



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT HEATHROW TRAINING OCTOBER
1998 REINSPECTION EAST BERKSHIRE COLLEGE
TRAINING AGENCY MARCH 2000

East Berkshire College
Training Agency
(Formerly Heathrow Training)



SUMMARY

East Berkshire College Training Agency provides government-funded, work-based training programmes in engineering, motor vehicle engineering, construction, hairdressing, business administration, customer service, sports and recreation, graphic design and decorative horticulture. At the time of the first inspection, Heathrow Training provided training programmes in construction, engineering and motor vehicle engineering. Health and safety was given high priority. Motor-vehicle engineering trainees received progress reviews regularly and they were set achievable targets. Most trainees received good support from employers. In construction, off-the-job training was good. There was no overall co-ordination of the training process. Motor-vehicle training was less than satisfactory and engineering training was poor. In the months immediately prior to the first inspection, there had been substantial changes in management and staffing. Newly appointed managers had produced action plans to address weaknesses in training. Some staff were uncertain of their roles and responsibilities. Aspects of management were poor. Equal opportunities data was not analysed. Management information was not used effectively. Quality assurance was weak. Following implementation of the action plan produced after the first inspection, training programmes in construction are satisfactory and trainees are progressing towards achievement of their National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Although training in engineering has improved since the first inspection, it is less than satisfactory. Some trainees make slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ, and some of the changes proposed in the action plan have yet to be fully implemented. The inclusion of the training agency within the main body of the college has enabled the newly appointed managers and staff to take swift action to address many of the key weaknesses originally identified by inspectors in equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance. Although there are still weaknesses to be rectified, inspectors found these generic areas satisfactory.

As a result of the reinspection of East Berkshire College Training Agency (formerly Heathrow Training), the original published report text for the occupational areas and generic aspects of provision have been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. The summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	4
Engineering	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	5
Quality assurance	5



INSPECTION REPORT: HEATHROW TRAINING OCTOBER 1998
REINSPECTION (AS EAST BERKSHIRE COLLEGE TRAINING
AGENCY) MARCH 2000

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good support for trainees from employers
- ◆ keen commitment to uphold equal opportunities by all parties involved in training
- ◆ achievement of higher education qualifications by trainees
- ◆ good links between college staff and work-based trainers
- ◆ provision of effective additional learning support by the college
- ◆ managers have identified and are addressing the significant weaknesses
- ◆ effectiveness of quality assurance in leading to the steady improvement of training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training in some workplaces
- ◆ trainees' slow progress towards achieving NVQs
- ◆ failure to carry out some trainees' progress reviews with requisite frequency
- ◆ no systematic sharing of good practice by staff across all areas



INTRODUCTION

1. Following the inspection of Heathrow Training, East Berkshire College closed the company and established the East Berkshire College Training Agency. The agency is an integral part of the vocational faculty of the college. The agency is responsible for the management and administration of the college's work-based training contracted through West London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and Thames Valley Enterprise (TVE). Training programmes are in the occupational areas of engineering, motor vehicle engineering, construction, hairdressing, business administration, customer service, sports and recreation, graphic design and decorative horticulture.
2. Heathrow Training is a managing agent for East Berkshire College, delivering work-based training funded through West London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Most training is in the occupational areas of construction, mechanical engineering and motor-vehicle engineering. Off-the-job training is delivered at four college centres and, for motor-vehicle trainees, through an independent subcontractor. All the trainees are employed with companies in the Heathrow and west London area. Trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2 or 3, through work-based training programmes for young people or modern apprenticeships.
3. The Thames Valley corridor, along the eastern sector of which Heathrow Training operates, has the strongest economy in the United Kingdom outside London, with an unemployment rate of about 2 per cent. In the contracting TEC area, the construction and engineering craft sectors report severe skills shortages, with only 20 per cent of those employed in the construction industry in receipt of education and training. In these sectors, Heathrow Training has trainees employed by about 75 different companies.
4. The west London area, particularly around Heathrow, has a high proportion of refugees, 25 per cent of whom hold degree qualifications. Ten per cent of the respondents to a 1997 workforce survey conducted by the TEC reported that they had a first language other than English. The number of school leavers in the surrounding areas of Hounslow and Hillingdon achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above were 46.5 per cent and 44 per cent respectively, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997.



INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Heathrow Training produced its first self-assessment report for inspection. The report is predominantly the work of the newly appointed commercial manager. Self-assessment was carried out according to the Council's framework, and the report followed a format supplied by an external consultant. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report. The report included an ambitious plan of proposed action for addressing identified weaknesses. It highlighted many strengths and weaknesses which inspectors agreed with. They found some additional weaknesses, however, and awarded lower grades than those given by Heathrow Training.

6. The training agency produced its first self-assessment report for reinspection. The report was completed in January 2000. Self-assessment involved all the agency staff, and took account of the views of employers and trainees. The agency was supported by TVE and West London TEC in developing its self-assessment. Self-assessment examined the effectiveness of the action plan resulting from the first inspection. The self-assessment report was far more realistic than that produced by Heathrow Training and inspectors agreed with many of its judgements. Many of the weaknesses identified in the report had already been rectified by the time of the reinspection, although in some instances, it is too early to judge whether action taken on them is effective. Inspectors agreed with the grades given in the report for each section except engineering, where they awarded a lower grade.

7. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Heathrow Training during October 1998. Training in construction, engineering and motor vehicles was inspected. Inspectors examined documents at the company's offices and training centre and at employers' premises. They met managers and staff from the company, the subcontractor, employers, trainees and representatives of the further education college providing off-the-job training, the TEC and the regional government office. Inspectors visited four of the company's sites where off-the-job training is delivered, the subcontractor and 28 workplaces. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios, records of trainees' reviews, trainees' files and other documents associated with training and its management. Four training sessions were observed, and the following table shows the grades awarded by inspectors.

8. The agency was reinspected in March 2000 by a team of four inspectors over a total of 16 days. Inspectors visited 16 work placements, covering engineering and construction. They interviewed 45 trainees, 18 workplace supervisors and staff and managers responsible for the management and implementation of training in the agency, college and workplace. Meetings were held with managers and staff in the agency and college responsible for quality assurance, equal opportunities and trainee support. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work and

portfolios, records of trainees' reviews, trainees' files and other documents associated with training and its management. Seven training sessions were observed, and the following table shows the grades the inspectors awarded.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions during the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction			1			1
Engineering			2			2
Motor vehicle				1		1
Total	0	0	3	1	0	4

Grades awarded to instructional sessions during reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2	1	1		4
Engineering		1	2			3
Total	0	1	3	1	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

9. East Berkshire College Training Agency has 62 trainees on construction training programmes. The trainees are distributed across programmes as follows: 32 in electrical installation, seven in plumbing, 14 in wood trades, five in bricklaying and four in painting and decorating. Twenty-three of the electrical installations trainees are on a modern apprenticeship programme, working towards achievement of NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and the remaining trainees, on other programmes of work-based training for young people, are working towards achievement of an NVQ at level 2. All the trainees are employed and attend college on a day-release basis where they are working towards nationally recognised qualifications. Off-the-job training is provided by occupationally qualified staff, most of whom are also qualified teachers and have achieved assessor qualifications. Some of the college tutors are qualified as internal verifiers. Trainees are visited regularly in the workplace by the training agency's training co-ordinators. The training co-ordinators carry out the trainees' induction and progress reviews, and provide liaison with the employers.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ irregular review of trainees' progress and some poor action-planning

- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of the training programme
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based training and assessment
- ◆ trainees and trainers' poor understanding of key skills and their assessment

In their post-inspection action plan and recent self-assessment report managers and staff identified actions taken, and some yet to be completed, to rectify the weaknesses identified by the first inspection team. At reinspection, inspectors found some additional strengths and weaknesses but agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report for this aspect of provision.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good individualised off-the-job training
- ◆ good progress in implementing key skills training in most areas
- ◆ rigorous system of monitoring trainees' achievements in most areas
- ◆ good development of work-based assessment on the pilot scheme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training on some programmes
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessments in the workplace

10. Trainees are able to commence training throughout the year and are not restricted to the usual college start dates. All the trainees receive a thorough induction and they are able to demonstrate a good awareness of the health and safety requirements of their industry, the requirements of the NVQ and its assessment and the college's approach to equality of opportunity. Awareness of the importance of health and safety is strengthened at a second induction, into the workplace.

11. Off-the-job training in the college is good. Theory sessions take due account of the abilities of individual trainees. Good use is made of packages of training materials which enable the trainees to work individually and organise their own learning. During some off-the-job training sessions, the trainees are helped by a tutor, often on a one-to-one basis. Facilities for off-the-job training are generally satisfactory, although some former laboratories, used as classrooms for electrical installation trainees, are not well suited to the purpose, with some trainees facing away from the tutor. Practical sessions of off-the-job training are well planned and trainees work enthusiastically. They are aware of their learning goals and produce work to a good standard. Trainees are making good progress in acquiring key skills through the vocational aspects of their training and trainees are progressing well towards their achievement.

12. The progress of trainees towards achievement of the NVQ is monitored and accurately recorded by tutors. In most areas records are computerised and trainees are aware of their progress. They know what work they have to complete in order to obtain the award. Some records of electrical installation trainees' progress are not well kept. The section has invested in software designed for computerised monitoring of trainees' achievement of NVQ units, but is not yet using this fully.

13. Training co-ordinators visit trainees in the workplace, at least, every eight weeks to review trainees' progress. The relationship between training staff, trainees and their employers is good and most employers are well informed about their trainees and their progress. Some of the training co-ordinators, however, are not occupationally qualified and when carrying out reviews of trainees' progress, they do not record detailed information about the trainees' achievement of short-term targets. They also make few links between the trainees' work in the workplace and off-the-job training.

14. Most assessments of competence for the NVQ are carried out at college and many opportunities to gather evidence of competence in the workplace are missed. The assessments are thorough and clearly recorded, and trainees understand the assessment process well. Internal verification of assessments is planned and clearly recorded. A pilot scheme for assessment in the workplace is being run for carpentry and joinery trainees. A lecturer with responsibility for on-site assessment consults with the employers to plan on-site assessments prior to an assessment visit. Employers welcome this development as a positive step towards ensuring that trainees, many of whom are highly mobile, can generate evidence of their competence in a work-based setting. The pilot scheme has proved successful and the construction section plans to extend it to cover all its provision.

15. At the time of the first inspection, records of trainees and their achievements were unreliable. Since then, record keeping has become more accurate and records show that only one trainee has left a construction training programme early. Since the first inspection, no trainee has yet achieved the NVQ.

Engineering

Grade 4

16. East Berkshire College Training Agency has 34 engineering and 16 motor vehicle trainees, of whom 17 are modern apprentices and 33 are on other programmes of work-based training for young people. All the trainees are employed. Most of the motor vehicle trainees attend college on a day-release basis, although some attend a separate training centre. The carrying out of progress reviews and assessment for motor vehicle trainees is subcontracted to a local training provider. Engineering trainees attend college on a day-release basis, although first-year modern apprentices attend either as full-time students or on two days a week, depending on their employers' arrangements with the training

agency. On-the-job training is carried out in the workplace, but assessment of on-the-job training is carried out by a subcontractor and college staff. Engineering and motor vehicle trainees are working towards achievement of NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and another qualification.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor management of training in the Heathrow centre
- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of NVQs and assessment procedures
- ◆ trainees' slow progress towards achieving NVQs
- ◆ poor tracking of trainees' progress and achievement
- ◆ ineffective working relationships between some trainers and trainees
- ◆ little provision or assessment of key skills

The agency's action plan and subsequent self-assessment report proposed measures to improve the quality of training and assessment. At reinspection, inspectors found that some aspects of the action plan had not been fully implemented. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report prepared for the reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured off-the-job training
- ◆ well-resourced engineering facility at Maidenhead
- ◆ good links between off-the-job training and some employers' on-the-job training
- ◆ some trainees' success in obtaining additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of direct observation of assessment in the workplace
- ◆ some trainees' and employers' lack of awareness of programme requirements at NVQ level 3
- ◆ no assessment of key skills in engineering
- ◆ some trainees' slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ
- ◆ move to reviews by vocationally competent staff not fully implemented

17. Off-the-job training for engineering trainees is carefully planned and structured. Modern apprentices from one large manufacturing company undertake their first year of training entirely in the college and work towards achievement of an NVQ at level 2 in engineering foundation. The programme they follow is well managed and they produce practical work to a good standard. The engineering facilities at the college are good and provide trainees with a wide range of learning opportunities.

18. On-the-job training varies in its effectiveness. Links between the motor vehicle subcontractor, the college and the employers are good and employers have a clear understanding of their trainees' requirements. The subcontractors staff visit motor vehicle trainees in the workplace regularly and carry out effective reviews of trainees' progress. Although many of the staff are qualified assessors, most assessment of the trainees' competence in the workplace is based on evidence provided through workplace supervisors witnessing trainees' performance of tasks. Similarly, much of the assessment of engineering trainees is based upon workplace supervisors' opinions of the trainees' work. There is no assessment of trainees' performance in the workplace by qualified assessors. Key skills training is an integral part of motor vehicle training programmes. Most engineering trainees, however, have little awareness of the requirement for them to acquire and demonstrate competence in key skills. There has been no formal assessment of key skills in engineering, even for trainees who expect to complete their NVQ at level 3 in the near future.

19. In December 1999, training agency managers decided that the college's engineering staff, rather than their own staff who were not necessarily qualified engineers, should visit workplaces to carry out reviews of trainees' progress. Where engineering staff have carried out such visits, the trainees and their employers express their appreciation of them and their understanding of the requirements of the training programme is good. At one large manufacturing company, employing 21 of the engineering trainees, a member of the college's engineering staff visits every week and trainees are each seen once a fortnight. In this company, the links between on- and off-the-job training are good and the college is working with the company to try and ensure that trainees are assessed through direct observation in the workplace. Trainees have the opportunity to progress to programmes of off-the-job training leading to additional qualifications, and some of the modern apprentices are undertaking studies leading to higher education qualifications.

20. Some trainees, however, have not yet received a progress review by a member of the college's engineering staff, and in one case there has been no visit to the workplace since October 1999. Some trainees and their employers do not have a clear understanding of the requirements of the training programme. Some trainees have made slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ, particularly at level 3. Since the last inspection, some trainees are progressing at a faster rate but only five trainees have achieved an NVQ at level 2 and none have achieved an NVQ at level 3 or completed a modern apprenticeship.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

21. East Berkshire College Training Agency has adopted the college's well-established policy and procedures for equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy, and the complaints and grievance procedures are contained in a handbook issued to all trainees. Key aspects of the policy and the organisations commitment to equal opportunities are reinforced as part of the trainees' induction. Employers are required to sign up to the college's policy or demonstrate that they have an acceptable policy of their own.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic analysis of data on trainees' ethnicity, gender and disability
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities by staff and trainees
- ◆ no promotion of equal opportunities

Following implementation of the college's action plan, considerable improvements have been made to this aspect of provision. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the training agency's recent self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and widely understood equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ strong promotion of equal opportunities to staff and trainees
- ◆ participation in local initiatives to attract trainees from under-represented groups
- ◆ appropriate proportions of women and persons from minority ethnic groups among staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no analysis of applicants and interviewees in terms of ethnicity, gender or disability
- ◆ under representation of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds

22. The Training Agency uses the College's clearly written and comprehensive equal opportunities policy and related procedures. The policy is reviewed regularly and modified to reflect any changes in legislation. All trainees and staff receive a copy of the policy and, together with the college's complaints and grievance procedures, this is explained at induction. Trainees recall this aspect of their

induction clearly and are aware of how to use the procedures. When agreeing to place a young person on a training programme, agency staff ensure that the employer is aware of the college's equal opportunities policy and complaints procedures and employers are required to sign an agreement stating that they will maintain equality of opportunity for the trainees in the workplace. Employers either adopt the college's policies, or have an acceptable policy of their own. Training Agency staff monitor the workplaces regularly to check that employers are upholding equality of opportunity.

23. Information about the trainees, relating to ethnicity, gender and disability is collected and analysed. Similar information about applicants is available through the agency's management information system. It is not analysed or used systematically in the planning of promotion and recruitment procedures. A large proportion of the local population is from minority ethnic groups but trainees from these groups are under-represented on programmes. Of the agency's 147 trainees, only nine identify themselves as being from ethnic minority backgrounds.

24. The agency and college promote equality of opportunity through positive images and clear statements in their marketing materials. Amongst managers and staff of the agency, women and people from minority ethnic backgrounds are well represented and they promote equality of opportunity effectively at local promotional and recruiting events. The training agency participates in many local events aimed at informing groups under-represented on training programmes about the training opportunities available to them.

Trainee support

Grade 3

25. Applicants for training are referred to the East Berkshire Training Agency by the careers service, local schools and employers. Through the college, the agency has strong links with local schools. Taster days are run three times a year, in conjunction with the careers service, and these give local school pupils the opportunity to experience training in various occupational areas. When an individual applies to join a training programme, agency staff provide advice and guidance and carry out a test of the applicant's basic skills. All applicants are interviewed and, on joining a programme, undertake a programme of induction. Once on a training programme, the trainees have access to the full range of support facilities available from the college and are regularly visited in the workplace by staff who review their progress.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ the failure to take the results of initial assessment into account in the preparation of individual training plans
- ◆ infrequent progress reviews for construction and engineering trainees
- ◆ no systematic accreditation of prior learning

26. In its recent self-assessment report, the agency recognised that some of the action plans drawn up after the first inspection have yet to be fully implemented across all vocational areas. Inspectors agreed with the revised grading given by the agency.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ rigorous assessment of trainees' basic skills
- ◆ clear guidance for new trainees
- ◆ good provision of additional learning support in the college
- ◆ fortnightly progress reviews in the workplace for many trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to set trainees short-term targets during some progress reviews
- ◆ some reviews not carried out within the target period
- ◆ no structured review of effectiveness of additional support in the workplace

27. At the time of the reinspection, all the 147 trainees were in full-time employment. Some were employed and had been referred to the agency by their employers, but most trainees, including those referred to the agency by the college, were found jobs in relevant industries by the agency staff. All applicants for training are invited to a half-day interview and initial assessment session. The agency provides these twice each month and each applicant receives a letter clearly detailing the purpose and content of the interview session. The sessions are carried out at the college's Windsor and Langley centres, and consist of a brief introductory talk, followed by a detailed assessment of the applicant's numeracy, literacy and communication skills. The assessment involves the use of an interactive computer package, which enables the staff to identify the trainees' specific development needs and additional support needs. Applicants receive immediate feedback on the results of their assessment through a one-to-one interview. This interview helps applicants to identify the specific vocational area of training to which they are best suited. Applicants are given clear advice and guidance regarding their chosen training programme. Agency staff use their contacts with local employers to place trainees in suitable employment. Applicants do not receive any systematic assessment of their information technology key skills.

28. All trainees receive a thorough induction to their training programme and this covers health and safety, equal opportunities and the facilities available to trainees. They are given clear information about their training programmes, the qualifications for which they are aiming, and assessment. Trainees receive a further induction from their employers when they start their on-the-job training.

29. When the trainees begin their off-the-job training, a further assessment of their skills and learning support needs is carried out within the college. Any identified additional support needs are met through the college's learning support unit. Usually, additional support is provided by the curriculum areas responsible for the off-the-job training component of the programme.

30. Much of the support for trainees in the workplace meets needs identified through the trainees' progress reviews. The agency requires progress reviews to take place at least once every eight weeks, which is more frequent than the contractual requirement of 12 weeks. Most engineering trainees and some trainees in other vocational areas receive progress reviews every two weeks. Since the decision was taken, however, for college rather than agency staff to visit the trainees in the workplace, a few engineering trainees have not received a progress review at all.

31. The progress reviews involve the trainers, the trainees and their workplace supervisors and are seen by all parties as an effective means of spurring trainees on to achievement of the NVQ. The records of most progress reviews are clear and detailed and include short-term targets. The records of some reviews, however, are cursory and do not include any targets. Where trainees' support needs in the workplace are identified, they are quickly met. The additional learning curriculum area staff give trainees is not co-ordinated with that provided by the support unit. There are no systematic arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of the support trainees receive.

Management of training

Grade 3

32. Since the first inspection of work-based training provision at East Berkshire College, considerable changes have been made to the management structure and the implementation of the management of work-based training. The original training unit, Heathrow Training, which operated autonomously has been closed. The new East Berkshire College Training Unit, which manages the work-based training provision of the college is incorporated within the vocational faculty of the college and is an integral post of the college. It was established in 1999. The college has recruited new managers and staff to the agency and they have moved rapidly to implement the measures proposed in the action plan following the first inspection. The agency has been in existence for about six months. The newly appointed managers and staff of the agency have moved rapidly to implement measures in the action plan drawn up after the first inspection, but some of these have still to be carried out.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no clear or effective management structure

- ◆ some inadequately implemented aspects of policy and procedure
- ◆ poor communications between all parties in the training process
- ◆ ineffectively managed training
- ◆ failure to make management information readily available to staff
- ◆ no systematic staff review and development
- ◆ ineffective deployment of staff
- ◆ inadequate resources to meet contractual requirements
- ◆ few performance targets set, monitored or reviewed

33. In their recent self-assessment report, managers and staff from the training agency recognised the need to maintain the progress made since the first inspection and identified current strengths and weaknesses with which the inspectors agreed. During the reinspection, inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses but agreed with the grade given in the revised self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and widely understood management structure
- ◆ good links between curriculum areas and work-based training provision
- ◆ well-managed off-the-job training
- ◆ well-defined roles and responsibilities for all staff involved with training programmes
- ◆ systematic business planning and rigorous management of work-based provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor management of some on-the-job training
- ◆ failure to ensure all policies and procedures relate to the workplace
- ◆ no systematic setting of performance targets for some staff

34. The managers and staff of the agency were appointed to carry out a complete review of the college's work-based training provision and address the issues identified through inspection. Some of the college's procedures, however, have not yet been amended to ensure they are relevant to training in the workplace.

35. Strategic planning by the senior management of the college, makes the training agency an integral part of the college's structure and provides for the links between the agency and the curriculum areas that provide the off-the-job training. In the college's business plan, there is a clear statement that work-based training is now

seen as crucial to the future of the college. The plan includes measurable targets for the continuous improvement of provision for work-based trainees. The college holds an annual planning conference involving all staff. Work-based training is high on the college's agenda and recent focus groups have addressed key skills training, construction training development and the sharing of good practice by other training providers. Communications between college and agency staff and managers are good. A schedule of meetings is circulated to all staff. All meetings are minuted and the implementation of action points is monitored.

36. Staff recruitment procedures are clearly set down in writing. There are clear job descriptions for each post within the agency to which the appropriately qualified and experienced staff are recruited. A staff appraisal system has been introduced. All members of staff are to be appraised every six months and have their training needs identified during their appraisal. At the time of the reinspection, some of the most recently appointed staff had not been appraised. Clear performance targets are set relating to the TEC contract, and trainees' recruitment, retention and achievement rates. However, responsibility for achieving some of these targets lies with staff in particular curriculum areas, rather than the agency, and they are not always made aware of the targets formally.

37. Off-the-job training is well managed. Theory and practical sessions are well planned. Links between on- and off-the-job training, however, are weak on some programmes in construction and engineering. On-the-job training for a small number of trainees is poorly managed. Some trainees have inappropriate placements. For example, one trainee was placed on a modern apprenticeship scheme with an employer who could not provide him with work through which he could demonstrate NVQ competencies across the requisite range. Since the last inspection, staff have taken action to rectify weaknesses in the management of training but problems relating to some trainees' on-the-job training remain unresolved.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

38. The agency's new managers and staff have taken action to remedy the major deficiencies found during the first inspection of the quality assurance of work-based training. The well-established quality assurance system used by the college has been extended to cover TEC-funded, work-based training. The agency is in the process of modifying quality assurance procedures to make sure they cover training in the workplace.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ the failure to implement new quality assurance procedures fully
- ◆ low staff awareness of the quality assurance system
- ◆ poor monitoring of trainees' achievements

- ◆ inconsistent use of standard documentation
- ◆ lack of action to address identified issues
- ◆ no systematic analysis of trainees and employers' views
- ◆ no action-planning for continuous improvement

39. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses stated in the revised self-assessment report, but found some the agency had not identified. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective adaptation of college's quality assurance system to cover work-based training
- ◆ effectiveness of observation of off-the-job training in leading to improvements
- ◆ good analysis of trainees' and employers' views to assist action planning
- ◆ prompt action to resolve issues raised by trainees
- ◆ improvement in the quality of training in most areas

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate internal verification processes in some workplaces
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice across all vocational areas
- ◆ insufficient explanatory information on NVQs for engineering trainees

40. Following a review of the quality assurance provision, the new managers and staff have made sure that work-based training is covered by the quality assurance processes of the college. There is a clearly written policy and there are procedures for the observation of off-the-job training sessions, checking internal verification procedures, gathering trainees' and employers' views, monitoring and recording trainees' progress and achievements. Some aspects of the quality assurance system have been specifically extended to cover the quality of training and assessment in the workplace, but they have not yet been fully implemented in all occupational areas.

41. The quality of work-based training and assessment has improved since the first inspection. Improvements have been made in response to findings from lesson observations. The training agency carried out an analysis of trainees' and employers' responses to questionnaires and drew up an action plan to address the issues identified. Although at an early stage of implementation, the action plan has led to improvements. For example, trainees and employers cited a lack of understanding of the NVQ and its assessment. In response, the agency has



provided information about the NVQ process and this has led to a great improvement of the situation in the workplace for many trainees. No returns to the questionnaire were received from engineering employers and trainees and similar action has not been taken in this occupational area. In all vocational areas, trainees benefit from the rapid response of college and agency staff to identified issues. Some trainees, however, have not yet received a visit in the workplace from their tutor and have not had the opportunity to voice concerns about issues they wish to be addressed.

42. Internal verification in the college or at the subcontractor's centre is carried out well and carefully recorded. Verification sampling plans are clear and internal verification findings are available to appropriate staff. Internal verification of assessments in the workplace is not carried out well. Internal verification of portfolio evidence is often only carried out at the end of the programme, prior to submission of the portfolios for external verification. External verifiers' reports are copied to all appropriate staff and any recommendations are quickly acted upon.

43. There is good practice in all occupational areas. There is, for instance, good assessment practice in the workplace in business administration and, in some instances, in construction. The quality assurance system identifies good practice in each occupational area. This is not systematically shared by staff across areas. All staff have a clear understanding of the quality assurance system. At some work placements, however, the implementation of the quality assurance procedures has been slow, and a noticeable improvement in the quality of training has not ensued.