



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 2000

The National Construction College



SUMMARY

The National Construction College is the largest training centre of its kind in the world, providing excellent practical facilities to meet the identified needs of the industry. Most trainees benefit from good training, extensive resources and are assisted by dedicated staff. Considerable emphasis is placed on and practised in health and safety. Equality of opportunity is widely publicised, although there has been little success in attracting non-stereotypical applicants. Many residential trainees undertake additional certificated studies which enhance employability. Since the first inspection, additional staff appointments have been made to support the trainees while they are in the workplace and while they are gathering site-based evidence to complete their portfolios. The collection of site-based evidence and assessment for general construction trainees are undertaken at the end of their programme, and opportunities to collect naturally occurring evidence are missed. Staff work together to address weaknesses in training, but some targets lack ownership. Different disciplines tend to operate in isolation, and best practice is not always shared. Quality assurance procedures are not consistently used to improve performance. Achievement and retention rates vary considerably among occupational sectors. Owing to the wide range of the specialist training at the college, the Training Standards Council has, exceptionally, agreed to grade each element of construction separately.

As a result of reinspection, the original published report text for construction (general construction) and management of training has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction (plant operations)	2
Construction (plant maintenance & repair)	2
Construction (construction technicians)	2
Construction (general construction)	4
Construction (access)	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Construction (general construction)	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent equipment and plant resources available to trainees
- ◆ well-planned and -documented off-the-job training
- ◆ extensive opportunities for additional studies provided
- ◆ well-motivated and enthusiastic trainees
- ◆ experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ good achievement rates in plant operations, maintenance and technician studies
- ◆ health and safety awareness central to all off-the-job training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment during general construction programmes
- ◆ no effective review of training
- ◆ no formal mechanism for sharing best practice
- ◆ lack of rigour and ownership for target-setting
- ◆ low achievement rates of full awards in general construction and scaffolding
- ◆ no regular monitoring of trainees and employers' views



INTRODUCTION

1. Owing to the wide range of the specialist training at The National Construction College (TNCC), the Training Standards Council (TSC) exceptionally, agreed to grade each element of construction separately.

2. Following the implementation of the *Industrial Training Act 1964* and the formation of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), a group of large national civil engineering contractors requested that facilities to train young people as skilled operatives and potential foremen be found. A Royal Air Force station in West Norfolk, about 16 miles from Kings Lynn and 44 miles from Peterborough, was purchased by CITB and converted into the Bircham Newton training centre. The 450-acre site has three large hangers covering 15,000 square metres of indoor space, numerous supporting workshops, offices, a restaurant, residential accommodation and leisure facilities. Its size enables plant training to be carried out with few space restrictions. The centre opened in 1966 as the Bircham Newton Training Centre (BNTC), providing outdoor training mainly in mechanical plant operations. The Civil Engineering College (CECOL) opened on the site in 1969, providing training for young new entrants to the civil engineering sector of the industry. As training diversified into such activities as scaffolding, health and safety, supervisory studies, surveying, steeplejacks and lightening conductor installations, the college was renamed in July 1998 as The National Construction College. Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) administers the college's contract and receives additional funding from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to support trainees recruited throughout England. The TEC funding is approximately one-sixth of the total running costs of the college, the balance being collected through industry levy, course and residential fees and consultancy.

3. TNCC is the largest construction industry training centre in the world and can take up to 500 trainees each week. Trainees are recruited nationally through CITB's area offices. The college structure, under its general manager, has been re-organised since the original inspection. Two new training managers were appointed in November 1999 and two new entrant training officers took up post in February 1999 to undertake pre-placement safety checks, monitoring and review of trainees' progress while on site. A new quality and compliance co-ordinator was appointed in January 2000 to link together the training activity from the agreement of the individual training plan to the attainment of the primary learning goal. The trainee services department is responsible for co-ordinating the recruitment of trainees and for their welfare while at college, and it provides a programme of personal development and leisure activities for evenings and weekends. The administration department provides support to each department. Maintenance, cleaning, security and reception services are no longer managed by college staff. The college's mission is to provide a direct training and assessment service in construction skills



not available elsewhere in terms of type, quality or quantity, to maximise the cost-effective use of resources and thus minimise the cost to industry.

4. The residential complex has mainly furnished rooms with single beds and study desks. All residential delegates have free use of the many on-site leisure facilities, including a 25-metre indoor heated swimming pool, multi-gym, and squash and tennis courts. Outdoor football and rugby pitches are floodlit. A full meals service is provided for trainees and staff in self-service restaurants, with bar and television lounges also available. One performance indicator TNCC uses is to determine the total annual capacity of the college in weeks, then measure the level of occupancy they actually achieve over the year. In 1997, a total of 7,799 youth trainees' attendance weeks were achieved, plus 2,511 for adults, which was a little higher than the previous year. In 1998, the recruitment of young people exceeded targets while the number of trainee weeks for adults was only 90 per cent of that targeted. In 1999, the total number of attendance weeks was 94 per cent of that targeted, with 8,555 by young people and 2,536 by adults.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The first self-assessment report was compiled through consultation following staff's attendance at several workshops arranged for training providers by the TECs in the east region. The report provided an overview of the occupational area followed by more detailed sections for each graded subdivision. The management team first analysed and assessed its training against the quality statements in the TSC's draft guidelines, and then involved all senior instructors and supervisors before extending the process to all staff. The senior staff in each department wrote the individual department reports, and their findings were incorporated into the composite action plan for the college. A section to embrace judgements on construction technicians was tabled at the start of the inspection. The report was found to be realistic in most aspects, although inspectors' judgements disagreed with some of the grades given. Inspectors regarded some strengths listed as no more than normal practice, and the weaknesses were not comprehensive. Clear cross-referencing to the evidence base was provided for the strengths, but not for the weaknesses. Some action-planning was identified, but target dates were not always set. Inspectors agreed with the grading of all the occupational areas except general construction, to which they awarded a lower grade. However, generic aspects all graded lower, except for equal opportunities, for which inspectors awarded the same grade. Following the development of an approved action plan after the first inspection, TNCC re-organised its method of operation and began addressing the issues identified during inspection. For reinspection, TNCC produced a short report reflecting the changes made to address the issues raised for general construction and management of training. The report contained an organisational chart, which identified the new roles of senior staff. TNCC did not grade the areas to be reinspected.

6. At the first inspection, a team of eight inspectors spent 35 days reviewing the work of TNCC in November 1998. It was agreed that solely industry-funded training would be excluded from inspection, which would concentrate on the role of the college as a provider of TEC-supported training, with due account being taken of trainees' on-the-job experience. Inspectors observed and graded 14 mainly practical training sessions. A total of 124 trainees were observed and 64 interviewed at the Bircham Newton campus. Inspectors visited the facilities at a subcontracted college, where 41 construction technician trainees were observed studying for national certificate qualifications, and the staff were interviewed. Two local plant operators providing work placements were visited, and workplace supervisors interviewed with the respective trainee. Inspectors interviewed many managers, instructors and support staff and examined management documents, including annual reports, the business plan, assessment records, trainees' portfolios and files, external verifiers' reports, audit reports and minutes of management meetings.

7. A team of three inspectors spent 12 days on the reinspection. They visited five trainees on construction sites in East Anglia and observed assessments and reviews. They interviewed workplace supervisors and the accompanying officers of CITB. While at TNCC, inspectors met with 23 trainees, interviewed five college instructors and 10 senior members of staff. They examined the newly established data collection and monitoring procedures and reviewed management documents.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	3	4	7			14
Total	3	4	7	0	0	14

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction (plant operations)

Grade 2

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are involved in the hands-on operation of modern high-cost capital equipment, covering the widest use of construction earth-moving equipment, used in the business. Trainees often have the use of one machine each, and instructors communicate by radio in their cab. Conditions on the 100-acre site are simulated, but reflect true site situations, giving trainees realistic experience of working on a major construction project.

8. There are 33 youth trainees following the NVQ plant operations (earth-moving) level 2 programme and a certificate of training achievement (CTA) for each category of plant operated during the course. The college is the major provider of plant-operations training in the country. A wide variety of courses is offered, varying from 20 weeks' NVQ level 2 full-time youth training to one-day taster or refresher courses, according to industry demands. There are usually eight groups of TEC-supported trainees each year. Trainees are also offered a fork-truck award, provided that they are prepared to attend evening classes to achieve certification. Plant modules are also offered to trainees in the construction department. Inspectors agreed with the main findings of the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned, -recorded and -delivered training
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ trainees are enthusiastic about their training
- ◆ trainees and all instructors work well as a team
- ◆ excellent equipment and training facilities
- ◆ achievement rates are steadily improving

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no on-the-job assessment undertaken

- ◆ late achievers lose the opportunity to complete the qualification
- ◆ some training is restricted, owing to lack of site cleanliness and machine availability

POOR PRACTICE

Several training excavations, of unknown depth, had filled with water, resulting in the back-fill becoming muddy and difficult to walk on. Trainees were moved to other parts of the site, interrupting the flow of work and making it difficult for trainees and training staff to access the operational areas.

9. The NVQ programme lasts for 20 weeks, 18 of which are training and two are assessment, when students carry out a set project. Training is well organised, planned, delivered and documented. The college has excellent plant resources, with trainees often able to use a mechanical digger each. Trainees generally work in groups of six and are enthusiastically supported by experienced and well-qualified tutors. Staff have developed realistic project-based exercises for trainees to be done at the end of the course. They help in maintaining trainees' enthusiasm and reinforce learning. There are excellent working relationships among college instructors, senior training staff and assessors. Trainees often learn alongside adults, adding a role-model sense of importance to their activities. Over the last three years, retention rates and NVQ level 2 achievement rates have shown a clear and steady improvement, from 67 per cent in 1995 to 83 per cent in 1996. With 32 trainees starting and 13 complete NVQs to date in 1997, results are following a similar pattern to those of 1996. This improvement is primarily due to the restructuring of the slinger-signalling unit of the qualification and increasing the ratio of instructors to trainees from one to 10, to one to six.

POOR PRACTICE

A group of six trainees was allocated only three crawler tractors to operate, but alternative activity was not provided for half the group. Trainees missed an opportunity to build on additional training, which would have brought added value to trainees.

10. NVQs to level 2 in earth moving are delivered solely at the college, which does not provide assessment in the workplace. There are lost opportunities to build working relationships with workplace providers, to plan training and to assess in real site surroundings and conditions. Trainees, who do not achieve full unit accreditation inside 20 weeks at the NCC, are not routinely followed up in the workplace to ensure that outstanding units are completed. Trainees often have to arrange their own assessments and completion plans, although, in a few cases, employers send trainees back to complete outstanding unit assessments.

**Construction
(plant maintenance & repair)**

Grade 2

11. There are 249 youth trainees undertaking a modern apprenticeship programme incorporating NVQ level 3, of whom 96 are training at the NCC, while the remainder receives workplace training with an employer. The plant-mechanics training programme has been designed to meet the requirements specified by employers and provides additional elements and underpinning knowledge required by the awarding body. There are 48 employed youth trainees undertaking NVQ level 2. Trainee numbers have increased by 100 per cent over the last three years. Trainees undertake an initial 10-week programme in basic plant mechanics, when they are assessed for entry to the trainee or modern apprenticeship programme. Following a period of workplace training, they return to the NCC for a further 10-

week training period in the first year and two six-week blocks in the second year of the programme. In the third year, there are two weeks of assessments for modern apprenticeship trainees. The college has 9,000m² of workshop space and a substantial range of equipment and heavy plant available for plant-maintenance training purposes. Inspectors found some duplication of strengths cited in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and confirmed the weaknesses cited. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and effective initial assessment and induction
- ◆ training substantially exceeds the NVQ requirement
- ◆ well-planned and effectively delivered training
- ◆ excellent training resources readily available to trainees
- ◆ trainees have easy access to additional learning support
- ◆ NVQ achievement rates are high

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no assessment carried out in the workplace
- ◆ infrequent and unrecorded workplace trainee reviews
- ◆ some trainees are distracted from their training by welfare concerns
- ◆ inconsistently implemented disciplinary procedures

GOOD PRACTICE

Excellent modern resources are provided for plant-mechanic trainees, including 600 small plant items and 20 pieces of heavy plant. This equipment is located in a realistic work environment, providing excellent simulation and training opportunities.

12. Practical and theory training sessions are well planned and effectively delivered. Tutors hold appropriate engineering and training qualifications and have extensive vocational experience. Trainees are generally attentive, diligent and well disciplined. Trainees enjoy their training. Workshops are well appointed, with an extensive range of machinery available for trainees to work on, providing the opportunity for highly realistic workplace simulation. Two information technology rooms, complete with up-to-date software on networked computers, are readily available for trainees' use and key skills training. Revision classes are held in the evenings in all main subjects, to provide extra tuition to any trainee who has an identified need. Over the last three years, the number of trainees gaining the NVQ level 2 qualification has risen by a third to 96 per cent.

13. Trainees are not assessed in the workplace by college staff. There is a reliance on witness testimonies for portfolio evidence. No witness register exists, and the identity and competence of the witness is not formally verified. Training instructors are unsure about the effectiveness of reviews carried out by CITB's national field staff and they do not have effective communication with field staff or records from them. Welfare facilities at the college cause some dissatisfaction among trainees, and training time is lost in discussing and dealing with these issues. Outcomes of

systematically implemented disciplinary procedures are, on some occasions, modified or reversed by individual managers after employers had intervened on trainee's behalf. This results in trainees and instructors losing confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the procedures.

**Construction
(construction technicians)**

Grade 2

14. There are 78 technician trainees, divided into five first- and three second-year groups. Trainees follow a Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) national certificate programme in building or civil engineering. The two-year, full-time residential training programme is shared between the National Construction College (NCC) and College of West Anglia (COWA). Attendance patterns vary among groups, to suit providers' workload, but, generally, the first year includes two five-week blocks of study at COWA, separated by training on site at NCC. Trainees spend some time working with employers and return for the second year to complete their primary qualification aim. Most trainees have company sponsorship throughout the programme. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were confirmed, but the weaknesses were no more than normal practice; others were identified during inspection. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality training, maximising strengths of both colleges
- ◆ high average success rate over three years of 92 per cent
- ◆ additional practical skills and qualifications gained by trainees
- ◆ additional evening mathematics class provided at NCC
- ◆ good-quality tutoring and assessment input from COWA's staff
- ◆ high standard of physical resources available

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no evening access to necessary training resource facilities
- ◆ reviews not systematically completed every three months
- ◆ no formal contact with employers or trainees during on-the-job periods between training sessions

15. Following an aptitude test taken in the regions, successful trainees attend an overnight interview at the NCC, with members of staff from both colleges present. A specifically designed mathematics test is included to determine any additional support required. An initial two-week basic skills induction programme effectively

covers all health and safety issues, which are re-emphasised as each aspect of training takes place. Trainees make good use of extensive surveying and concrete-testing facilities at the NCC, and assessments contribute to the appropriate national certificate units being recorded and verified through the COWA system. The success rate for the programme over the last three years is high, at 92 per cent - well above the average for further education colleges. The real strength of the programme is the additional offerings, including opportunities to gain practical basic skills in the use of construction plant, certification in the use of abrasive wheels and the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) certificate of competence in surveying. For civil engineering trainees, a weekly evening mathematics class, offered by a member of COWA's staff is an effective use of time for residential trainees. Staff at COWA are committed to the success and continued improvement of the programme. Class observations and assignments reviewed were of an exceptionally high standard. The quality and variety of resources available to trainees at the NCC are excellent.

16. Although contact among the NCC and the COWA takes place almost daily, there is little formality in the process. NCC's staff do not attend course team meetings, review sessions or verification panels. Review of trainees' progress does not happen regularly or formally and relies on COWA's staff reporting each trainee who is falling behind and on NCC's staff taking action to assist improvement. The lack of evening access to support facilities in the library and to computers hinders trainees' completion of assignments. There are no reviews carried out on the job, between one training session and the next and often no contact at all with the trainee or employer. Most of the second year of training takes place at the COWA, except for a short surveying module and residence at the NCC. The distancing of participation results in reluctance of ownership by NCC's staff. Course management responsibilities are not clearly defined. Trainees are often not informed about progress, achievement or procedures to obtain further information. There is no system for updating individual training plans. A new mentoring scheme has been introduced to try to improve this situation. Little information is given to trainees about progression routes on completion of studies.

Construction (general construction)

Grade 3

17. At the time of the reinspection, there were 22 second-year and 24 first-year trainees taking general construction. Employed first-year trainees are national trainees. All second-year trainees and unsponsored first-year trainees are on other work-based training programmes for young people. By the end of the first training block at the college, it is expected that all trainees will be employed. Trainees follow either civil engineering apprentice trainee (CEAT) or construction operative schemes. All trainees are residential at the college, with CEATs attending for 21 weeks full time and the construction operatives for a continuous 43-week programme, during which time they receive practical and theoretical training,

leading to NVQs at level 2. For the remainder of the programme, trainees are in the workplace. An indoor training area of 4,500 square metres has 13 adjacent classrooms supported by extensive outside training areas.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ no work-based assessment
- ◆ work-placement visits not made by training staff
- ◆ no effective working relationships with field staff or work-based supervisors
- ◆ completion targets are not set
- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ no TEC-funded NVQ achievements to date

18. An action plan and a positional paper detail measures the college is taking to address the above list. Since the original inspection, action has been taken to address all of the identified weaknesses. Work-based assessment has started to take place by the use of product evidence. Training staff visit trainees on site, in addition to safety and welfare visits by one of two newly appointed new entrant training officers. There is more contact between the field staff, work-based supervisors and trainers, although this has not increased much in some cases, especially among smaller employers. Completion targets are set for some trainees. Retention has improved over the past year and some NVQ awards have been gained. Some of these positive changes have only recently been implemented and so have had insufficient time to become regular procedures within training. The strengths identified at the time of the original inspection have been maintained and remain unchanged.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent training resources and equipment to support learning
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ additional training opportunities taken by trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of awareness of the NVQ requirements among trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment and evidence collection during programme
- ◆ no rigorous completion targets routinely set
- ◆ low achievement of full awards

19. The extensive college resources are excellent, with many realistic simulated work situations supported by adequate consumable resources to cater for the needs of the programme. In addition, a number of live projects, involving maintenance to the college estate, are used for work-based observations to collect NVQ evidence. Trainers are well-qualified with considerable relevant experience in their occupational areas. They deliver the programme in a competent and professional manner in the classroom and practical training areas. The course is clearly referenced against NVQ standards, enabling students to know exactly where they are on the programme. The programme has been enhanced by the addition of key skills at level 1, which are included as a module lasting three hours each week for 15 weeks. Trainees receive additional training in relevant subjects, such as dumper-truck driving, abrasive wheels, new roads, street works and working in confined spaces. Some trainees also access opportunities for additional evening classes in brickwork to NVQ level 1 and in computing. There are good, productive working relationships between trainers and trainees, with help given to trainees when needed. Assessments at the college are correctly carried out, properly recorded and thoroughly internally verified.

20. Many first-year trainees do not realise that they must complete a period of on-the-job training in addition to the full-time block at the college. This is talked through at induction, but it is not reinforced subsequently by all staff. The reason for the introduction of key skills training and their relevance to the NVQ programme has not been clearly understood by many trainees. Work-based assessment and evidence collection is beginning. However, the programme only allows for this after the trainee has been on site for approximately six months. Naturally occurring opportunities to collect evidence during this time are missed. Portfolio evidence in the form of assessments at the end of each training block is collected throughout the full-time training. Trainees are starting to be visited on site. This is planned to alternate between a visit by one of the two newly appointed new entrants training officers, followed, approximately 12 weeks later, by a review and portfolio check from one of the training staff. Project work carried out around the college estate is observed and work-based evidence is collected to complement portfolio building. The new entrants training officers are not occupationally competent to assess on site but both are trained to complete safety and welfare reviews. No work-based assessors are currently appointed for the TEC-funded programmes in this area. Witness statements are used extensively and there is tight control on the validity of the signatures and witnesses used. Individualised action plans are sent to trainees and, more recently, their employers, with targets for evidence gathering prior to a review and assessment visit. The targets set for completion are not always rigorous enough to promote early achievement by the more able trainees. Between 1994 and 1998, 167 trainees began programmes and 18 achieved full NVQ level 2 awards. Unit achievement throughout the programme is increasing and is well recorded. Realistic projection rates for completion by the 1998 intake of trainees are set and monitored. The retention rate during the past year has improved significantly from 22 to 78 per cent. A reason for the previously poor retention rate was identified.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good key skills training. The key skills co-ordinator, who has achieved his key skills level 4 award, has developed tasks for trainees to complete which generate a range of evidence covering several key skills competencies. One task involves trainees in completing a spreadsheet, and the competencies included in carrying this out have been carefully cross-referenced and the task planned so that it takes no longer than the allocated three hours each week in the 15-week module. Trainees work in groups of no more than eight so that the co-ordinator can spend individual time with them if necessary.

Approximately one third of trainees on the general construction operatives programmes were completing the plant operators qualification in their second year and were leaving to take up full employment after this and abandoning further training. From August 1999, trainees' primary goal is now the plant operators NVQ at level 2, with the general construction operatives programme now offered as a secondary NVQ.

**Construction
(access)**
Grade 3

21. There are 49 trainees on programme, although none of the trainees on the lightening conductor programme was present during inspection. The access department delivers training to scaffolders, steeplejacks and lightening-conductor installers. Scaffolding trainees are modern apprentices working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3, while steeplejacks work towards NVQ level 2. Both groups receive key skills level 1 training delivered by the local college of further education (COWA), using the foundation general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in the built environment. Scaffolding trainees receive key skills as part of the modern apprenticeship framework. The steeplejacks' programme of key skills is delivered at the request of the Steeplejack Industry Training Group Association. All trainees are employed, and periods of work experience form an integral part of all trainees' programmes. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and well-documented training programmes
- ◆ shared and agreed training objectives
- ◆ good learning resources and materials to support training
- ◆ enthusiastic and motivated trainees
- ◆ effective off-the-job training and assessment
- ◆ additional training opportunities support competence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective assessment of trainees in the workplace
- ◆ decline in achievement and retention rates
- ◆ incomplete trainee records
- ◆ training plans not updated

22. Trainees are well motivated and encouraged by supportive instructors to work effectively and at their own pace. Induction procedures are thorough, resulting in

high awareness of occupational requirements among trainees. Training programmes are clear and well documented, and trainees enjoy good working relationships with their instructors. There is a good mix of theory and practice in training sessions, and the classrooms located in the training area are effectively used as learning support centres. Trainees appreciate the high-quality training resources and materials available to them and are enthusiastic about the effectiveness of the opportunities for training and assessment. A 30-metre-high, purpose-built chimney structure and two tall steel chimneys effect a realistic working environment for trainees to climb and work on. Scaffolding trainees are able to cover additional construction-related topics above the NVQ requirements, enhancing their competence. Trainees work well, and progress is regularly monitored and recorded by instructors during learning sessions.

23. The implementation of NVQ qualifications has seen a serious decline in achievement and retention rates over the last three years. Whereas, in 1996, achievement of NVQ level 2 was 94 per cent, with a retention rate of 80 per cent, in 1997, it was only 44 per cent against a retention rate of 47 per cent, and current results show no achievements, with a 32 per cent retention rate. Poor work-based assessment is a contributory cause being addressed by an increased emphasis in the use of trainees' assessment records, although these have yet to be issued. The current intake of trainees will also carry out an assessment block at the end of its programme to ensure that increased certification is achieved. Some trainees' records are incomplete, and training plans are not updated while on work placement. A new quarterly review has been implemented which, together with the planned recruitment of two new entrant training officers to monitor and record progress, will release more time of training staff.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

24. The equal opportunities policy is currently out of print and being rewritten. Publications and promotions carried out by CITB's staff include strong emphasis on equality of opportunity, although the stereotype image of the industry greatly reduces the impact. A document titled 'Equal opportunities and you' is given to all trainees and forms part of the induction process. Only 1.5 per cent of trainees are women, and the percentage from minority ethnic groups is equally low. Inspectors identified different strengths and weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report, but confirmed the grade proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ new framework for development of equality of opportunity issues
- ◆ good provision available for trainees with special training needs
- ◆ new positive image marketing materials widely distributed
- ◆ regional events held by area staff to break down stereotype image of industry

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little staff training in equal opportunities issues
- ◆ low awareness of equality of opportunity by trainees
- ◆ little use of data to measure equal opportunity performance
- ◆ poor promotion of equality of opportunity to employers

25. The CITB has undertaken a full review of all its equal opportunities issues, and the equal opportunity policy analyst is reviewing all policies and documents. Actions arising from the review have all been sanctioned, and new policies and plans for appropriate training are well advanced. Among the new policies being produced is one for employers and a new disability policy. There are good examples of marketing, with posters representing all sectors of the community. Provision is made for trainees with special training needs, a current example being a trainee who is dyslexic being provided with a reader whenever necessary. A rigorous equal opportunities working group meets twice annually, and equality of opportunity is a permanent agenda item on executive committee meetings. There is a documented grievance procedure of which trainees are aware. The college exceeds its TEC contractual requirement for recruitment of trainees with disabilities. There are no recorded equal opportunity issues.

26. The equal opportunities policy is not effectively promoted to trainees who, consequently, have a poor understanding of the issues involved. There is little evaluation of statistical data. They do not inform management decisions nor are they used to measure performance. The self-assessment report identifies a need for staff training to raise awareness of equal opportunities issues, but this training has not yet taken place. There is little promotion of equality of opportunity to employers. Marketing materials for the college programmes are produced only in English.

Trainee support

Grade 3

27. The support given during training is heavily influenced by the fact that all programmes are residential. Single-room accommodation and extensive sporting facilities are available for up to 500 trainees recruited from all over the country and sometimes from overseas. The need to be aware of the implications of living and working away from home forms part of the programmes of study, particularly for the increasing number of younger trainees, which exceeds that of adults three-fold.

Trainees work in 'gangs', with senior training instructors responsible for training progress. They are also allocated a 'block' leader for their accommodation. Recently, a mentoring system has been introduced to support all aspects of the college experience. Recruitment takes place by area field staff in the regions, where an aptitude test is carried out. Successful candidates are invited to attend for interview at the NCC and receive an introduction to the facilities. Most trainees experience a thorough induction programme, including initial and basic skills assessment, but these do not generally inform the individual training plans. The strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report were generally confirmed, although inspectors identified others. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and comprehensive induction programme
- ◆ additional qualification achievement encouraged
- ◆ residential aspect of training prepares trainees for construction industry
- ◆ additional personal development activities organised, including outward bound
- ◆ formal and informal personal counselling and advice available

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ initial and basic skills assessment varies across programmes
- ◆ most initial assessments do not inform individual training plans
- ◆ progress reviews not systematically carried out or documented
- ◆ unclear lines of communication for trainee support
- ◆ poor progression and employment advice

28. The induction programme is in two parts and follows a well-defined plan. Trainees arrive generally at least the day before the start of their programme. On arrival, a good welfare induction is supported by a very detailed booklet, which covers every aspect of college life. It is aimed at those aged 16 to 18 and so inappropriately phrased for the more mature trainees. The vocational teams carry out induction to their areas of work, including comprehensive health and safety awareness sessions. The programmes followed are all residential, actively preparing trainees for work on construction sites, which often involves extensive periods away from home. A wide range of recreational activities is offered, providing effective personal development programmes to trainees. Good sporting facilities are freely available, and regular competitions and team matches are arranged. Many groups participate in outward-bound-type activities as part of their development programme. Trainees are all encouraged to acquire additional skills and certification to increase their knowledge and employability. Understanding pastoral support is both formal and informal, with assistance given to accessing support from external

agencies, when necessary, such as for drug addiction and personal health.

29. Basic skill assessment does not take place in all areas of training, and results are not always used to inform training and development plans. Identified basic skill needs are not always addressed promptly. Trainees' progress reviews are sometimes not carried out regularly, and documents are not always accurate or up to date. The vocational trainer, welfare worker and mentor's roles are often unclear to trainees, resulting in confusion and time-wasting. The welfare aspect of the residential programmes causes several minor irritations, especially among older trainees, required to abide by the rules made mainly for those just leaving full-time education. There is no formal exit interview and very little access to advice on progression routes.

Management of training

Grade 3

30. Since the first inspection, the college has undergone substantial management, structural and personnel changes. The general manager has taken responsibility for additional training centres in Birmingham and London. The trainee services manager's role has been extended to include the recruitment and welfare of these other centres, although he has been relieved of other duties related to the campus. An additional training manager has been recruited, increasing the number to two. A quality and compliance co-ordinator has been appointed, overseeing two new entrant training officers. There are five senior instructors overseeing a bank of full- and part-time instructors. They are supplemented by team leaders who specialise in welfare and pastoral care for trainees, and eight support staff. There is also a team of administrators taking care of the bookings for training. Managers meet monthly to review financial and operational performance and other relevant issues. TNCC has been accredited with the Investors in People Standard.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ infrequent and unco-ordinated management of on-the-job training
- ◆ some TEC contractual requirements are not implemented
- ◆ some poor trainee-related documents
- ◆ data not use to inform action by staff
- ◆ poor understanding by staff of targets and contractual requirements

31. Staff have addressed the issues raised by inspection. A structure has now been developed that not only supports good off-the-job training but also addresses the poor management and co-ordination of on-the-job training and assessment found at the first inspection. Many of the changes instituted are recent and have not been fully implemented across the organisation. In preparation for reinspection, the college produced a short report to support its action plan. The report did not grade

management of training, but clearly described the measures taken to address the previous weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ new staff appointments made to address inspection issues
- ◆ effective staff recruitment and development procedures
- ◆ close liaison with the construction industry and related federations
- ◆ policies and strategies meet industry training needs
- ◆ good use of staff mentoring to support trainees' pastoral and training needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unawareness among employers regarding on-the-job training
- ◆ no routine monitoring of trainees' files
- ◆ poor understanding of the importance of outcome targets by some training staff
- ◆ no formal evaluation of training
- ◆ no formal measures to share good practice

32. Five experienced senior instructors are responsible for training at the college. Three are new appointments, and good induction and staff development have been instrumental in integrating them into their roles. A newly created post of quality and compliance co-ordinator has responsibility for the administrative management of NVQs, including the agreement of individual learning plans with trainees, ensuring trainees' reviews take place and organising on-the-job assessment. Lines of communication and responsibility are clearly defined in the management structure. Two new entrant training officers have been recruited since the first inspection to carry out trainees' reviews and report to the quality and compliance co-ordinator. They are not occupationally qualified and their reviews focus on safety, welfare issues and trainees' progress. The new entrants training officers have responsibility for 384 trainees located countrywide. A computer database and planning tool called 'the apprentice review planner' has been introduced to plan, co-ordinate and track trainees' reviews and on- and off-the-job assessment. Although this has only been used for a short time, it has resulted in reviews being planned and executed in line with TEC contractual requirements. A recent TEC financial appraisal and monitoring audit has found improvements since the last audit.

33. Off-the-job programmes at the college are effectively managed by the senior instructors and are taught by industrially experienced and qualified instructors, all of whom are registered assessors. Mentoring was introduced shortly before the first inspection and is now well established across the organisation. TNCC's staff act as mentors to the trainees during their off-the-job training. This role is valued by trainees and provides good support and guidance on training-related, welfare and pastoral issues. The college is in a unique position to respond to the specialist training requirements of the industry sector. The CITB carries out national

employment surveys to determine labour requirements for the industry and the results, together with advice from an advisory committee consisting of industry federations and employers, enables the college to set targets for training which reflect national requirements.

34. The value of on-the-job training has been recognised by the college and the development of the quality and compliance co-ordinator role is beginning to improve this training. Management of this process is still at an early stage. Employers' representatives have little knowledge and understanding of the content of NVQs or how evidence of competence can be collected. Guidance notes are being developed to address this, but they are not yet widely available. College staff are unclear about how the new trainees' review planning program will be used to plan assessment visits, as these seem to be fixed around specific time intervals rather than trainees' assessment needs.

35. The construction plant section is further advanced in terms of gathering evidence of on-the-job activities than the other programmes. It has piloted the use of a computerised database system, which links trainees' details with reviews, attendance, discipline, appeals and the results of assessment. By inputting the trainee's name and the employer's postcode, the construction plant assessor can produce the necessary paperwork, including a map, required for an on-the-job visit. This is a relatively new development but, when integrated with the trainees' review planner, it will provide a powerful tool to manage on- and off-the-job training and assessment. The construction plant assessor, who spends around 80 per cent of his time reviewing and assessing on-the-job training, is still having difficulties in influencing the trainees' on-the-job activities to meet NVQ assessment requirements.

36. A checklist has been developed to ensure that trainees' files contain all of the information required for contractual compliance. However, there is no routine monitoring of the contents of files, and some are incomplete, with documents missing. Data on trainees' progress are available to inform action by staff. Achievement and retention rates are discussed by senior managers and communicated to all relevant staff. Targets are agreed between managers and senior instructors, but some instructors do not see these as appropriate and attach more value to training than to achieving the NVQ within a given timescale. The consequences of failing to achieve outcome targets, both in financial terms and in relation to the impact on trainees, are not clearly defined by managers or understood by all staff. There are no formal mechanisms to monitor or evaluate the quality of programmes run by the college. Quality and improvement issues discussed relate mainly to internal verification processes rather than the content and quality of training. There is no forum or process to share good practice across the five disciplines within the college. While good practice is shared within teams, it is not systematically shared with others. The role of the quality and compliance co-ordinator has been recognised as crucial to introducing lines of communication between teams of instructors but as yet these have not matured.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

37. The college is recognised as a national centre of excellence by the Norfolk and Waveney TEC and is an approved centre by the awarding body. It was assessed and registered as meeting the requirements of ISO 9002 in July 1994. All programmes are developed in conjunction with industry and its federations to meet sector requirements. The appropriate awarding bodies verify the programmes, with individual programmes adapted to meet individual employers' needs. There is a comprehensive quality assurance management system, and many staff are involved in meetings to discuss quality. Staff from all parts of the college, are trained as auditors operating outside of their own department. Inspectors identified more weaknesses than were cited in the self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly documented and comprehensive arrangements
- ◆ quality improvement teams established
- ◆ quality systems advisory panel encourages continual improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ quality assurance arrangements not consistently applied to all training areas
- ◆ analyses of data not regularly used to improve performance
- ◆ effectiveness of the training provision is not formally monitored

38. There are well-documented and comprehensive arrangements for the quality assurance of the training function, including active quality improvement teams set up to deal with specific quality assurance problems. The quality systems advisory panel meets regularly to discuss quality assurance issues. IT comprises staff from various departments and encourages active involvement of a wide range of staff in the continual development of the quality assurance system. Industry monitoring panels assess centres' facilities, and external verifiers visit regularly, reporting positively on the training and assessment undertaken. Standards and targets are set, against which performance is measured. The targets are usually for all the students who attend and concentrate heavily on employers' expectations and satisfaction.

39. The security, cleaning and reception departments are not yet covered by the quality assurance system. However, draft procedures have been written for the plant and site-maintenance sections and it is planned that they are brought into the scheme by June 1999. All quality assurance manuals have been withdrawn from departments, as the procedures are being entered on a computer network. Not all



GOOD PRACTICE

A regular newsletter, called 'Quality', is distributed to all staff, giving details of changes and improvements to the quality systems. This is also posted on noticeboards around the college for trainees' information.

the hangars are networked, meaning that occupational training areas do not have ready access to computer systems. Senior instructors have retained paper copies of procedures. Quality assurance arrangements are not consistently used to improve performance. The internal audits are carried out, and, where required, corrective action requests are raised, with dates set for the action to be taken. The required action is not always carried out within the timescale set, and the improvement is delayed. The effectiveness of training for trainees and employers is not formally monitored. A questionnaire has recently been introduced and issued to trainees for feedback on training. Several of these have been returned, but have not been entered in the computer system for analysis and evaluation. Five years ago, meetings were introduced for trainees to represent their views, but their frequency has declined in recent times. None has taken place this year, although one is scheduled shortly, as a result of requests from trainees. There is no formal system to gather feedback from employers.