualification. The training programme runs for two or three years according to the entry qualifications of the trainee. All trainees attend off-the-job training provided by a subcontractor. The subcontractor provides veterinary nursing training at three sites. These are at Potters Bar in North London, Godmanchester near Huntingdon and in Leeds. Ninety-five per cent of the consortium's trainees attend off-the-job training at Potters Bar, and the remainder go to Godmanchester. All off-the-job trainers are qualified veterinary nurses and either hold, or are working towards, qualifications in training and assessment. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses with which inspectors agreed. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that identified in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good guidance notes developed for new NVQ
- ◆ effective off-the-job training
- ◆ well-monitored progression within training programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak monitoring of on-the-job training
- ◆ slow implementation of internal verification
- ◆ poor review process
- ◆ few employers conform to training requirements

6. The NVQ in veterinary nursing came into existence in January 1999. The examination requirements of the previous awards have still been retained. In addition, trainees are now required to complete a portfolio of practice-based assessment. The subcontractor has devised comprehensive guidance notes to support trainees in the completion of the portfolios. These have now been published as a book, which is available for all veterinary nursing trainees. The subcontractor has very strong links with the profession and has been prominent in the development of the new veterinary nursing training scheme. It has arranged training days for the principals of veterinary practices and head nurses. This has

included developing their understanding of NVQ requirements and giving an introduction to assessor training.

7. All trainees and every veterinary practice receive a timetable for off-the-job training. There are clear schemes of work for all sessions. Trainees' attendance and punctuality is good. There is a comprehensive range of books and videos available which are used by trainees. Off-the-job trainers are fully conversant with the changes in the training programme. They encourage trainees to relate their work experiences to the subject being taught. Assignments are set which are directly related to the order of work in the portfolio. These are closely monitored by off-the-job trainers to ensure that trainees are achieving. The trainers give detailed feedback to the trainees. The subcontractor keeps detailed records of trainees' progress and the work the trainee needs to complete in order to achieve the next intermediate target. The subcontractor reviews trainees' progress during tutorials at the end of the off-the-job training day. When trainees do not achieve the pre-entry qualifications or levels of the NVQ, they can study within five comprehensive, intense short courses to retry achieving the qualification. Trainees are able to progress well through the different stages. The achievement rate for the examination section is 66 per cent, which is 14 per cent above the national average. Where trainees do not have the necessary entrance qualifications, they are encouraged to attend the pre-entry programme. All trainees who successfully complete this progress to level 2 of the NVQ.

8. Although there are very clear guidelines issued by the awarding body about the requirements of the training programme, few of the employers are aware of, or conform to, the requirements. Trainees are not given regular time for private study at work. There is no structure to the training they receive at work. Trainees do not receive at least three hours each week of tutorials. Two trainees have to attend off-the-job training on their days off. Few trainees receive copies of the occupational standards they have to achieve to complete their NVQs. Those who do only do so when the head nurse realises the omission. There is a lack of support in the workplace. In 1998-99, 48 per cent of trainees left the programme early. Trainees' retention rate has improved recently and only 6 per cent of trainees have left early in the current year.

9. The subcontractor submits an end of term report to the training consortium and each employer. The training consortium also carries out a review with trainees every three months, in line with the TEC contract. Employers are rarely involved in these reviews. The reviews are treated in isolation, with no cross-referencing or use of the other's review by either the consortium or the subcontractor. The consortium does not know where trainees are with regard to NVQ unit progression, nor does the employer. Trainees only receive a copy of the end of term report which is based on their examination results. There is no action-planning involving the off-the-job trainer, the employer, the trainee and training consortium to help the trainee progress through the programme.

10. The awarding body for this new NVQ requires internal verification to be carried out by either a qualified veterinary surgeon or a listed veterinary nurse.

Few of the employers' staff supervising trainees have achieved assessor or internal verifiers' qualifications. To overcome this problem, the awarding body has given responsibility to its external verifier to verify all the portfolios which are completed at each level. This is far from ideal as the internal verification process should be able to monitor a sample of assessments and provide feedback to assessors and trainees throughout the training process.

Engineering

Grade 3

11. There are 144 young people taking engineering following a range of programmes as detailed in the table below. In addition, there are two work-based learning for adults trainees and five New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option taking qualifications in body repair. Those trainees working with vehicles are referred to as motor-vehicle trainees, and all other trainees are referred to as engineering trainees. All trainees are employed. There are 37 employers with trainees at the consortium, 30 which have motor-vehicle trainees and seven which have trainees in the rest of the engineering programmes at the consortium. Off-the-job training is conducted on one or more of the three campuses. Trainees attend West Herts College's engineering department one day a week during term time to gain the related theoretical knowledge to complement the on-the-job training. Reviews are carried out every three months in line with the TEC's contractual requirements. In motor-vehicle programmes, occupationally qualified college assessors carry out all assessments. In engineering, most of the level 3 assessments are carried out by subcontracted qualified assessors. Other level 2 assessments are carried out by qualified college staff. There is one company which has its own on-the-job qualified assessor and another which has a member of staff training to be an assessor. There are adequate learning resources throughout engineering and for most of the motor-vehicle programmes.

12. Over the past four years, recruitment for modern apprentices and national trainees on motor-vehicle mechanical and electrical systems programmes has steadily increased. For the other motor-vehicle trade-based training in body repair, maintenance and valeting, the trend has shown a decrease. Of all trainees starting programmes, 36 per cent leave early. For those completing their programmes, there has been low achievement, below the national average for the past four years in motor vehicle. Trainees achieve NVQs, but do not always complete the programme framework. Achievement has been gradually improving over the past three years. In other engineering areas, recruitment has declined but is now showing an upward trend. Retention rates are high, with 93 per cent of those starting staying to complete their programmes, but again achievement rates for those completing their programmes are low although they have been improving over the past three years. The self-assessment report identified strengths which inspectors found to be no more than normal practice and it failed to identify the strengths and weaknesses which inspectors found. The self-assessment report separately graded motor vehicle, engineering and information technology programmes. The grade awarded for engineering as a whole by inspectors is the same as the average grade given by the consortium for its three defined areas.

Table 1

	Modern apprentice	National trainee	Other youth training	Total
Electronics servicing			5	5
Engineering	7			7
Engineering manufacture		3		3
Engineering production	6			6
Electrical and electronics servicing	2		2	4
Installing and commissioning electrical systems and equipment	2			2
Installing information technology components		7		7
Engineering foundation	8	5		13
Motor vehicle mechanical and electrical systems	32	33	1	66
Vehicle body repair	27	2		29
Vehicle maintenance			1	1
Vehicle valeting			1	1
Total	82	50	10	144

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of off-the-job-training
- ◆ good workplace assessments in motor vehicle
- ◆ integration of good key skills in motor-vehicle training
- ◆ rigorous monitoring and cross-referencing of evidence in motor vehicle
- ◆ trainees' high retention rates
- ◆ good celebration of trainees' successes in motor vehicle

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ many missed opportunities for gathering evidence in engineering
- ◆ late introduction of key skills for some engineering trainees
- ◆ poor assessment process in some areas of engineering
- ◆ no information technology workplace assessments
- ◆ limited availability of resources in motor-vehicle body workshop
- ◆ lack of internal verification planning in motor vehicle

13. Engineering trainees attend the college for one day each week during term time. The training they receive is of a high standard. Trainees are enthusiastic and praise the standards of training. Employers also appreciate the high standard of training. Tuition is often on an individual basis or in small groups in order to ensure that trainees have a good knowledge of the concept being taught. The handouts and workbooks are good. They are detailed and clear in their explanation. At some employers, there are good examples of planned on-the-job training. Clients use digital cameras in gathering evidence. The portfolios have been word processed by the trainees, to develop their information technology skills. Most portfolios are of a good standard.

14. All assessment for work-based motor-vehicle trainees is carried out in the workplace by industrially qualified and experienced motor-vehicle technicians or skilled tradespeople. Assessment is by observation, or by collecting job cards and witness testimony. The college motor-vehicle staff hold a sample of all witnesses' signatures. In addition, a number of the college's motor-vehicle staff, who are qualified assessors, visit employers' premises once each college term to carry out assessments in the workplace. A qualified assessor assesses each motor-vehicle trainee in the workplace once every three months. Evidence obtained in the workplace, signed by a qualified motor-vehicle tradesperson is transferred to the trainee's portfolio. Portfolios are well presented and maintained, containing a variety of evidence. The assessment details are recorded in the trainee's portfolio and signed by a qualified assessor. Accreditation is awarded at the completion of each unit. Achievements are cross-referenced to other relevant units in the portfolio, which is retained by the trainee. The motor-vehicle staff at the college have a duplicate copy of all trainees' assessment records. Portfolio-building workshops are included in the off-the-job training sessions. Constant reviews and monitoring are carried out in these sessions on a one-to-one basis.

15. Key skills for all motor-vehicle trainees are fully integrated into the motor-vehicle studies programmes. Six assignments are set for each trainee which are directly related to the motor-vehicle industry. These assignments are based on current industrial practices. They include current issues concerning the transport industry. Trainees are aware of the key skills elements and are knowledgeable about the requirements expected of them to achieve their intended goals. A college tutor has been assigned to the motor-vehicle section for the key skills element of training. A member of staff joins the portfolio-building workshop sessions and integrates key skills into the motor-vehicle studies. Trainees are able to obtain one-to-one tuition on key skills and additional learning needs if they are experiencing problems. This system is fully developed and used in the motor vehicle, mechanical and electrical section. It is now being developed in the body repair and paint finishing section of the department as the motor-vehicle section shares good practice.

16. In October of each year, the motor-vehicle section organises a presentation evening to celebrate the success of all work-based trainees, and to award certificates and prizes to selected trainees. A guest speaker, who presents the awards, is invited together with parents, friends, the college principal, college staff

and staff from the training consortium. The event is well attended. Reports and photographs are included in the local newspaper and on college bulletin boards. The guest speaker is normally a prominent person from the industry who is closely associated with work-based training. Each year, the road transport engineers for heavy vehicles provide an award for the best trainee in the London area. For two consecutive years a trainee from West Herts Training Consortium has won this award. Both trainees have been on modern apprenticeship programmes at NVQ level 3 in motor-vehicle studies.

17. Sixteen trainees taking NVQs at level 3 in engineering have missed many opportunities for gathering evidence in the workplace. Registration of some level 3 engineering trainees has been delayed and no qualified assessor has been available to assess them. This has recently been rectified, and a part-time qualified assessor has been appointed. Trainees are now receiving assistance in gathering evidence. In some cases, trainees scheduled to finish this summer have only recently started gathering level 3 evidence and no assessments have been carried out. These trainees have only a few months to complete what would normally take two years. They are also required to undertake some level 2 assessments, which were not completed when they were taking the NVQ at level 2.

18. Trainees have a poor knowledge of assessment procedures, and only a small range of assessment methods is used. Most level 3 NVQ evidence being collected consists of a daily list of work undertaken by the trainee which has rarely been assessed. Some trainees taking NVQs at level 3 in engineering have not begun training in key skills, even in their final year. Many aspects of the trainees' work has been left to the end of the programme. Reviews of progress have been carried out in compliance with contract requirements but have not focused on the NVQ achievement or set intermediate targets for trainees. Many trainees are not aware of what programme they are following. Individual training plans are not routinely updated. In some cases, they do not give an accurate picture of the trainees' progress and targets. Internal verification within the college is good, but there is no internal verification system or assessment planning arranged for the trainees taking NVQs at level 3 in engineering who have been assigned to a subcontracted assessor. Trainees undertaking NVQs in installing information technology components are not being assessed in the workplace, and all of their assessments are being carried out off the job.

19. Motor-vehicle college staff are well qualified and experienced. All staff are qualified assessors but only one member of motor-vehicle staff holds the internal verifiers' award. Four members of staff are working towards the internal verifiers' award and are expected to achieve it in the near future. Currently, the internal verification process is not planned. The samples for internal verification do not cover the complete range of assessment evidence. Internal verification is based on the inspection of trainees' portfolios. The samples are dated and signed when verified. Internal verification of assessors, assessments and tests on off-the-job theory training does not occur.

20. Most resources within the motor-vehicle section are good and suitable for

NVQ training. In the body-repair and paint-finishing section of the motor-vehicle department, however, resources are below standard. The resources do not meet with current industrial standards and consumable materials are in short supply. Motor-vehicle body-repair and paint-finishing NVQ courses are carried out at the William Street campus of West Herts College. The site buildings are old and have been subjected to vandalism with thefts from motor-vehicle resources. The trainees taking NVQs at level 3 on this programme have had their off-the-job training reduced to one half day each week. The remaining half day is devoted to private study in portfolio building, visiting local employers or, in some cases, returning to work.

Business administration

Grade 3

21. There are 24 trainees on business administration training programmes. There are six modern apprentices, 17 national trainees and one trainee on a work-based learning for adults programme. There are also three New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. One trainee is working towards an administration NVQ at level 1, 12 are taking NVQs at level 2 and three at level 3. Two trainees are working towards NVQs in accounting at level 3 and four at level 2. There is one trainee taking an NVQ at level 2 in operating information technology and one trainee working towards an NVQ at level 2 in using information technology. Trainees learn about the business administration training programmes through the careers service and careers conventions, or through job centres or word of mouth. Each applicant to the training is given a basic skills test unless their abilities are already known to the college from an earlier course. The trainees find work placements through the training organisers employed by the consortium, by themselves or through contacting employers who have recently employed a young person in work-based training. Some trainees undertake extra qualifications, build their portfolios or do other training by one-day or half-day attendance at the college on release from the workplace. Induction is given individually at the college by the training organiser responsible for the trainee. Peripatetic assessors visit trainees in the workplace every two or three weeks for assessment of workplace evidence and questioning to establish trainees' knowledge and understanding. The training organiser visits trainees every 12 weeks to conduct a review of their progress. This meeting usually includes the employer. Accounts trainees on NVQs at level 2 and 3 attend college on day release or on one evening each week during term time. College sessions cease for 12 weeks during the college holidays. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths which inspectors found to be no more than normal practice and inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report separated the grades for business administration and accounts giving one a grade 2 and one a grade 3. Only one overall grade was awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of workplace evidence in administration
- ◆ clear monitoring of NVQ unit achievement

- ◆ good learning resources
- ◆ good staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills achievement
- ◆ low retention and achievement levels in administration
- ◆ poor correlation between on- and off-the-job training for accounts
- ◆ few workplace assessments for accounts trainees

22. Within the last six months, the consortium has adopted a system of peripatetic work-based assessment for administration programmes. This has resulted in good portfolios containing evidence obtained from the trainees' working environment, including good use of photographic evidence. Off-the-job training changed in 1999 from one day a week in college, when all trainees followed the same formally taught course, to one half day a fortnight for some trainees. Off-the-job training now satisfies trainees' individual support needs for portfolio building or enhancing their technical skills. This has improved the attitude and achievement of trainees. Good-quality resources have been developed in-house to help trainees to understand the requirements of their NVQs and accumulate suitable evidence. The resources use straightforward language and avoid jargon. Key skills material has been identified but not yet used by work-based trainees. Regular meetings of staff encourage the sharing of good practice. The trainees understand and appreciate the roles of the various members of staff and are well supported by them. A clear and effective system has been developed to record trainees' achievement of units of their NVQs. This enables trainees' progress to be monitored. Trainees' progress is discussed at meetings of assessors and managers. Internal verification is thorough. The records are available centrally to all staff. Trainees have a clear record of their unit achievement in their portfolios. The training organisers visit trainees every 12 weeks but are available to trainees and employers at any time if problems occur. Some staff are taking NVQs at level 3 in business administration in order to better support trainees. They are also taking advanced information technology qualifications to keep their knowledge up to date. Following the recent need for more workplace assessment several staff are working towards assessor and internal verifier qualifications.

23. New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option have good training and additional support. They have good work-experience opportunities while on day-release from college. They are improving their skills and employability. In 1999-2000, 46 per cent of clients completed their individual training plan, 46 per cent left the programme early without any qualifications, and 8 per cent left early to take up employment.

24. Opportunities are missed to accredit key skills achievement. Trainees collect good evidence from their workplaces for their business administration portfolios but they are not guided to cross-reference this to the key skills units as they progress. There is poor understanding among many trainees of their target

qualification and their planned achievement date. One modern apprentice, who was on a business administration programme, was unaware that she was also taking a customer service qualification. Many trainees are unaware of the existence of their individual training plan. The reviews conducted by training organisers vary in format and content. The information contained in them is bland and does not help trainees to understand their progression through the qualification.

25. There have been low levels of retention and achievement over the last two years among national trainees and over the last three years among modern apprentices. In 1999-2000, 41 per cent of national trainees beginning programmes have already left without qualifications. Accounts trainees have achieved well above the national average in their external examinations, but other parts of the NVQ are not satisfactory.

26. A quarter of business administration trainees are taking accounts. Few assessments are conducted in the workplace. An assessor goes into the workplace to assess the health and safety unit of the NVQ, but none of the trainees' accounts work is assessed there. A member of the college's staff has paid a visit to a trainee in the workplace, but as the tutor has not achieved the assessor units he was unable to assess the trainee's competence. There is a poor correlation between the off-the-job training for accounts trainees with the fixed syllabus of the college course. Trainees find few connections between the theory they learn at college and their day-to-day work.

Leisure, sport & travel

Grade 4

27. There are 33 trainees working towards sport and recreation qualifications in operational services and supervision. One is working towards an NVQ at level 1, 25 are working towards NVQs at level 2 and seven are working towards NVQs at level 3. Of these, 17 are modern apprentices, 15 are national trainees and one is on another work-based training programme for young people. Trainees are placed at local leisure centres, swimming pools and an athletics track. Training and assessment have been subcontracted to a local training provider since December 1998. There had been a number of changes in training providers prior to this. Trainees are assessed in the workplace and there are currently two assessors. Trainees are visited by their assessor every fortnight and receive reviews by training organisers every three months. Trainees are able to acquire additional qualifications, such as first aid, lifeguarding and coaching awards through their employers. Employers provide additional operational training. Retention has been poor in previous years, but there has been a marked improvement during 1999 and in the current year. Achievement has been poor. However, there are now a number of trainees near completion. The self-assessment report identified strengths which inspectors found to represent no more than normal practice, and the weaknesses with which inspectors agreed. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent use of learning resources
- ◆ high standard of NVQ portfolios
- ◆ good use of accreditation of prior learning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unplanned training in the workplace
- ◆ no key skills development or assessment
- ◆ weak monitoring of trainees' progress

28. Trainees are able to use all the resources at the leisure centres to gain competence and complete evidence for their portfolios. All employers allow trainees time during their working hours to complete work in preparation for assessors' visits and portfolio building. Employers provide training which is required by trainees' job roles, such as in customer care and for trainees to complete their projects on the business in which they work. These training opportunities are used by trainees to create additional evidence towards their NVQs. Assessors visit on a regular basis. In some cases, they visit every week and in others less frequently, but visits can be arranged to suit the trainee and used to gather naturally occurring evidence as appropriate. Trainees are encouraged to get involved in a variety of activities in order that the full range of the NVQ can be covered. The assessors have high levels of technical experience which they update regularly by working in the industry. They use this knowledge to provide additional advice and support to trainees. This gives trainees an in-depth understanding in some areas of the NVQ. Trainees are encouraged to collect a diverse range of evidence during portfolio building. All assessments take place on the job, using naturally occurring evidence wherever possible. Trainees being observed understand that they must demonstrate the required standards in order to complete their NVQs. This also ensures that trainees can perform practical skills to the required standard and that the NVQ does not become a paper-based exercise. All trainees use a full range of evidence, including witness statements, questions and answers, and extensive cross-referencing. Trainees have complete ownership of their portfolios. The subcontractor carries out an interview to accredit prior learning during the induction process at the start of the trainee's programme. This ensures that any key skills, formal qualifications and coaching awards are accredited and used within the trainee's portfolio. Trainees value this process as it gives them a good start into the NVQ. The subcontractor follows trainees from centre to centre if they are moved by their employer or change employers. This allows trainees to continue with their programme irrespective of their work location. This policy has helped trainees to remain in programmes who would otherwise have had to leave when changing jobs. The college has had problems in finding a good subcontractor in recent years. There have been a number used without success. Some trainees have been on programme for some time but have

made little progress. The new subcontractor has been able to use some of the work which they previously completed to move delayed trainees on in their programmes and increase their motivation to continue training.

29. Retention has been poor in previous years but the current year has seen the rate improve, with only one trainee leaving early with no qualification. There has been no achievement this year, but there are a number of trainees near completion. Trainees have made progress and have a number of units signed off which has resulted in increased motivation.

30. Training in the workplace is unplanned. This results in trainees being unable to complete the framework. All trainees have training plans which are completed at the start of their programme, but these are not updated. Trainees do not regard these as important documents and do not refer to them. Some trainees are unaware of the programme that they are on and what is involved in completing the full modern apprentice framework. There is no overall plan which allows trainees, employers or the college to see when training should take place or to show what the target completion date is. All employers give training sessions to deal with operational issues, but no account is taken of these when drawing up trainees' plans. Employers are not aware of the requirements of the NVQ or of how they can support the trainee in the training. This results in missed opportunities for assessment or gathering evidence. This has also resulted in some trainees experiencing difficulties in obtaining small pieces of evidence to complete their NVQ. Employers provide no training in the wider knowledge of the industry required in the modern apprentice framework. For example, they are unaware of the requirement for trainees to have an understanding of the overall business of the company. The consortium will only fund NVQ programmes, and trainees are reliant on their employers providing the industry specific qualifications required by the modern apprentice framework. Some employers are unable to do this, so trainees are unable to complete their framework. Although trainees are set work by the assessor which should be completed by the next visit, they are not set long-term targets for the completion of units or of the NVQ. This results in slow progress by some trainees, who consider the NVQ to be a two-year course and yet are capable of completing it in a faster time.

31. Training in key skills has been subcontracted, but the subcontractor currently has no trainer qualified to teach them. There is little key skills development or assessment. Many of the trainees and one of the assessors have little understanding of key skills. One assessor is currently working towards the key skills practitioner award. There have been no key skills portfolios presented for verification or certification. Key skills are currently not being worked upon by trainees. This means that they are not integrated into their NVQs and that trainees are unable to complete their programmes.

32. There is weak monitoring of trainees' progress. The college has recently introduced a quarterly review meeting at which the subcontractor provides information about trainees' progress. The information currently provided is incomplete and out of date. The training organisers do not have a complete picture

of what is happening in the programme and, therefore, cannot make informed judgments. There is no formal mechanism for passing on important training-related information about trainees, such as which trainees have been identified as requiring learning support. This is currently done verbally and often over the telephone. Some trainees are not receiving the appropriate learning support that they need.

Hospitality

Grade 3

33. There are currently nine trainees: one woman and eight men. All but one of the trainees are employed in a range of establishments including hotels, pubs and hospitals. There are no trainees from minority ethnic groups. About 50 per cent of trainees complete their training plans. Trainees' are being trained at foundation level and progress to NVQs at level 3. There is one trainee on another work-based training programme for young people, six national trainees, one modern apprentice doing an NVQ at level 3 and one trainee on a work-based learning for adults programme doing an NVQ at level 1. The college currently uses two awarding bodies but this will shortly be reduced to one. Trainees attend college on day-release one-day each week during term time and attend classes with other full-time students. Trainees are offered additional support in literacy and numeracy. They are visited in the workplace for review meetings. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses with which inspectors agreed, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job-training facilities
- ◆ good integration of learning support
- ◆ good progression between NVQ levels

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no planned on-the-job training
- ◆ no workplace assessment

34. Trainees attend off-the-job training at the college. There are good training facilities. There are 10 training kitchens, a bakery, a brasserie and a restaurant. All these training areas are well equipped with modern facilities. There is a well-stocked library with relevant material for the hospitality industry. Well-qualified staff carry out the off-the-job training. All staff have recent industrial experience. The training includes examples of application in the workplace. Learning support is integrated into the training. Trainees are provided with help in reading, and with written work. Trainees with learning difficulties, including those with dyslexia, are provided with readers. One trainee with a hearing impairment has specialist equipment for use during off-the-job training. In most cases, trainees are supplied with a uniform by their employers but have to provide text-books and a knife kit themselves for the off-the-job training. The college's trainers assess and internally

verify trainees' work. All staff involved in these processes are suitably qualified. Tracking sheets are used to monitor trainees' progress. Many trainees take the opportunity to gain additional qualifications including basic hygiene and health and safety training. There has been good progression for trainees. So far this year, seven trainees have progressed from foundation programmes to NVQs at level 2 and several others have progressed to level 1.

35. Training in the workplace happens when learning situations occur. There is no structure. Trainees and employers are vague about the use of evidence from the workplace in trainees' portfolios. Within the trainees' workplaces there are ample assessment opportunities. Some employers have little knowledge of the NVQ framework. Trainees often carry out advanced tasks, but there is no mechanism by which their competence can be used as evidence. There are no workplace assessments. Witness testimony is not used. All assessment is carried out off the job in the college. The college's kitchens are used to simulate a working environment for assessment. There are also few opportunities for assessment during off-the-job training. The quantity, quality and range of realistic work experience demonstrating trainees' competence are not used to help trainees to complete the units of their NVQs. While the variety of work placements is good, the actual support trainees receive, and for the training process, is poor.

Hair & beauty (hairdressing)

Grade 4

36. The consortium subcontracts all of the hairdressing off-the-job training to West Herts College. There are 49 trainees taking hair and beauty qualifications. Of these, seven are on other work-based training programmes for young people, 35 are national trainees and seven are modern apprentices. All trainees attend the college on a day-release basis one day a week during term time. Trainees can begin the off-the-job training at any time within the college year. All trainees receive an initial assessment of their basic skills on entry to the programme. There is only one employer with a work-based assessor. The college has recently recruited a member of staff who will be visiting the trainees in the workplace to carry out assessment. A further member of the college's hairdressing staff is also starting to visit trainees for assessment in the workplace. Trainees are allocated a training organiser who visits them in the salons to carry out reviews. Each of these training organisers is also responsible for interviewing prospective trainees, arranging the details of employment with training in salons, counselling and pastoral support, and careers and progression advice for trainees. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses, but further weaknesses were identified by inspectors who awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ advanced practical skills demonstrated by first-year trainees
- ◆ flexible off-the-job attendance patterns
- ◆ all trainees employed

- ◆ wide range of differing salons to accommodate individual needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees on inappropriate programmes
- ◆ few assessment opportunities
- ◆ trainees' poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification procedures
- ◆ some invalid assessment
- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ slow progress for most trainees

37. All trainees on the hairdressing programmes are found employment by the consortium, prior to the start of their training. Most of the current trainees are on other work-based training programmes for young people and national traineeships and are not required to have secured employment in order to carry out their training. There is a wide range of salons used to provide employment for the trainees. Each trainee is appraised during their interview, and their career preferences are matched with employment possibilities. An individual assessment is also made by the interviewer of the trainees' personality and social skills in order that the most suitable type of salon may be found for them. The salons vary both in size, location and professional activity, and careful consideration is given to matching trainees with employers. Most of the first-year trainees develop skills quickly in the first year of their training. Trainees carry out practical tasks of an advanced nature after only seven months on the programme, including cutting, applying foils and perm winding. Before being allowed to join the programme, hairdressing trainees are required to purchase a hairdressing kit and clothing. This costs a substantial amount of money. There is the facility for trainees to pay in instalments for the kit and clothing, but if trainees leave the programme early they are pursued for any outstanding money.

38. There are flexible off-the-job attendance patterns available for trainees who cannot attend the designated training session through other work commitments. Trainees can also start the programme as and when they wish throughout the academic year. This flexibility in the system has been introduced in the college through the request of the consortium in order to accommodate specific requests from individual trainees and employers.

39. A significant number of the trainees taking hairdressing are categorised as requiring significant help to achieve the level 2. Some trainees are on inappropriate programmes. Trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people are not required to achieve key skills. However, these trainees are attending off-the-job key skills sessions and attempting to complete key skills in communication at NVQ level 3 and information technology and application of number at NVQ level 1. The information technology assignments are also too difficult. The complexity and degree of skills required for the set seven assignments is the same as that required for key skills at level 2. Trainees are also following a programme

in problem-solving at NVQ level 3, which is an optional key skill for those who need to achieve a key skills qualification. Trainees who have been categorised as a result of literacy and numeracy tests as being unable to achieve an NVQ at level 2, have had the intended level 2 NVQ in hairdressing changed to an NVQ at level 1. These trainees do not have additional learning needs and are in no way incapable of performing tasks for the NVQ at level 2. The practical work undertaken both off- and on-the-job is at a level 2 standard, as is the theory training being received by all first-year trainees. National trainees are also following key skills at level 3 in communication and problem-solving. The framework only requires them to complete level 2 in communication and problem-solving as optional units. The information technology assignments are also given to national trainees. Trainees are struggling to complete these.

40. There are few assessment opportunities for trainees. Most trainees are employed in salons where there are no work-based assessors. Witness testimonies are rarely used. Most assessments take place at off-the-job training sessions. There are few models for the trainees to work with. This reduces their assessment opportunities. The college has recently appointed an assessor to visit the trainees in the workplace. However, as assessment is not planned in advance of these visits, the trainees do not always have a model on whom to demonstrate their competence. On these occasions, the visit is used to review trainees' portfolio work. The college's academic year currently determines when the trainees can attend college. As the college is closed for 12 weeks of the year, there is little assessment during the holiday periods. The trainees who attend college on a Monday also have further reduced time to be assessed owing to the bank holidays throughout the year. The college has made attempts to rectify some of these issues by appointing the assessor to visit trainees in the workplace. These visits are also planned to continue over the college's summer break.

41. There are poor retention and achievement rates for all of the hairdressing training programmes. For other work-based training for young people in 1997-98 and 1998-99, the achievement of programmes for those completing their training was 18 and 32 per cent respectively. The retention rate for the same periods is 19 and 29 per cent. For national trainees in 1998-99 none achieved a qualification and 65 per cent left early. For modern apprentices in the same year, 22 per cent completed the programme and 34 per cent achieved the modern apprenticeship.

42. There is a lack of rigour in the internal verification process. Sampling is not pre-planned to ensure that the internal verifiers cover each of the units and elements achieved by the trainees. There is no internal verification of verbal questioning or practical assessment. The internal verification reports do not always record the date of the activity, and they contain very few comments as to the quality of the evidence being verified. There are no systematic meetings held between internal verifiers in order to standardise procedures and confirm good practice. There is no internal verification of the work of the assessor employed in the one of the salons.

43. There are some invalid assessments e.g. a witness testimony completed

inadequately by a trainee and then confirmed as an accurate assessment of competence by another trainee working in the same salon. This is then recorded in the NVQ logbook by the college tutor as a workplace assessment. A college tutor giving training for both the practical and knowledge element of the NVQ at level 2 in hairdressing to first-year trainees has not achieved the appropriate training qualification. The staff member is not working towards it. This tutor assesses both practical and written work. These assessments are invalid, as there is no countersignature by a trained assessor. One of the internal verifiers is working towards the internal verifiers' award. This person verifies portfolios of evidence with no countersignature from a qualified internal verifier.

44. There is no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. The college providing the off-the-job training does not share with the employers any plan of training activities. The salons offer their own training sessions and, as these training activities are unco-ordinated, trainees are often practising different skills at different times. In some cases, this causes confusion with the trainees and prevents them from continually practising a skill to achieve competence.

45. Some trainees make slow progress on the NVQ. One trainee has had no assessments at all in the first seven months of the training and some second-year trainees have only two units completed with only five weeks left on the programme. Other trainees have taken two years in order to complete the unit on shampooing, despite having previous experience of Saturday work and shampooing clients in the salon on a daily basis. There are no clear targets set for continuous and progressive achievement. Monitoring documents have only recently been introduced to identify which stages of the training the trainee has reached. Trainees rely heavily on the college to provide them with assessment opportunities. Little workplace evidence is used.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

46. The consortium offers programmes in care and childcare at NVQ levels 2 and 3 for modern apprentices and national trainees. There are 40 trainees and clients: 30 are modern apprentices, seven are national trainees, one trainee is on another work-based training programme for young people and two are New Deal clients. Thirty-nine of the trainees and clients are employed and all are assessed in the workplace. There are eight trainees taking NVQs at level 2 and three at level 3 in care working in one private hospital and in a residential school for children and young people with epilepsy. Nine trainees taking NVQs at level 2 and 11 at level 3 in childcare work in day nurseries, nursery schools, and as nannies in private homes. The consortium subcontracts the off-the-job training sessions to the college. Trainees in childcare at level 2 attend the college two days each month. Level 3 trainees attend a weekly two-hour evening class. There is one male trainee in care, and no men taking childcare. One childcare trainee belongs to a minority ethnic group. The care trainees at the residential school attend training sessions at their workplace for three hours each week. Most work on a day shift, but one adult trainee at the school works on a pattern of four nights on and four nights off to suit

her family responsibilities. The care trainees at the private hospital are taught individually by visiting college staff or join full-time students at the college in classes held at the college's campus. In addition, all trainees attend 10 or 12 three-hour sessions at the college for training in key skills. Some assessments for childcare and care trainees are carried out by assessors employed by the college but, wherever possible, work-based assessors conduct assessments. There are six active work-based assessors in childcare, and seven in care. Nine college-based assessors visit workplaces to carry out assessments and to help trainees collect and organise written information in their portfolios. The consortium organises regular meetings for all assessors to share information about their trainees, and to standardise assessment procedures. The self-assessment report contains the strengths identified by inspectors, but did not include the weakness concerning retention. The grade given by inspectors is the same as that awarded in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ accurate and thorough assessment
- ◆ diverse off-the-job training
- ◆ good co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good progression by trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient access to key skills learning resources for some trainees
- ◆ poor retention of trainees in childcare

47. Care and childcare trainees work in a wide range of good-quality workplaces, and attend off-the-job training sessions at different times. This suits the shift pattern of work and is appreciated by trainees and employers. Some trainees attend specially organised workshops at the college, some join classes of full-time college students at times which fit in with their work shifts, and some are taught individually by visiting tutors. College staff organise group training sessions every week for trainees working at the school for children and young people with epilepsy. School staff are strongly involved in the training and assessment, and work patterns are arranged so that trainees can attend. The quality of work experience is monitored by the consortium's staff. For example, they ensure that all trainees are employed and have appropriate access to off-the-job training opportunities. The consortium's staff have established effective links between on- and off-the job training. Teaching staff plan learning activities which draw upon the trainees' work experience and show the relevance of the training to their jobs. Some work-placement staff are actively involved in trainees' reviews. All help identify opportunities for assessment so that trainees can make good progress towards achieving a qualification. Assessors provide a high level of support for trainees by planning frequent assessments with trainees and providing instructive feedback on progress. Assessors' training is provided for workplace staff. Regular assessors' meetings are held to share information about trainees' progress. The

assessments are collected into well-organised portfolios which are clearly cross-referenced to other pieces of written work, and to the national standards in care and childcare. The internal verification system is thorough. All units are verified and accredited as they are completed. The college's assessors are also qualified as internal verifiers. An internal verifier observes assessors to ensure that a fair standard of assessment is maintained. Actions suggested by the external verifiers are acted upon promptly. External verifiers' reports are generally good. Trainees make good progress from one level of the qualification to another with many trainees converting from work-based training to modern apprenticeships. When they have completed their training, some gain promotion, some continue training to become assessors themselves, and others move into higher education. The number of trainees on care and childcare programmes who have achieved a qualification has risen from 44 per cent in 1998 to 65 per cent in 1999.

48. Twelve workshops in key skills are offered at one of the college sites. The trainees gather much of the required information from the workplace and from their completed NVQ assessments. Trainees show a good understanding of key skills. However, nine care trainees who work at the school for children and young people with epilepsy receive all their training, including the training in key skills, on the school campus. These nine trainees have insufficient access to computers to support the development of their key skills. Three computers are available for their use, but school business has priority. They are sometimes not available for trainees to use at a time when their shifts allow. In 1998-99, half of the childcare trainees left their programmes early without achieving a qualification. Retention is now improving.

Media & design

Grade 2

49. The consortium has 15 trainees working towards qualifications in machine printing. There are five modern apprentices, nine national trainees and one trainee on a work-based learning programme for adults. There is also one New Deal client. All trainees are working towards NVQ at levels 2 or 3 in machine printing, key skills training and taking an industry standard examination. Modern apprentices progress to NVQs at level 3. All trainees are employed in local print companies. Trainees spend one day a week during term time at the college for off-the-job training. Trainees are recruited onto the course throughout the year but cannot start off-the-job training until September when the academic year begins. The college provides practical skills training in machine printing and related activities, portfolio-building workshops, key skills training and lectures for the knowledge required for the final examination. There are no worked-based assessors. Qualified and occupationally experienced assessors from the college carry out all assessment in the workplace. Training organisers visit the trainees at least every 12 weeks to carry out workplace reviews of progress. In 1999, 30 per cent of trainees left the programme without gaining a qualification, 40 per cent left having completed their qualifications and 30 per cent remained in training. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were found by inspectors to represent no more than normal practice. Many weaknesses were also not identified. Other strengths and

weaknesses identified by inspectors resulted in the same grade being awarded as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ well-managed progression for trainees
- ◆ effective liaison between consortium staff and off-the-job trainers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding and implementation of key skills
- ◆ insufficiently current learning resources

50. The off-the-job training is broken down into modules, each of which is taught over a period of approximately 12 weeks. During this time, trainees spend the mornings learning the practical skills of machine printing and pre-press activities such as plate making. There are sufficient printing presses and other equipment to ensure that each trainee has adequate access to equipment. The afternoon is taken up with lectures to give trainees the knowledge in support of the morning's practical training. Portfolio-building workshops are held weekly. Trainees bring evidence from the workplace to the college so that tutors can assist with portfolio building. Key skills training and one-to-one tutorials for trainees who have particular issues for which they require specific help are also held in the afternoons.

51. At the end of each module, trainees undertake an examination and the NVQ unit is finally assessed. If a trainee fails the module examination, they are given help with revision through one-to-one learning support. An examination re-sit is available as soon as the trainee and tutor agree that the trainee is ready. On completion of all of the modules, the trainee gains a machine printing industry standard qualification and the NVQ. Where trainees wish to progress to level 3 and modern apprenticeships, their progress in the workplace and personal development is closely monitored. While working towards completion of the NVQ at level 2, tutors assess the suitability of the workplace to provide appropriate experience and evidence. Additionally, tutors assess the capability of the trainee to succeed at level 3. They also discuss the requirements of the NVQ at level 3 with the employer to ensure that the employer will support the trainee through the next stage of the programme. If the trainee has the desire and aptitude to progress but the full range of workplace evidence cannot be produced with the current employer, the college ensures that alternative arrangements are made for the trainee to complete. The consortium's staff, college tutors and assessors work closely together to monitor the effectiveness of off-the-job training, trainees' personal development and their learning in the workplace. There are regular meetings at which specific issues concerning individual trainees are discussed and remedial actions are identified. Tutors, assessors and the consortium's staff work closely to promote and market the printing courses. They identify new employers who may employ trainees and maintain contacts with existing employers. Minutes

are taken of their meetings and actions clearly recorded and are implemented.

52. Key skills are partially integrated into the NVQ, but most trainees see key skills as a separate qualification. They do not understand the connection between key skills and their workplace practices. Some evidence for key skills is taken from portfolio evidence. The trainees completing assignments generate other key skills evidence. The key skills assignments are not always related to the workplace. Trainees who started training in September 1999 do not fully understand what evidence they have to generate. Some verbal instruction is given, but this is not followed up with a written assessment plan which the trainees can keep and refer to.

53. Although resources are generally adequate, there has been little recent investment in up-to-date printing equipment which trainees may be using in the workplace. Consumable items such as printing plates are often reused many times, and the product which trainees achieve is often of a less than acceptable quality. Tutors and assessors see trainees every week at off-the-job training sessions and help them to integrate evidence generated in the workplace into their portfolios. Assessors are only able to visit trainees in the workplace once a term to assess their competence. Trainees are therefore only assessed three times in a year on their workplace performance.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

54. Basic employability training for adults and other work-based training for young people form the two main strands of training in foundation for work. There are 19 trainees, eight of whom are on a programme for those with additional learning needs. Two trainees are on work-based learning for adults programmes. The remaining 10 are on basic employability programmes learning life skills to achieve personal targets. The aim of the training is to prepare individuals for employment by offering work 'tasters' as well as classroom-based activities at the two vocational training centres in Watford. Most trainees undertake literacy and numeracy training which leads to the achievement of wordpower and numberpower qualifications. These are offered at both centres and form most of the in-house training. Training in job-search skills, confidence-building, personal effectiveness and social skills is also available.

55. All trainees have an initial interview, take a basic skills assessment test and have an induction to their course. Work-based learning for adults trainees are on the basic employability programme for 21 hours a week for a period of 20 weeks. Most of the trainees on work-based programmes for young people receive training for 20 hours a week and can remain on the programme for a year. Those who are under 18 years of age and have been identified by the careers service as having an additional learning need can undertake training for 16 hours a week for a period of 16 weeks. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors to those cited in the self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that

given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly appropriate initial assessment
- ◆ individualised training programmes
- ◆ well-resourced training
- ◆ trainees' high retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inflexible programme of wordpower and numberpower
- ◆ weak use of results of initial assessment
- ◆ some staff unqualified to give basic skills learning support

56. Before starting on the programme, all trainees are interviewed by the lead trainer from the vocational training centres. Each trainee's literacy and numeracy skills are also assessed using standardised national tests. Trainees may not complete their literacy and numeracy assessments at this time, owing to lack of competence or ability. Once on the scheme, staff undertake further detailed assessment of the trainee's literacy and numeracy levels by using a variety of different methods suited to the individual. These include college tests, trainees' self-assessment and interview techniques. Results from this assessment provide detailed information on the skills and knowledge the trainee needs to acquire, as well as clearly identifying their occupational interests and any additional training needs. Training needs are picked up throughout the programme. Both vocational training centres are open throughout the year. Trainees can start their training at any time. At the beginning of each week, staff provide each trainee with their own personalised workplan. The plan details the training to be undertaken during the week. Depending on the trainee, materials to be used for the training are contained within each of the trainee's files of work. On arrival at the centre, trainees access their own files and can begin working immediately. Trainees can also use other material and equipment if needed. Wherever possible, training is based on the trainee's occupational interests. All training sessions are run by more than one member of staff, allowing trainees to receive individual attention when necessary. Both vocational training centres have a wide range of appropriate equipment and materials. These are easily available for trainees to obtain without having to ask the trainer. The one vocational training centre has a dedicated computer room, which is available at all times for foundation for work trainees. A smaller number of computers are available at the other vocational training centre. The first vocational training centre also has a kitchen as part of the main training room. The kitchen is used by the trainees and trainers as a learning resource. For example, trainees practise their reading and numeracy skills through cooking by following recipes, weighing and measuring.

57. There are high retention and achievement rates among trainees on both adult

and youth programmes. During 1999-2000, retention rates on all the youth training programmes averaged 86 per cent, and on adult programmes, this was 83 per cent. Achievement rates are also high. On adult programmes last year, 93 per cent of trainees achieved their learning goals and on youth programmes, 63 per cent achieved their targets.

58. Although initial assessment is thorough and in-depth, the findings are not recorded on the individual's training plan. The details are not referred to during reviews. There is no structured way of ensuring that the initially identified training needs have been met. Although the training to be undertaken is recorded on the trainee's weekly workplans, there is no overall system to check how these relate to the learning needs identified at the initial assessment or whether the work plans have been completed without going through the weekly record sheets.

59. No use is made of the information obtained at initial assessment to prioritise the order in which wordpower or numberpower might be achieved. All trainees start with unit one and work through each element in sequence before moving on to unit two. Most of the wordpower and numberpower training is given by the use of worksheets and little use is made of naturally occurring evidence, either at the training centre or when trainees are on work 'tasters'. The use of worksheets for practise and assessment does not suit the learning styles of some trainees. A few of the worksheets are poorly photocopied. In addition, some trainees working on their number skills find reading the instructions on the worksheets awkward because the words are too difficult for their reading ability.

60. Some staff giving literacy and numeracy training are not qualified to do this. Currently, just over half of the trainees are working towards gaining a basic skills qualification in literacy or numeracy. In addition, most of the other trainees currently on the programme are receiving some help above the level of basic skills with their English or maths.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

61. The consortium shares the responsibility of equal opportunities among its staff. The college's equal opportunities committee meets each term. Each member of the college's staff receives information about equal opportunities during their induction, as do the trainees. The trainees' handbook includes a copy of the equal opportunities statement, which is a summary of the policy. All employers involved with work-based trainees are asked at the beginning of training to abide by the college's equal opportunities policy. However, the college's equal opportunities policy is not shared with subcontractors. The consortium collects data on ethnicity, gender and disability from prospective trainees' application forms. Among the trainees at present, 2.6 per cent are from minority ethnic groups in comparison to 8 per cent of the local population being from minority ethnic groups. The self-assessment report failed to identify a number of weaknesses. A lower grade was

awarded by inspectors than that identified in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction in equality of opportunity for new staff
- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities by consortium staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little effort to encourage under-represented groups into training
- ◆ out-of-date equal opportunities policy
- ◆ some disregard of statements within equal opportunities policy and college student charter
- ◆ no representation of consortium team on college equal opportunities committee
- ◆ little analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of equal opportunities practices among employers or trainees

62. There is a detailed and effective induction process for all the staff. It includes instruction on the legislative requirements of equal opportunities. Staff are required to know how equal opportunities are implemented in the college. In particular, the staff within the training consortium are given good training at induction on the impact of equal opportunities in the workplace. Immediately prior to inspection, the consortium staff received some additional staff development training on equal opportunities.

63. Within the training Consortium there is good promotion and a high profile given to equality of opportunity. The trainees' handbook has just been updated to reflect this. There is a good procedure for checking that the equal opportunities policy and grievance procedures have been covered and understood at trainees' induction. Consortium's staff have received regular updating and training. All of the consortium's staff attended a training programme held in the spring on equal opportunities policies and procedures. It was well received. During consortium staff meetings, equality of opportunity is discussed and, where appropriate, additional training is given, such as by showing relevant videos.

64. There is a poor representation of trainees from minority ethnic groups on programmes. An average figure taken from the quarterly labour market data from the North West London TEC and the local economy assessment for Hertfordshire indicates that 4.9 per cent of young people between the age of 15 and 19 are from minority ethnic groups. This statistic is an average taken from the three catchment areas of West Herts College. In Watford itself, the percentage is higher. The consortium has identified the poor representation of people from minority ethnic groups is a weakness and has visited to a local multi-racial school in order to promote work-based training. This has led to 16 recent inquiries from pupils of

this school but none of these pupils will be available to begin training until the end of the academic year. Occupational gender stereotypes are also very apparent within programmes. For example, all trainees in engineering and printing are men, as are 98 per cent of trainees in motor vehicle and 85 per cent of trainees in accounts. Similarly, all trainees in veterinary nursing are women, as are 97 per cent of trainees in childcare and 96 per cent of trainees in hairdressing. Although also identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, there has been no action taken to rectify this imbalance.

65. The college's equal opportunities policy is out of date. The last reviewed document is dated 1997. There are numerous changes in the law relating to equal opportunities which are missing from the policy. The college's equal opportunities statement is also outdated, and has not been reviewed since its introduction in 1993. The equal opportunities policy and the college's student's charter clearly outline the college's and consortium's stand on equality of opportunity in education and training. The policy states that the recruitment patterns across the whole college will be reviewed and the recruitment of under-represented groups, in particular, will be encouraged. There has yet to be any activity within the consortium to address gender imbalance. There are also clear guidelines on the student induction and that students will be informed of their rights and responsibilities. This is not fully carried out for trainees, and the trainees' handbook does not include procedures trainees can follow should they need to appeal against assessment decisions or make complaints. Most trainees are not aware of these two processes. There have been no complaints made by any trainee to the consortium. The equal opportunities policy also includes the statement that all trainees are entitled to receive appropriate learning support according to their individual needs. For many of the trainees identified as having basic skills learning needs, this support is not given. The policy expresses the need to promote positive, non-stereotypical images of training and to communicate in community languages where appropriate. Pictures on stands used at open days contains stereotypical images and there is no information available in alternative languages. The equal opportunities policy has clear guidelines with regard to clearly communicating its equal opportunities policy to all subcontractors. This is not systematically carried out.

66. There is no representation from the consortium team on the college's equal opportunities subcommittee. The absence of this representation reduces the inclusion of work-based training as a consideration in developing equal opportunities policies and procedures. There is currently no analysis of any equal opportunities data. All trainees complete an application form, which includes giving equal opportunities data, when applying to begin their training. However, this information is not used to analyse ethnic representation or the gender imbalance in some of the occupational areas. Equal opportunities practices are not systematically monitored among either the trainees or employers. All trainees receive a copy of the equal opportunities statement at the start of the programme. However, their understanding is not systematically checked while they are on their programme. All the employers are asked to abide by the college's equal opportunities policy. However, they are not provided with a copy, and no check is

made of their procedures once the trainee is in the workplace.

Trainee support

Grade 4

67. Potential trainees are referred to the college by their employers, careers service or on the advice of family and friends. Trainees who are not already employed undertake an initial interview to determine their career aspirations and abilities. The consortium's staff assist trainees to find employment with local companies if they are not already employed. Induction for each trainee is carried out in the employer's premises and there is a further induction to the off-the-job training on the trainee's first day at college. Most trainees are required to take a basic skills test on entry or at their interview to determine the level of any additional support required in literacy and numeracy. While in training, the consortium's staff carry out workplace reviews of trainees' progress every thirteen weeks. All trainees are assigned a personal training organiser. The self-assessment report failed to identify any of the weaknesses found by inspectors. Most of the strengths identified related to one issue and was found by inspectors. Other strengths were found to be no more than normal practice and other weaknesses were not found. Inspectors found an additional strength and further weaknesses, and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective allocation of training organisers to trainees
- ◆ some comprehensive monitoring and recording of trainee support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some inaccurate interpretation of basic skills testing
- ◆ little systematic accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans
- ◆ some ineffective reviews

68. Every trainee is allocated a personal training organiser. The training organisers are responsible for all aspects of individual trainee support. They carry out quarterly workplace reviews, initial assessment of basic skills and give advice and guidance on careers and progression. They also liaise, on behalf of the trainees, with college tutors, assessors, employers and outside agencies such as the career service. Where appropriate, the training organiser directs trainees to other agencies if the consortium cannot provide the trainee with a programme to suit their needs. Training organisers are also responsible for trainees' induction to the workplace, which is carried out on a one-to-one basis. Each training organiser maintains comprehensive records of all aspects of the identified additional support given to individual trainees plus a chart showing the dates of workplace reviews. In the absence of a training organiser, another member of staff has access to all details of

the individual trainees and is able to carry out reviews instead. There are other files detailing pastoral support and confidential issues relating to the trainee. This information remains confidential to the individual training organiser working with a trainee.

69. A standard basic skills assessment covering reading, spelling, punctuation and numeracy is undertaken by all trainees who do not have 'A' levels or appropriate GCSEs or who have little or no workplace experience. The consortium makes great efforts to administer initial assessment in a sensitive manner and in an appropriate place. Marks awarded for answers given in the assessment are not always correct. Some trainees are awarded lower marks than the answers indicate, and trainees are incorrectly assessed as requiring considerable additional support. The consortium has inappropriately identified some trainees as requiring additional support in order to complete an NVQ at level 1 or 2 following incorrect interpretation of the basic skills assessment results. Trainees whose basic skills assessment indicates that they require some help with one area of literacy or numeracy such as punctuation, grammar or percentages are automatically identified as requiring additional learning support. This is not always the case. Additional funding is claimed to provide this learning support. Most of the endorsed trainees do not receive any structured additional learning support. Training plans do not detail the additional support required.

70. The existing skills, knowledge and previous qualifications of trainees are not always assessed on entry. In some occupational areas, the training provided does take account of previous learning. Gaps in learning are identified and the trainee's programme is altered to ensure that they do not have to complete the full training programme. This practice is not shared across all vocational areas or between individual tutors and trainers. There is no assessment of key skills on entry to the programmes. The consortium does not use the assessment kit. A pilot scheme was undertaken to assess key skills, but the results were not satisfactory and it was discontinued pending identification of a more appropriate kit.

71. Additional basic skills support in literacy and numeracy for most trainees is at the discretion of tutors and assessors. Some assessors have time allocated to give additional assessments. Tutors and assessors are not qualified to teach basic skills. Where individual support is given, what this has been and when it was given is not always recorded. Some trainees are referred to the learning support unit at the college. They have to attend in their own time during their off-the-job-training day. The learning support unit gives trainees the opportunity to improve their basic skills but most trainees do not attend. Individual training plans are compiled according to TEC requirements. However, although qualification aims and units are recorded, the individual training plans do not record individual training needs. They are rarely amended to reflect trainees' progress towards completion of the intended qualification outcome.

72. Workplace reviews take place every 12 weeks in accordance with the TEC contract. Some sections of the reviews are not completed. Specific training to be undertaken, support required and actions by all parties are not always agreed with

the trainee. The writing on some reviews is illegible. Employers are not always involved in the review. The review process has failed to identify or deal with significant issues affecting some trainees. These instances include non-attendance at off-the-job training, lack of support for literacy and numeracy, slow progress towards completion of qualifications and dissatisfaction with off-the-job training.

Management of training

Grade 4

73. There is a team of 19 people who manage the work-based training. The team consists of a director, two managers, nine training organisers, five administration staff and two learning support trainers. The consortium has been operating for 17 years as a separate unit within West Herts College. The consortium has a set of management policies and procedures. Following organisational structure changes, the consortium is now one of three units within the business training division of the college's external relations department. The consortium holds operational management meetings, general staff meetings and meetings of the staff from the vocational training centres. The training provider uses a range of subcontractors to provide off-the-job training and assessment. There is line management responsibility between the college and the consortium. The head of external relations at the college is the line manager of the head of business training. The head of business training is the line manager of the director of the consortium. The head of external relations is a member of the college's strategic team. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were found by inspectors to be no more than normal practice and compliance with contractual requirements. The inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors identified an additional strength and a weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good strategic planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak operational management structure
- ◆ lack of rigour in the management of the subcontractors
- ◆ ineffective use of data

74. Between 1996 and 1999, the college was working on a restructuring development plan. It is now in the process of implementing that plan. Implementation has resulted in the college achieving the Investors in People Standard in March 2000. The college recognises the value of planning in order to co-ordinate complex activities across a physically fragmented and diverse college in a coherent and consist way. Part of the plan is the imminent integration of the training consortium into the main activities of the college. The restructuring action plan includes the decision to establish performance indicators and measurable achievements for all areas of the college's work, including the work undertaken by

the consortium. The roles of all staff within the consortium have been re-evaluated as part of the overall re-organisation of the college. All the consortium's staff have been offered development opportunities, both through the college and the local TECs, and appropriate staff development has taken place to prepare staff for the restructuring. As part of the college's overall management strategy, staffing resources are being reviewed.

75. Within the college, the consortium's staff and the college's staff have established long-term working partnerships. However, in some cases, the management relationship between the consortium and the college has been ineffective. The managers of the consortium have made many requests for improvements in work-based training to curriculum staff. There has been considerable frustration over the lack of acceptance and implementation of their requests. Issues affecting training and trainees have not been dealt with in an appropriate manner. There is a lack of rigour in progressing, and implementing suggestions that come through different forums.

76. Roles and responsibilities have changed within the last year. All the changes and proposed changes have not yet been fully established into the management structure. There is a lack of clarity in some job roles and in understanding of the responsibilities with regard to the management and evaluation of training carried out by subcontractors. There is no service level agreement with the main subcontractor used by the consortium, which is the college. It relies on the goodwill of the college's staff to provide a high standard of training. There is a wide variance across the occupational areas.

77. The agreement written for the subcontractors for two occupational areas is identical. The subcontractors have a different process of training and assessing. The agreement lacks clarity as to the actual requirements which must be implemented by the subcontractor. In the case of veterinary nursing, it clearly states that it is the subcontractor's role to carry out and ensure that internal verification and the awarding body's requirements are met. The consortium has no mechanism to ensure that these roles and responsibilities specified in the agreement are carried out. This has allowed slow internal verification within veterinary nursing. The most recent business plan refers to the need to prepare service level agreements with faculties but no mention is made of agreements with other subcontractors. There are standard agreements with subcontractors, but in some cases, these are not accurate, as they do not reflect what the subcontractor does.

78. Data collection and statistics are mainly used to ensure compliance with TEC contracts. There is a lack of data collected and little use is made of available data during management planning or to assist operational management. There is little use of performance indicators or benchmarking data to compare training being given by different subcontractors.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

79. The consortium has a range of quality assurance policies and procedures. They meet the requirements for the work-based training contract with the TECs. The college has begun working towards an internal quality assurance self-assessment procedure. The college established a quality and curriculum committee in 1997. The remit was to review achievement, assess suitability of quality assurance procedures and monitor the achievement of corporate objectives. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were to do with compliance with contracts and found to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report and found additional weaknesses. The grade awarded was lower than given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTH

- ◆ good strategy to improve quality assurance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ out-of-date quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ no internal auditing
- ◆ little evaluation of work-based training
- ◆ little sharing of good practice
- ◆ no monitoring of assessment and internal verification process

80. The overall issue of quality assurance is being addressed through a range of measures. These include clear strategic management aims and objectives, clearly defined management roles and responsibilities, organisational restructuring, and review of staffing resources. The intention is to develop quality assurance procedures based on self-assessment and target setting. Although self-assessment was introduced during the 1998-1999 academic year, previous to the inspection by the FEFC, procedures have yet to be developed for work-based training. The college's faculties produce annual reports for the college's overall self-assessment report, and this includes examination of off-the-job training provided for trainees, but the training trainees receive at work or with subcontractors does not fall under the same procedures for scrutiny.

81. The consortium has set attainment targets regarding the number of trainees recruited but does not have targets for retention or achievement of trainees as part of the quality assurance process. Three different sets of achievement data were presented at inspection as the accuracy of the first two sets was doubtful as they were incomplete. The consortium has a range of policies and procedures, many of which have not been reviewed or changed for several years. There are some that date back to 1994. They have been reviewed or assessed. The current quality assurance arrangements have been in place for some time but have not used across all occupational areas, regularly reviewed or updated. Each of the subcontractors has a range of written quality assurance policies and procedures, but the

consortium does not monitor the effectiveness of these. Self-assessment and evaluation of performance are recognised as necessary to ensure quality, but there was little evaluation prior to the self-assessment process for inspection by the TSC. There are examples of good practice in certain of the occupational areas and also evidence of good achievements by trainees, but there is no established process for the sharing of this good practice.

82. There are no internally set targets or standards for assessment and internal verification. The training consortium carries out no internal audits of these processes. There is no system to show a measured increase or decrease in the quality of performance. There are no arrangements to sample the quality of training or assessment carried out by subcontractors. Some assessment was found to be invalid. There has been no internal verification in some cases and the trainees are not always aware of any alternative arrangements set up regarding the internal verification process. Verification processes vary in and across occupational sectors and with different subcontractors. There is underdeveloped use of the results from questionnaires to obtain feedback on training. Retention figures in some areas of training are poor and there is little done to make use of this information. This is the first self-assessment report prepared by the consortium. Trainees and employers were not consulted in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report did not fully comply with the requirements set in *Raising the Standard*.