



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1999

Brooksby College

SUMMARY

Trainees at Brooksby College benefit from good on- and off-the-job training in agriculture, horticulture and service engineering, all of which fall within the occupational area of agriculture. Service engineering trainees are provided with exceptionally high-quality off-the-job resources and equipment. Equal opportunities policies are tailored to the needs of trainees and their application is monitored through internal verification. Support for trainees is good and extends to the workplace. Induction is comprehensive and includes employers and parents. Staff at the college undertake regular and frequent professional training that is particularly focused on work-based training, and the college has a successful programme of recruiting and training work-based assessors. Management-information systems, although adequate at present, do not allow for easy analysis of trends and developments. Quality-assurance measures are good and relate explicitly to the circumstances of work-based training although do not fully take into account training delivered by employers.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ outstanding off-the-job resources for service engineers
- ◆ inclusion of equal opportunities monitoring in internal verification
- ◆ separate equal opportunities policy specifically written for students and trainees
- ◆ good availability and use of learning support in the workplace
- ◆ detailed and comprehensive induction
- ◆ good staff training and development
- ◆ successful programme to recruit and train work-based assessors
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance policies and procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no individuality to training plans
- ◆ inadequate action-planning after review
- ◆ incomplete management-information systems

INTRODUCTION

1. Brooksby College is located six miles from Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. It has a 375-hectare estate and farm which accommodates 130 Holstein Friesian dairy cows and 1,200 ewes. Arable operations at the farm include growing cereal crops, oil-seed rape, maize and forage crops. There is a 1.5-hectare coarse-fish farm and a registered carp fishery. The college also has a three-hectare commercial nursery, a six-hole golf course, an indoor riding school, stabling for 30 horses, kennels and a cattery, aviaries and facilities for keeping reptiles and other small animals, and an ornamental lake in extensive gardens.

2. Brooksby College contracts with Leicester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The college offers the following TEC-funded programmes: modern apprenticeships and national traineeships in agriculture, with options in mixed farming, livestock production and mechanical crop production; modern apprenticeships and national traineeships in amenity horticulture, landscapes and greenkeeping; and modern apprenticeships and national traineeships in agriculture and ground care machinery service and repair. These encompass a range of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1,2 and 3. The college also offers full-time education courses in agriculture, animal care, countryside, equine studies, fishery management, horticulture and floristry. There is also provision for learners with a disability or learning difficulties, and adult basic education.

3. In Leicestershire, the proportion of agricultural businesses falls just within the top half of a ranked list of the industrial sector, making up 9.6 per cent. Production, retail and construction are also important areas. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 48.3 per cent compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The number of people of working age who were unemployed in October 1999 was 6,438, which is 2.2 per cent of the working age population. There has been a 3 per cent decrease since October 1998. Minority ethnic groups in Leicestershire account for 11.1 per cent of the population.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Brooksby College produced a self-assessment report for inspection by the Training Standards Council (TSC) in July 1999. It had previously produced a self-assessment report in July 1998 as part of its annual review process. The current report was written separately from, but in conjunction with, a similar report for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Although the director of curriculum wrote the main body of the self-assessment report, the report was the culmination of a larger, college-wide exercise for which each section produced a self-assessment report. The resulting main report was edited and approved by the quality and verification group.

5. The inspection of TEC-funded work-based training was carried out jointly with inspectors from the FEFC, with full collaboration and exchange of evidence. Four TSC inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Brooksby College. They interviewed 28 trainees. Six interviews were conducted with off-the-job training staff and nine with off-the-job management staff. Twenty-two interviews were conducted with on-the-job training staff and eight with on-the-job management staff. Inspectors visited 23 workplaces. Twenty-three trainees' files and 29 portfolios were reviewed. Other documents reviewed included contracts with the TEC, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance and operating manuals, minutes of meetings, staff development records, marketing materials and monitoring data. Inspectors observed two training sessions, one assessment and three reviews, with evidence also taken from FEFC inspectors' observations of training sessions, assessments and reviews.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 2

6. Trainees are recruited by referral from careers centres, school careers officers, direct contact, or by word of mouth, but the great majority are recruited by employers and referred to the college. Most trainees, except for a few national trainees who are found work placements by the college, are employed and training takes place both on and off the job. The numbers of trainees by programme and discipline are shown in the table below. Service engineering trainees attend college for four weeks three times each year for off-the-job training, and horticulture and agriculture trainees attend college for one day every one or two weeks for off-the-job training. Overall achievement is good at 72 per cent, although some horticulture and agriculture trainees take longer than the service engineer trainees to achieve their qualifications. Early leavers average 25 per cent across all disciplines, but this figure has risen slightly over the past three years. In 1998, the training programme for service engineers won a National Training Award, and, in 1999, was highly commended by the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets

(NACETT) in its Beacon Awards. The self-assessment report described 15 strengths many of which were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice, and nine weaknesses, all of which are addressed by appropriate action plans. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

Discipline	Other youth training	National trainees	Modern apprentices	Total
Service engineers	0	14	36	50
Agriculture	2	5	7	14
Horticulture	0	14	1	15
Equine	0	2	1	3
Total	2	35	45	82

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ high level of guidance and support given to trainees by employers
- ◆ outstanding off-the-job resources for service engineers
- ◆ strong links between on- and off-the-job assessment in agriculture
- ◆ excellent co-ordination between theory and practical training in horticulture

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some inadequate action-planning after review
- ◆ poor portfolio management in horticulture

GOOD PRACTICE

One amenity horticulture trainee, who is specialising in sports-turf maintenance, writes job sheets, recording recently accomplished tasks. These are subject to a first and second draft, and the results are exemplary. His supervisor checks these sheets, not only for technical accuracy, but also for English language and grammar. The trainees' grasp of clear and expressive writing is noticeably improving.

7. College staff interview prospective trainees either at Brooksby College or in the workplace, which ever is convenient to the trainee. Careers advice given at this stage is comprehensive, with all options being explained to the trainee. Service engineering trainees are usually residential for a full week at college for the purpose of induction before going out to work in the industry. Trainees unable to attend this week are given the information at individual tutorials. Trainees' retention of important information from induction is good and induction for all trainees is comprehensive and well received.

8. The Basic Skills Agency assessment test is used to identify any learning support needs. Trainees are graded, and those identified as requiring support are referred to student services which co-ordinates learning support. To provide a non-threatening environment and encourage the take up of learning support, the learning support tutor assists with timetabled key skills and numeracy sessions. Trainees also undertake some occupational initial assessments, for example, basic tractor driving, simple livestock health checks and feeding, or knowledge of crop rotation. Key skills initial assessment, although satisfactory, is not yet fully comprehensive. Two

different key skills assessments have been piloted, but these were not found to be satisfactory and the college has effective plans to address this.

9. Workplace training for service engineers is very good. It is well structured, and workplace supervisors frequently and regularly provide demonstrations of tasks. Trainees then assist with the task and, once considered competent, they are allowed to perform the task independently. Employers are supportive of the training process and provide trainees with a high level of guidance and support. When a trainee is judged to be competent, the work supervisor signs off the appropriate task sheet. In some workplaces, there are employers who have achieved an NVQ, so they have a greater understanding of the portfolio-building process. Some employers from a national dealership send the trainees on additional service-engineering courses at the national training centre in Nottinghamshire. This training centre has been open for two years and the resources are of a very high standard, with the technology employed reflecting the best available in industry. Facilities at the college are supplemented by the loan of equipment from this national dealership.

10. The tasks that horticulture and agriculture trainees undertake are more than sufficient to cover all the units and range required for their NVQ, and the supervisors with whom they work are highly competent and qualified. The links between on- and off-the-job training in horticulture are very clear. Horticulture supervisors find out what trainees learn at college during day-release sessions, and adjust tasks at work to ensure that they reflect off-the-job training requirements. In general, employers are highly committed to training, and make every effort to ensure that trainees get the broadest experience possible of their chosen occupation.

11. Off-the-job training for service engineers is delivered at Brooksby College on a block-release basis and at the national dealership training centre on Fridays of each block-release week for the trainees working with the dealership. Off-the-job training for horticulture trainees is delivered on a day-release basis, one day every two weeks, and for agriculture trainees for one day each week. Off-the-job training for all trainees uses a variety of training strategies, including conventional lectures, group work and assignments, which effectively cover theoretical knowledge, portfolio building, information technology skills and key skills. The content of off-the-job training for service engineers is not adequately communicated to employers.

12. In the service engineers' workplaces, witness testimony is used as evidence to demonstrate trainees' competence. Assessment is based around a scheme developed by a leading trade association, which uses task sheets to record trainees' achievements. The reliance on this scheme limits the diversity of evidence in the service engineers' portfolios. Assessment of horticulture and agriculture trainees takes place in the workplace by direct observation of their natural work performance. Assessments for agriculture trainees are carried out by a peripatetic assessor who visits the workplace on a regular basis and who undertakes assessments at short notice to suit the trainees' circumstances and seasonal operations. For agriculture trainees, a good rapport exists between assessors, trainees and employers who provide witness testimony, farm records and additional

diverse evidence. There is excellent co-ordination between workplace and college assessment for agriculture trainees. Although there are very few qualified workplace assessors in agriculture, the system of using peripatetic assessors is well used and assessment is rigorous. Several horticulture workplaces have qualified assessors.

13. The progress of all trainees to either secure full-time employment or further qualifications is excellent. Most service engineers continue with their current employers, and many are given the opportunity to progress to a fourth year to achieve the Agriculture Technician Diploma awarded by the national dealership. Additional courses leading to qualifications are also offered to service engineers, including welding at NVQ level 2. Almost all agriculture trainees enroll on level 2 programmes and progress to level 3 modern apprenticeship programmes on completion of level 2. Some trainees progress to full-time further education courses at the college. Most of the trainees on the agriculture programme are from farming families, so return to employment on the family farm at the end of the programme.

14. Most of the service-engineer employers have outstanding resources. The workshops are fully equipped for the maintenance of modern agricultural machinery. There are, however, a few workplaces without as many resources, but these are still adequate for the learning needs of trainees. All of the trainees from one national dealership receive a full set of industry-standard, theoretical and practical service manuals. Service manuals are readily available at all national dealerships. Some trainees receive loans from their employers for the purchase of tools.

15. Most of the farms employing trainees are relatively small businesses, with fewer than five staff, but are adequately resourced for training agriculture trainees. Most farms have a mixture of animal and arable enterprises, which allow the trainees to cover the full range of the NVQ without difficulty. Horticulture trainees work at golf clubs, nurseries or large private gardens. The first two are adequately resourced for training, and the third often provide exceptionally rich training environments with a very wide variety of garden and landscape types, tools, propagation and maintenance facilities, and sometimes sites of historic or cultural interest.

16. Brooksby College has well-equipped workshops for all trainees. There is a well-stocked library containing up-to-date books and magazines. For service engineers there is a separate welding workshop. The college farm is an excellent resource which is used by trainees for practical training and some assessment. The college buildings are surrounded by well-maintained gardens and sports pitches that are used by horticulture trainees as a training and learning resource. The college also has a small commercial plant nursery where trainees gain valuable experience of a commercial environment.

17. Individual training plans are compiled according to the TEC's requirements, and review dates are recorded on the training plan. However, action-planning following reviews is occasionally weak, tending to concentrate on welfare and pastoral

matters rather than focusing on what action needs to be taken to help trainees to achieve the elements and units of the NVQ.

18. Most trainees have a good grasp of portfolio-building requirements. However, the portfolios of horticulture trainees are kept by the college for safekeeping, and consequently these portfolios contain a standard and more limited range of evidence, usually witness testimonies, and many opportunities for including diverse evidence are missed.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

19. The college reviewed and revised its equal opportunities policy in September 1996 and again in March 1999. There are two separate policies, one relating to full- and part-time students and staff and the other to work-based trainees and staff. The college has recently formed an equal opportunities monitoring group which meets three times each year. The group consists of five members of staff, four students and one trainee, one representative from industry and one member of the college board. Terms of reference for the group have recently been agreed. The group monitors equal opportunities issues across the college and reports to the quality and verification group. Equal opportunities issues are included in induction for trainees and staff and the college has recently held equal opportunities training sessions for employers. Providers who were unable to attend these sessions have been sent the information by post. The college is committed to inclusive learning, making training available to all who want it, and has produced an action plan to achieve this. During 1998-99, 90 per cent of trainees were men. There were no trainees with disabilities or trainees from minority ethnic groups. There is access to ground floor rooms on the campus for those with mobility difficulties, and convenient parking available. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors acknowledged that all weaknesses have been addressed by appropriate action plans. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ separate equal opportunities policy specifically written for students and trainees
- ◆ targeted promotion of training to under-represented groups
- ◆ good equal opportunities training for staff and employers
- ◆ effective monitoring of equal opportunities during internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ indifference or hostility to equal opportunities in some workplaces

20. The equal opportunities policy is written in two distinct documents: one overall policy for the college and one specifically written for work-based trainees and employers. It is clearly written, in line with current legislation, and includes a complaints and grievances procedure. This ensures that the information given to trainees is specific to their requirements and is easily understood by them. The college recognises the difficulties it has in recruiting from minority groups within the local population, and from groups that are under-represented among current trainees, such as those living in towns. It has developed a number of marketing strategies aimed at these groups. For example, a recent postal campaign focused on areas with high proportions of minority ethnic groups in Leicester, college representatives attended a careers event held at a premier league football ground, and advertisements have been placed in a regional newspaper. Promotional material produced by the college includes positive images of those from under-represented groups, including showing women in non-traditional occupations. Material is included of those from minority ethnic groups, and a current display in the college's reception area shows people with disabilities working in agriculture. Targets are set for recruitment as a whole from these events, but specific targets for recruiting from minority ethnic and other under-represented groups are not set, either by the college or by the TEC. Although the recruitment of students from under-represented groups onto full-time courses has increased, this success is not yet reflected in numbers of trainees.

21. Internal verification reports include comments on equality of opportunity. Trainees work in a wide range of environments, so internal verifiers note if equality of opportunity is respected in the workplace and whether trainees are treated well at the college too, with regular opportunities for learning and assessment made available to them. This is fed back to the internal verification quality assurance meetings and helps to ensure that no trainee is disadvantaged during the assessment process.

22. Staff development has focused on equal opportunities for both college staff and the local employers. Recent events have included two training days at the college to raise awareness of equal opportunities issues among employers. Employers and work-placement providers unable to attend this event have received the information by post. This has helped to raise awareness of equality of opportunity in the workplace with many employers. Following internal staff development, the ability of staff to explain equal opportunities issues to trainees both during induction and throughout their programmes has improved.

23. Until recently, equal opportunities has been monitored by individual sections in the college and results were passed to the quality and verification group for action. Following self-assessment, an equal opportunities group was formed. The group has met and has established its terms of reference and these have been ratified by the college corporation. The group is not yet fully established into college systems.

24. Many workplace mess facilities for greenkeeping trainees are of a poor quality, cramped and untidy and do not provide adequate resources for trainees to pursue their training objectives and maintain their own training and assessment records.

Some of these mess facilities have calendars or posters on their walls which some people might find offensive. A few employers in small businesses demonstrate little regard for equality of opportunity and feel that equal opportunities policies are not appropriate to their business. This is particularly true of some small businesses, which claim they have no time to spend on monitoring compliance with the equal opportunities policy provided by the college. The college is actioning this through training and support sessions for these employers.

Trainee support

Grade 2

25. College representatives visit schools, local and national shows, and careers events (occasionally international ones), to promote training in the land-based sector. Most trainees are recruited by employers and referred to the college for training. The college induction programme includes a college tour, introduction to the NVQ and the portfolio-building process, and covers health and safety, equal opportunities, basic assessments, and the trainees' rights and responsibilities. There is a special induction day in July, to which trainees, parents and employers are invited. All trainees are given the Basic Skills Agency initial assessment to determine their learning support requirements for literacy and numeracy. The student services department within the college co-ordinates any additional support deemed necessary by initial assessment results. All trainees are assigned a personal tutor. The college operates a bus service for trainees from locations in Leicestershire, Rutland, the city of Leicester and from various parts of the east Midlands. Two significant weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of inspection. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good learning support in the workplace provided by basic skills trainers' visits
- ◆ active support for trainees in the workplace by employers
- ◆ detailed and comprehensive induction

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some standardisation of training plans
- ◆ some inadequate feedback given to trainees following initial assessment

26. Agriculture trainees benefit from weekly visits to their workplaces by a qualified basic skills trainer who also helps with their NVQ work. As well as providing good basic skills training and support at work for trainees, these visits also help to improve the employers' understanding of the NVQ and learning support. This initiative has proved to be very effective and is now being piloted in other programme areas.

27. Trainees undergo a comprehensive and effective induction process. Portfolios show that trainees are informed about the training programme and NVQ requirements. Health and safety is covered in detail. Trainees are fully and effectively introduced to the learning resources at the college. Trainees' understanding of subjects covered during induction is checked by issuing them with a questionnaire and by regularly revisiting these subjects.

28. Employers are very supportive of the training process and provide trainees with a high level of guidance and support. Employers value the NVQ and the process followed to achieve it. Many employers set aside a special period for trainees to build their portfolios within work time.

29. Individual training plans are compiled according to TEC requirements. However, although qualification aims and units are recorded, the individual training plans sometimes do not meet individual training needs as they occasionally do not include short- and long-term target dates. The training plans are infrequently amended, although reviews covering individual training plans, health and safety, and any pastoral issues take place at least every 12 weeks. All trainees take part in tutorial progress reviews during off-the-job training.

30. The college makes great efforts to administer basic skills assessments in a sensitive manner and to avoid trainees being made to feel different. Following their initial assessment, those trainees who require learning support are told about this. However, those not identified as requiring learning support are not always informed.

31. The college has effective policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning and experience. For example, the work-based internal verification co-ordinator is also qualified to accredit prior learning and in some cases is able to accredit level 2 agriculture evidence into level 3 portfolios without trainees repeating assessments. There are two people qualified as accreditation of prior learning advisors in horticulture, one in agriculture and one working towards this award in service engineering. The director of curriculum is also qualified to accredit prior learning. Throughout the college every department; equine, countryside, etc, has a qualified advisor and the college is able to scrutinise trainees' previous qualifications and experience in many areas and to determine where accreditation is suitable.

32. Effective pastoral support is given to trainees in all programme areas. College staff voluntarily open the service engineering workshops to trainees on a Wednesday evening for two and a half hours. This enables trainees to work on their NVQ practical projects or work on their own motor vehicles using the resources of the workshop. This encourages team spirit among the trainees and staff, and allows the staff to forge good working relationships with their trainees in an informal and relaxed environment. Trainees have the opportunity for personal counselling and advice, if necessary. In addition, trainees gain more experience within their vocational area.

Management of training

Grade 2

33. Management of training at Brooksby College is the responsibility of the director of curriculum and the director of finance. The career training administrator is responsible for maintaining records relating to training. The career training administrator also acts as the main reference point for employers and work-placement providers, and is also the main link between employers and college tutors. Management of work-based training at Brooksby College is closely integrated into the rest of the organisational structure and there is no separate training agency. Brooksby College was accredited with the Investors in People Standard in 1998. Three serious weaknesses covering the communication of administrative matters to employers, the internal handling of records, and the installation of an electronic system to help to provide information for the TEC, had been addressed by the time of inspection. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective staff training and development focused on work-based training
- ◆ successful programme to recruit and train work-based assessors
- ◆ good links between employers and the college
- ◆ good internal communication

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete management-information systems
- ◆ poor contingency planning for staff change

34. Staff at Brooksby College benefit from frequent and regular training and development that is focused on the needs of trainees. Recently this training has dealt with the need to promote equality of opportunity in the workplace and on improving communications between employers and college staff. There are effective and well-documented procedures for the recruitment of staff, induction, appraisal and professional development which are strictly adhered to.

35. For the past three years, the college has had a concerted programme for the recruitment and training of work-based assessors. Targets for recruiting work-based assessors are regularly set and the college has had considerable success in this area, particularly in horticulture and agriculture. The college is very supportive of employers. Many are small businesses with only one trainee, so the college acknowledges the administrative burden they take on by providing help and guidance, particularly with attendance records and other documents. There are formal links with the agricultural industry. The agriculture section has an industrial liaison group, and the Greenkeepers Association meets at the college each term. The college also maintains informal links with a wide range of employers, many of

whom are former trainees or students, across the region and, in the case of service engineers, across the country. These links mean that trainees benefit from access to an abundance of employment opportunities.

36. The college acknowledges that its current manual systems for handling management information, while adequate for processing information for current numbers of trainees, are cumbersome and not appropriate for planned increases in numbers. Electronic systems are more suited to monitoring information on students than trainees, who do not fit into the college term-time structure. The college plans to introduce electronic systems across all college programmes, but as yet these are not fully operational. Achievements, retention and progression are reviewed at least four times a year, and manually generated management information is effectively used to make decisions and set targets. However, a great deal of important knowledge and information relating to management of training is kept by individuals, rather than in a central and easily accessible system. The recent loss to the college of a key member of staff has resulted in much of this information becoming lost or, at least, difficult to retrieve. A replacement member of staff was found promptly and is working to address these problems.

37. Internal communication in the college is well managed. The college executive, which is made up of the principal, the director of finance and the director of curriculum, holds a planning day each term to review operating objectives, targets, and the development of aims and objectives for all college business, including training. This executive also meets on a weekly basis to discuss strategic and operational issues. The director of curriculum also meets at least monthly with managers and subject tutors. All meetings are minuted, and actions, and those responsible for them, are easy to track. Most managers have more than one role, and a clearly communicated organisational and line management structure means that training staff are effectively deployed.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

38. The college has a charter which is reviewed annually by a special working group drawn from the quality and verification group. The charter is in four sections and outlines the college's commitment to work in an efficient and effective fashion in a number of specified key areas. These include the handling of enquiries, applications and interviews, the provision of resources and computing facilities, the role of the college in relation to employers and the community, and the way trainees' progress is reported to employers. It also includes a clear complaints procedure which is promoted but has seldom been used. The director of curriculum and the curriculum and quality assurance co-ordinator are responsible for the development and maintenance of the college's quality assurance systems. All course teams and some support areas participate in a continuous cycle of action-planning, interim and annual review and self-assessment. In the self-assessment report, the college states that its quality assurance systems are not well adapted to work-based training. Much work has been done to rectify this situation. As a

consequence, inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ widespread involvement in and understanding of self-assessment process by staff
- ◆ specific internal verification co-ordinator for work-based training
- ◆ good inclusion of trainees' experiences of training quality

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal mechanisms for gaining feedback from service engineering and amenity horticulture employers
- ◆ no direct observation of training delivered by employers

39. The college has a comprehensive strategic plan. All staff share the responsibility for maintaining and improving quality, are encouraged to set and monitor standards, and have a good understanding of the quality assurance arrangements. The college has devised appropriate service standards and performance indicators for most business support areas, as well as for teaching and training. However, in some areas, procedures to monitor the standards are at an early stage of development.

40. A quality and verification group was established in 1997 to validate new quality assurance procedures and monitor their compliance. A schedule of internal inspections has been introduced to check evidence and validate the judgements in curriculum and support area self-assessment reports. Good practice is highlighted and areas for improvement identified. Reports are compiled then carefully scrutinised by the quality and verification group and the academic board. The academic board's minutes and agendas are clearly recorded, with papers on items for consideration submitted for inclusion on the agenda in good time. The academic board has taken an active part in making recommendations to the governors and in college management. These internal inspections are based on the FEFC's inspection framework, but also make reference to the Training Standards Council's *Raising the Standard* where appropriate. One of the main benefits of these internal inspections and self-assessment reports is that all staff involved either directly in training or in the administration of training have a thorough knowledge and understanding of, and continual involvement in, quality assurance arrangements.

41. Quality assurance arrangements are primarily designed to improve the learning experience of full-time students. However, measures have been taken that relate exclusively to trainees, such as the appointment of an internal verification co-ordinator specifically for work-based training.

42. Internal verification procedures are well designed and rigorously applied, and extend to all trainees, all programmes, all qualifications and all units. Also, to aid continuous improvement by staff, the internal verifiers undertake observations of training and assessment carried out by college staff. External verifiers' reports are, on the whole, favourable.

43. TEC-funded NVQ programmes have been subject to self assessment for two years. Trainees' forums are held each year for all NVQ programmes where trainees are encouraged to discuss their experiences. These discussions are minuted, with permission from the trainees, by the director of curriculum and the results analysed and included in the self-assessment process. A questionnaire, with standardised questions that allow for year-on-year comparison, is also completed by trainees three times each year.

44. Although there are excellent systems to gather and act on trainees' views, and the views of agriculture and greenkeeping employers, these arrangements do not extend to service engineering and amenity horticulture employers. However, this is an improvement on the situation described in the self-assessment report, where it is stated that there was no agreed procedure to ascertain the views of employers and industry representatives. A lot of successful work has been done since the production of the self-assessment report to address this problem, including the circulation of questionnaires and the establishment of training and development sessions.

45. Many of the measures to determine the quality of training and assessment delivered by college staff are detailed and rigorous, including direct observation of training. However, college staff do not directly observe on-the-job training by employers. The college acknowledges this in its self-assessment report and is working on what action would be feasible and appropriate to improve on the existing indirect measures, such as assessment of portfolios, trainee feedback, etc.

46. The self-assessment report is, on the whole, a reasonable reflection of the training provided by the college, with many strengths correctly identified and appropriate action plans drawn up to address weaknesses. Many of the weaknesses have been effectively dealt with since the production of the self-assessment report.