



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 2000

Gatewood Partnership Limited

SUMMARY

Gatewood Partnership Limited offers outstanding training in childcare and satisfactory training in construction, engineering, business administration and hairdressing. Trainees and employers testify to the improvements the company has made to training in hairdressing which it acquired from another training provider in 1998. At the start of their training, all trainees are found employment with local companies which support trainees well. Managers have clear priorities. They have ensured that the company is financially viable and they have managed its rapid growth successfully. At the first inspection, policies and procedures for many aspects of the company's activities were at various stages of development and there was a lack of systematic quality assurance. Since then, all staff have been involved in planning and implementing improvements. The company has built on its strengths to develop quality assurance arrangements, although there is still a lack of cohesion between these arrangements.

As a result of the reinspection of Gatewood Partnership Limited, the original published report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 section have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report which have not been subject to full reinspection have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Hair & beauty	3
Health, care & public services	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ all trainees found good jobs
- ◆ well-managed and suitably resourced off-the-job training
- ◆ outstanding training and assessment on childcare programmes
- ◆ rapid improvement of training in hairdressing
- ◆ good support for trainees throughout training
- ◆ strong management links with local employers
- ◆ well-planned and effective response to identified weaknesses

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor planning of on-the-job training in electrical installation
- ◆ lack of work-based assessment in motor-vehicle, electrical and business administration programmes
- ◆ failure of initial assessment to identify trainees' additional support needs fully
- ◆ no cohesive quality assurance arrangements

INTRODUCTION

1. Gatewood Partnership Limited was established in April 1998 as a wholly owned subsidiary company of Carshalton College. The partnership is the result of an amalgamation of Allan Woods Associates, Carshalton College and a company which provided training for local hairdressing salons. The company also brought in several trainees from a training consortium which ceased trading. Allan Woods Associates and the training consortium had operated as managing agents for training in the south and southwest London area since 1983. The amalgamation brought together a management team and staff with considerable experience of training. The inspection covered the work-based training programmes which the company provides in construction, engineering, business administration, childcare and hairdressing. These programmes are funded through South London Training and Enterprise Council (SOLOTEC) and AZTEC. At the first inspection, there were 287 trainees: 159 modern apprentices and 128 trainees on other work-based programmes for young people. The numbers of trainees in agriculture, management and professional, leisure, sport and travel, and hospitality were too few for those occupational areas to be inspected. There are now 305 trainees, of whom 200 are modern apprentices, 78 are national trainees and 27 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. They are detailed by course in the table below. These trainees are pursuing several different qualifications, including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2 or 3. All trainees are employed in companies in and around south and southwest London.

Numbers of trainees at the time of the reinspection by programme and occupational area

	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other youth training	Total
Agriculture	1	3	3	7
Construction	82	1	0	83
Engineering	18	16	10	44
Management & professional	0	0	1	1
Business administration	36	7	1	44
Leisure, sport and travel	3	2	0	5
Hospitality	0	2	0	2
Hair & beauty	32	43	7	82
Health, care & public services	28	4	5	37
Total	200	78	27	305

2. Over the last few years, in the areas from which the company recruits trainees, there has been a sustained reduction in the number of skilled and unskilled manual workers. At the same time, there has been a growth in the service occupations. Locally, the manufacturing and construction sectors employ 12 per cent and 7 per cent of the working population respectively. The service sector accounts for 75 per cent of employment. Twenty per cent of the local working population are employed in clerical and secretarial jobs and 80 per cent of these are taken by women. In the London borough of Sutton, where the company is based, unemployment is low. In November 1999, the unemployment rate was 2 per cent compared with a rate of 5.5 per cent for Greater London, and 4 per cent for Great Britain (source: SOLOTEC). In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 60.1 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. (Source: DfEE).

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Gatewood Partnership produced its first self-assessment report for the first inspection, using the Training Standards Council's (TSC's) framework explained in *Raising the Standard*. The self-assessment process involved all the company's staff and the resulting report was detailed and comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with all the grades for occupational areas except childcare, for which they awarded a higher grade. In relation to generic aspects of training, the inspectors agreed with the grades for equal opportunities and trainee support. They considered, however, that the company had placed insufficient emphasis on weaknesses in management of training and in quality assurance, and they awarded lower grades for these aspects of training. Following inspection, Gatewood Partnership's first action plan was rejected as it focused solely on addressing weaknesses and did not specify how the strengths would be maintained. The revised action plan was approved in July 1999. Gatewood Partnership amended this action plan according to its improvements in November 1999, and again in January 2000 in time for reinspection.

4. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 27 days inspecting construction, engineering, business administration, healthcare and public services at Gatewood Partnership in November 1998. Inspectors examined documents at the company's offices in Carshalton College and in its training centre. They met managers and staff from the company and college, employers, trainees and representatives from the TEC and a local government office. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios. They visited 41 employers and observed trainees' reviews, assessments and training sessions in the workplace, college and training centre. The following table shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed in the first inspection.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions in the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction			2			2
Engineering		2	3			5
Business administration		1	2			3
Hair & beauty	1	1	3	1		6
Health, care & public services	2	3		1		6
Total	3	7	10	2	0	22

5. Two inspectors spent a total of four days reinspecting quality assurance at Gatewood Partnership in February 2000. They visited a hair salon and a workplace

offering training in electrical installation and spoke to the two modern apprentices and their supervisors. They spoke to four other trainees at the training centre, one of whom was employed by Gatewood Partnership as an administration assistant. They interviewed eight of the 12 staff, including the chief executive and all the programme managers. They examined a wide range of written evidence.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

6. There are 56 trainees in electrical installations, of whom 43 are modern apprentices and 13 are on other training programmes for young people, leading to an NVQ at level 2. All trainees are employed with appropriate local companies, most of which are small electrical contracting companies. All trainees attend day release at Carshalton College, working towards part 1 and part 2 of the City & Guilds 2360 electrical installations qualification. Modern apprentices, working towards the NVQ at level 3, attend an extended day, the last session of which is a tutorial for portfolio development. Some trainees also attend an evening session for examination revision. The college has established a good reputation for electrical installations and is a Joint Industry Board-accredited centre (JIB) for the NVQ at level 3. The inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ the provision of relevant industrial experience for trainees through good work placements
- ◆ strong links and good communications with employers
- ◆ employers' high opinion of the quality of off-the-job training
- ◆ well-resourced off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of planned training in the workplace
- ◆ some employers' failure to give trainees sufficient help in gathering evidence for NVQ assessment
- ◆ insufficient provision of key skills training
- ◆ insufficient emphasis in progress reviews on the need for trainees to acquire their NVQ

7. The employers with whom the company works provide good learning opportunities for trainees in a wide variety of environments which reflect the commercial pressures and working conditions of the industry. Trainees receive regular monitoring visits to the workplace from Gatewood Partnership's programme manager, and quarterly progress reviews are carried out in the workplace. In the

main, the trainees find these visits supportive but, in some instances, insufficient pressure is put on them to work harder in order to achieve their NVQ. The high level of help and support which trainees receive from the programme manager is extended to trainees' activities at college through the manager's regular visits to the college. Off-the-job training is effective and well resourced. The college is highly regarded by local electrical installation employers. Tutors are well qualified and experienced and they provide effective teaching and good support for trainees. The considerable college investment and development in electrical installations have been recognised by the industry's lead body, and the college is one of the few in the country accredited to provide the NVQ at level 3.

8. College staff have developed an effective system for assessing trainees and for recording assessment. In order to encourage employers to become involved in assessment, the college staff have devised some useful and informative leaflets on the assessment process for them. Of the 56 trainees registered on training in electrical installations programmes, four have achieved NVQ at level 2; 11 have completed all the elements of the NVQ at level 2 and are awaiting external verification of portfolios. None has yet achieved the NVQ at level 3; consequently, no modern apprenticeships have yet been awarded.

9. Training in the workplace has not been systematically planned to enable trainees to claim credit for competence demonstrated on the job. Employers are given information on what trainees need to do in order to obtain an NVQ and on the assessment process. They are expected to provide reports on their observation of trainees' performance in the workplace and details of witness testimony of the quality of trainees' work on the job. In practice, however, many trainees have to find opportunities themselves to gather evidence of their acquisition of competence in the workplace. They make little progress in gathering the requisite evidence and their employers are unsure of their own part in the assessment process. The assessment of competence is conducted off the job, and many opportunities to claim evidence of competence in the workplace are missed. Many employers are not sufficiently involved in the evidence-gathering and assessment processes, and most trainees make slow progress towards achieving the NVQ at level 3. Trainees and employers are given information about key skills and their assessment. Although trainees are shown how they can develop key skills across the occupational units of their NVQ, insufficient emphasis is given to key skills and they do not form a significant part of the trainees' learning experience.

Engineering

Grade 3

10. Gatewood Partnership has 29 motor-vehicle trainees, of whom 17 are modern apprentices, five are on national traineeships and seven are on other youth training programmes. All trainees are employed and work towards achieving an NVQ at level 2 or 3 in motor-vehicle engineering. All trainees attend day release at Carshalton College. In the year before the formation of the new training company, the achievement rate among trainees was 50 per cent, with 41 per cent of the 12

trainees leaving before completion of training. Of the current trainees, two have left early and three have so far achieved an NVQ at level 2. The inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified by the company and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-organised off-the-job training
- ◆ good resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ good rapport among the company's staff, subcontractors and employers
- ◆ close monitoring of trainees in both their on-the-job and off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no assessment in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient integration of key skills with the vocational content of programmes

11. Initially, all trainees are tested to determine their suitability for a modern apprenticeship or other training programme. From the start of their programme, all trainees are employed with reputable local companies in the motor-vehicle industry. Employers' workshops are well equipped, and trainees carry out on-the-job training which is relevant, although not always structured to meet the NVQ programme.

12. No assessments are carried out in the workplace. Assessment of trainees' competence for the purposes of NVQ assessment is carried out entirely in the college. Opportunities for employers to observe, and gather evidence of, trainees' performance in the workplace are missed. Job cards are not used. The location of Gatewood Partnership's staff in the college assists the monitoring of trainees' attendance and progress at college. Feedback to employers about all aspects of off-the-job training is effective. Trainees are not always set short-term targets during progress reviews.

13. Trainees attend college in classes with other day-release students. The off-the-job training is well structured, and resources for trainees in vehicle body and vehicle mechanics at the college are good. At the beginning of each year, all trainees receive details of the year's teaching programme and assessment schedule. Effective learning materials have been developed to help trainees to progress towards the achievement of their NVQ. The college's motor-vehicle workshops have been recognised by the awarding body as a realistic working environment, and trainees have all their practical competencies assessed within it. The delivery and assessment of key skills are not integral to all motor-vehicle programmes although staff from the college are working with the company's staff to address this weakness.

Business administration

Grade 3

14. There are 26 business administration trainees, of whom 16 are modern apprentices and 10 are on other training programmes for young people. Trainees work towards achievement of an NVQ at levels 1 to 3 in administration or levels 2 and 3 in customer services. All trainees are employed with one of the 21 companies with which Gatewood Partnership works to provide on-the-job training. Trainees also study, on day release, at Gatewood Partnership's offices in Carshalton College. The mode of trainees' attendance at the college depends on the type and stage of training programme. At the college, trainees are provided with a portfolio-building workshop and they receive individual help and guidance from a trainer/assessor. The inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and many of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. They agreed with the grade given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' good understanding of key skills
- ◆ trainees' strong commitment to progress and to meeting achievement targets
- ◆ strong, well-established links with employers
- ◆ trainees' good achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ the failure of assessors to visit the workplace
- ◆ insufficiently detailed witness testimony of trainees' workplace performance
- ◆ no systematic documentation of assessment
- ◆ lack of uniform approach to the provision of tutorial support

15. Trainees are effectively supported by well-qualified staff, with whom they have an excellent working relationship. Portfolios produced by trainees are of a high standard and contain a mixture of work-based evidence, assignment and project work. Key skills are introduced at an early stage of training and are well understood by trainees. Trainees are well motivated and progress at an appropriate rate. Achievement rates are generally high. In 1996-97, 80 per cent of trainees achieved their NVQ. The strong links between Gatewood Partnership and local employers have been established over many years and are used to good effect in placing trainees in appropriate employment.

16. Trainees are regularly visited in the workplace for progress reviews, but opportunities to assess trainees in the workplace are missed. Although witness testimony of trainees' performance in the workplace forms part of the evidence for NVQ assessment, it takes the form of a checklist and does not give details of the activities which trainees have carried out. The approach to recording assessment is unsystematic. When trainees attend at Gatewood Partnership's offices, some

receive individual tutorial support, by appointment with a tutor, whilst others obtain it at a voluntary drop-in session. For a variety of reasons, some trainees do not derive maximum benefit from the latter arrangement.

Hair & beauty

Grade 3

17. There are 95 trainees working towards achievement of an NVQ at level 2 or 3, of whom 46 are modern apprentices and 49 are on other training programmes. In April 1998, Gatewood Partnership took over a local provider of hairdressing training. Staff have worked hard since then to improve the reputation of the training and the facilities available to trainees. Gatewood Partnership's hairdressing trainees are all employed. Off-the-job training is delivered at a training centre in four-day blocks, approximately every five weeks. On-the-job training is provided through one of the 64 hairdressing salons with which Gatewood Partnership is linked. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ the provision of work-based training in good-quality salons
- ◆ regular, productive review and monitoring of trainees' progress in the workplace
- ◆ new and well-designed documents to assist the assessment and review processes
- ◆ good work-based training in most salons
- ◆ successful integration of key skills with vocational contact
- ◆ regular visits to trainees in the workplace to help them to develop practical skills

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of clients for trainees in off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient development of trainees' information technology skills
- ◆ some unmet staff development needs
- ◆ some ineffectively planned training sessions
- ◆ the failure to make good use of initial diagnostic assessment results
- ◆ some missed opportunities to involve employers in training

18. Since the acquisition of the hairdressing training provider, Gatewood Partnership's staff have been effective in developing a wide range of systems and supporting procedures for improving training and assessment. Many of these are at an early stage of implementation, and their effectiveness cannot yet be judged. However, trainees and employers expressed the view that both training and assessment had already improved considerably. Trainees understand key skills and their assessment. Staff have done a considerable amount of work to ensure that

key skills are an integral part of training leading to the new NVQ in hairdressing.

19. All trainees undertake initial assessment of numeracy. However, the results are not used to determine the extent to which the trainees need additional learning support. There has been no staff development related to the identification of trainees' additional learning needs. At the training centres, trainees carry out a programme of theoretical work and their practical skills are assessed by the company's assessors. Some of the practical sessions are not well planned and some trainees do not have anything useful to do, particularly when there are not enough clients on whom they may practise. During on-the-job and off-the-job practical sessions, trainees demonstrate appropriate skills in their hairdressing techniques. They are also encouraged to take decisions about technical aspects of the job and use standard professional practices. In 1998, 81 per cent of trainees completed their programme, and most achieved an NVQ at level 2 in under two years. There is little or no use of information technology in either on-the-job or off-the-job training.

20. All salons in which trainees are employed offer good training facilities, and on-the-job training is generally well planned. Most employers are keen to become more involved with the training process. In some salons, employees have gained qualifications as assessors and carry out some of the assessment of trainees in the workplace. However, in most salons, employers have not had the opportunity to become as directly involved in training as they wish to be. Trainees are regularly visited in the workplace by Gatewood Partnership's staff. These visits incorporate assessment and progress reviews. These are successful in helping the trainees to develop practical skills and progress at an appropriate pace towards achieving their NVQ.

Health, care & public services

Grade 1

21. There are 32 trainees, and each is employed by one of 13 local employers, mostly in the private sector. Fifteen of the trainees are modern apprentices, working towards an NVQ at level 3; 17 are on other training programmes for young people, working towards an NVQ at level 2. Gatewood Partnership's provision of childcare training is well established, and a team of very experienced staff has been delivering the training since 1983. Five years ago, following an approach from a group of local nurseries, the company set up an NVQ assessment centre. Since then, Gatewood Partnership's staff have worked closely with local nurseries, playgroups and child minders to provide training leading towards NVQs in childcare. Trainees attend one morning's off-the-job training at Carshalton College each week. Inspectors agreed with many of the main strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the company had under-estimated some of its strengths in this occupational area and they awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ employers' full involvement in the training process
- ◆ trainees' high achievement and retention rates
- ◆ fortnightly assessment visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ clear and realistic targets for trainees
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of trainees' progress toward meeting targets
- ◆ trainees' good understanding of key skills
- ◆ successful integration of key skills with the vocational content of programmes
- ◆ excellent communication between all involved in the training process
- ◆ thorough and rigorous assessment procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient emphasis on work practice in trainees' written work

GOOD PRACTICE

In the case of one trainee, who became pregnant while on the programme, the programme area manager was able to negotiate a three-month break in training with the workplace employer. Following this, the trainee returned, successfully completed training and is now in permanent employment with the nursery.

22. The employers, with whom Gatewood has developed a close working relationship, show a strong commitment to training and to helping the trainees to achieve their NVQs. Gatewood Partnership's staff keep employers well informed about the trainees' progress, and problems which trainees may have are quickly resolved. All trainees receive regular progress review visits in the workplace from Gatewood Partnership's staff. During these visits, trainees, employers and assessors agree on targets for short-term achievements. The extent to which trainees are meeting these targets is monitored on subsequent visits and corrective action is taken, where necessary. With help from Gatewood Partnership, some of the nurseries have helped their staff to become qualified workplace assessors. Gatewood Partnership's assessors visit trainees in establishments other than these nurseries, every two weeks in order to help them to progress at an appropriate rate.

23. All parties in the training process are appropriately involved in the planning of training and assessment and the excellent communication they maintain with one another ensures a close correspondence between all aspects of on-the-job and off-the-job training. Very few trainees leave before completing the programme. In 1997-98, 93 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2. There is frequent assessment of trainees in the workplace by direct observation. Assessment is detailed and it is carefully and accurately recorded. Key skills are fully integrated with the vocational content of NVQ units. Trainees have a clear understanding of what they have to do to complete the key skills component of their programme successfully. Assessors have received training in the delivery and assessment of key skills.

24. In general, trainees produce a large amount of written work for their portfolio of evidence. In some instances, much of this evidence is derived from learning materials supplied by training staff rather than the trainees' own work practice.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

25. Gatewood Partnership has a brief, but clearly written, equal opportunities policy, and staff, trainees and employers are made aware of this. Gatewood Partnership's staff, together with staff from Carshalton College, provide trainees with equal opportunities awareness training as part of their induction programme. All trainees and employers are given an information pack which clearly details the responsibilities of everyone in relation to equal opportunities, and explains the grievance and appeals procedures. Trainees from minority ethnic groups are well represented among the trainee population. The inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ the company's success in breaking down gender stereotyping on hairdressing, electrical installation and engineering programmes
- ◆ good representation of trainees from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ the success of the company's staff in raising employers' awareness of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no training for staff on equal opportunities
- ◆ no analysis or use of equal opportunities data

26. Gatewood Partnership designates one employee as the equal opportunities nominee. The company works closely with Carshalton College to make policy and to devise procedures for ensuring equality of opportunity. Employers and trainees are well supported by Gatewood Partnership's staff, who encourage a positive attitude to equality of opportunity in the workplace and in college. Although all trainees receive training in equal opportunities awareness at induction, there are no records of comparable training for staff and employers. Statistical information about ethnicity, gender and disability is collected, but not analysed or used to inform recruitment policy. Nine hairdressing trainees are from minority ethnic groups. The company has not explored the feasibility of making an Afro-Caribbean hairdressing unit available to trainees.

27. The Gatewood Partnership has been successful in breaking down the gender stereotypes associated with some of the occupational areas in which it offers training. Nine males are training as hairdressers, two females are training as electricians and one female is training to be a motor-vehicle mechanic.

Trainee support

Grade 2

28. Prospective trainees experience a recruitment procedure which not only seeks to place them on the appropriate training programme, but also equips them for gaining paid employment from the start of their programme. They are interviewed at their local careers office by Gatewood Partnership's staff who assess their basic skills. Trainees are then referred to the appropriate programme manager who, taking their initial assessment results into account, matches them to a suitable workplace and arranges an interview with the prospective employer. Once on a training programme, trainees are well supported in the workplace and at college. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses which the company identified in its provision of trainee support and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong staff commitment to provide support for trainees
- ◆ good recruitment and thorough induction procedures
- ◆ frequent opportunities for childcare, business administration and hairdressing trainees to discuss their progress
- ◆ the securing of good-quality employment for trainees at the start of their programme
- ◆ good additional learning support for trainees with identified needs
- ◆ good support for trainees from workplace supervisors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ the failure to take results of initial assessment into account in individual training plans
- ◆ ineffective progress review process for trainees
- ◆ the failure to identify all the additional support needs of trainees

29. Staff at Gatewood Partnership are very supportive towards their trainees. They develop effective working relationships with them and trainees feel they can seek help at any time. All trainees undertake initial assessment, but, in a few cases, this does not identify their additional support needs fully. When these needs become apparent, however, they are promptly met. Programme managers arrange for any additional learning support needs identified during initial assessment to be met through the college's support systems or, in some cases, through specialist external agencies. Although all trainees have an individual training plan, this is not fully used in all occupational areas, and there is no system to ensure that the plan is properly informed by initial assessment.

30. The recruitment and induction processes prepare trainees well for their training and employment. Gatewood Partnership's policy is to arrange appropriate

employment, with a suitable wage, for all trainees from the start of training and it is very successful in doing this. Part of the initial training for all trainees includes help with presentation skills and job-interview techniques. Trainees are regularly visited in the workplace by company staff. Trainees on hairdressing and childcare programmes, have frequent opportunities to discuss and resolve any problems affecting their progress. Workplace supervisors support trainees in all occupational areas. Employers involved with hairdressing and childcare programmes are kept well informed about the NVQ taken by trainees and about its assessment process. They provide more support for trainees than some of the employers in other occupational areas.

Management of training

Grade 3

31. Gatewood Partnership, as a wholly owned subsidiary of Carshalton College, was established in April 1998. Over a short period of time, the company's management has faced the considerable challenge of having to bring about the successful merger of two private providers, take over a hairdressing training company and become part of the Carshalton College. The efforts of managers have necessarily focused on the company's growth and financial viability. Most policies and procedures are in a transitory stage and are being adapted to align with those of the college. The inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors but they awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ the managers' good use of their strong links with employers
- ◆ clear and effective lines of internal and external communication
- ◆ the strong commitment of all staff to upholding the company's values
- ◆ well-managed off-the-job-training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ the failure to implement policies and procedures with uniform rigour
- ◆ the failure to formalise and document significant management processes
- ◆ the failure of the management-information system to inform decision-making adequately

32. Many of the staff have been involved with the constituent organisations of Gatewood Partnership for many years. Managers make good use of the strong, long-standing working relationships which they have developed with local employers to secure appropriate employment for trainees. Off-the-job training is well managed, and trainees in college and in the training centre benefit from the close links between aspects of both on-the-job and off-the-job training. Communication between all these involved in the training process is good.

33. Some of the company's own procedures or those of the college which the company has adopted, are not implemented effectively across all aspects of the company's work. Furthermore, the company does not monitor the implementation of such procedures adequately. In some instances, the company has not yet developed new policies and procedures of its own but is using those which it inherited from the separate organisations from which the company was formed. Some of these procedures are not adequately documented. The management-information system is new, and data from the previous system are not in a form which is compatible with it. The new system is still being developed, and the information held is not readily available to managers in their decision-making.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

34. Gatewood Partnership has informal arrangements for assuring quality in training. Each main occupational area has a programme manager who is responsible for the quality of training in that area. They report to the chief executive, who in turn reports to the board of directors, which also comprises two college governors, and two of the college's senior management team. Plans are currently being developed to integrate the quality assurance arrangements of Gatewood Partnership with the more formal college system. Improvements in quality assurance during the past year have focused on addressing weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Prior to reinspection, Gatewood Partnership summarised its progress against the action plan, and graded quality assurance.

During the first inspection, the weaknesses identified were as follows:

- ◆ no coherent quality assurance system
- ◆ lack of written and formalised arrangements for the quality assurance of subcontractors' provision
- ◆ no plan for improving the quality of provision
- ◆ no formal mechanisms for collecting trainees and employers' views

35. Inspectors found that of the four weaknesses identified a year ago, only two remain. There are also additional strengths. The inspectors agreed with the grade given in the revised action plan.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and effective response to identified weaknesses
- ◆ rigorous checking of work-based training by programme managers
- ◆ some effective arrangements to share good practice
- ◆ strong internal verification in care and hairdressing

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no cohesive quality assurance system

- ◆ lack of written or formalised arrangements for the quality assurance of subcontractors' training
- ◆ no use of achievement and retention data to inform improvements

GOOD PRACTICE

Six months after the last inspection, the hairdressing programme manager was concerned that significant weaknesses remained in the training. She invited the care programme manager to conduct a detailed audit. They jointly agreed the objectives and the scope of necessary improvements. The programme manager planned and implemented improvements based on the subsequent report of the audit.

36. Gatewood Partnership uses external evaluation reports from awarding bodies, independent inspection results and its own self-assessment process to identify weaknesses in its training. It has taken specific steps to identify weaknesses within individual programmes as well as conducting annual self-assessment at a broader level. It places great emphasis on the identification and correction of weaknesses within programmes and on improvements to the day-to-day management of training. Managers involve all staff in the planning and implementation of improvements. Weaknesses identified during the first inspection included a failure to write down agreed action for improvement. Gatewood Partnership now has a well-organised action-planning process. All staff are aware of their responsibilities, and action plans are regularly updated. In response to the weakness in collating management data, it has invested in a sophisticated computer programme to keep detailed records of trainees' progress and achievement. The revised action plan indicates that many weaknesses have been significantly overcome. Last year, there were weaknesses in key skills training for engineering and hairdressing trainees. New arrangements have been made to integrate key skills, particularly numeracy skills, in engineering and to provide information technology training in hairdressing. Business administration assessors now assess trainees in their workplaces. Gatewood Partnership has begun to find out how employers and trainees judge the different aspects of the programmes, and of its service to them, by using a detailed questionnaire. The early response rate has been high.

37. Effective and rigorous monitoring of work-based training is carried out by programme managers. Each programme manager visits each trainee at least every 12 weeks, and often more frequently. This monitoring activity is carried out independently of any work-based assessment by other staff. The programme managers now have the authority, regarding their budget and staff, to implement improvements in their programme area which they do as a matter of urgency. For example, the programme manager for care identified, on visits, that although the training complied with the requirements of the awarding body, a number of trainees were not getting experience of working with babies. She arranged training sessions in the preparation of baby foods and in other skills relating to the care of babies.

38. Gatewood Partnership now has informal management meetings which create the opportunity for the sharing of best practice. This has resulted in some organisational improvements. The method for recording key skill progress has developed through ideas generated within the engineering and construction sectors and has now been adopted by all occupational groups. The robust internal verification process within care and hairdressing has been used as a benchmark for developing a company wide procedure. When staff assess trainees' knowledge and competence, they now use detailed criteria, and records of these assessments are now accurate and up to date. Understanding among staff regarding quality

assurance requirements has improved since the first inspection.

39. There are still no formal quality assurance systems. Managers have begun to address this weakness, and have begun discussions with the quality assurance managers of the college as to how to incorporate work-based training within Carshalton College's formal quality assurance system.

40. Another weakness identified at the first inspection remains unresolved. There are no service level agreements between Gatewood Partnership and its subcontractors. Subcontractors include freelance trainers and assessors, Carshalton College, and other local colleges. There is no clearly defined system for monitoring the standard of training offered by these colleges. There is no observation of subcontracted training or collection of performance feedback. The managers have begun to address these issues and have drafted a service level agreement; this is not yet agreed with the subcontractors.

41. Although the managers have invested in a sophisticated computer database, which allows them to collect and collate information on the trainees easily and to present this quickly and easily to external bodies such as TECs, they have not yet analysed retention or achievement data for trainees. They do not yet know whether or not the achievement or retention rates in different occupational areas are improving. They do not set targets for improvements in retention or achievement.