



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MARCH 2000

Norton Radstock College

SUMMARY

Norton Radstock College offers satisfactory training in environmental conservation, engineering and business administration. Provision in animal care and horticulture is less well delivered. At the time of the first inspection, its hairdressing and printing training was less than satisfactory, but plans were well advanced to address the weaknesses. At reinspection, the hairdressing programme was satisfactory and had been subject to great improvements but these had not yet had an impact on achievement and retention rates. The problems on the printing programme were proving more intractable, and the printing training was still unsatisfactory. Policies and procedures for promoting equal opportunities are comprehensive. The college has good trainee support systems, particularly for trainees who are based largely in the college. It has good links with employers and its management of training is good. At the first inspection, quality assurance systems did not address the particular needs of work-based training, and internal verification in many occupational areas was weak. By the time of reinspection, several new quality assurance methods had been implemented, and were beginning to show results. The college was aware of the problems in printing, and was still taking action to rectify them.

As a result of the reinspection of Norton Radstock College, the original published text for hair and beauty, media and design and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 introduction 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
Agriculture	3
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Hair & beauty	4
Media & design	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Hair & beauty	3
Media & design	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ♦ good college induction programme
- ♦ active employers' consortia
- ♦ comprehensive equal opportunities policies and promotion



- ◆ full range of student support services
- ◆ high-calibre modern apprentices in engineering and business administration
- ◆ high-standard work placements
- ◆ commitment to staff development life-long learning
- ◆ thorough trainee review arrangements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient information on trainees' progress for employers
- ◆ little integration of key skills
- ◆ little workplace assessment
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ underdeveloped method of sharing good practice in assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Norton Radstock College, located in the unitary authority of Bath and North East Somerset, holds contracts with Westec and Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). It has been delivering work-based training since 1982. At its peak, the college had around 300 work-based trainees. At the time of the first inspection, there were 109 trainees of whom 25 were adult trainees, 53 modern apprentices, 12 national trainees and 19 other youth trainees. A year later, there were 80 trainees. Twenty-two of these were adults, of whom five were following a New Deal full-time education and training option. There were 33 modern apprentices, 21 national trainees, and four young people following other youth training programmes. The college offers training in mechanical engineering, motor vehicle, horticulture, animal care, welding, administration, information technology, hairdressing, care, childcare and printing. Two members of staff are employed exclusively in the work-based training unit; other managers and staff hold other posts in the college. A senior manager acts as overall co-ordinator. Ninety-five per cent of the youth trainees were employed at the time of the original inspection. A year later, all the young people in work-based training programmes were employed. Trainees are not taken on until an employed position or a work placement is available for them. They are able to start on a full-time college course working towards the same qualification, while they wait for a placement to become available.

2. Northeast Somerset and Mendip have suffered industrial decline over the past 40 years, following the closure of the Somerset coalfields. More recently, the closure of ministry of defence facilities has affected employment. Norton Radstock is currently supported through a single regeneration budget (SRB). The economy is reliant on manufacturing whose jobs are low-skilled. Employees generally lack qualifications and skills in computing and information technology, and management. Unemployment in the area at the time of the first inspection was low, at 2.5 per cent in Bath and North East Somerset, compared with the national figure of 4.3 per cent. By the time of the reinspection, the local rate had fallen to 2.1 per cent, which was less than the national drop to 3.8 per cent. However, there are pockets of unemployment on local estates where some 65 to 69 per cent of households are entitled to full housing benefit. The number of minority ethnic group students studying at the college reflects the proportion in the local community. Most trainees have attended one of three local comprehensive schools. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 55, 44 and 28 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, this percentage in each of the three schools was 49, 45 and 34 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The average for the LEA was 53.2 per cent in 1998, and 54.7 per cent in 1999.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The self-assessment report prepared for the first inspection was originally produced by the manager, after consulting with colleagues in the different occupational areas, following the draft framework of *Raising the Standard*. It was substantially revised before inspection. All college unit heads contributed to the report, together with feedback from trainees and employers. The manager also produced the short report for the reinspection, but shortly before the reinspection took place, a self-assessment report for the whole college was produced. This includes the areas which were to be reinspected by TSC, as well as all the information required by FEFC for their inspections. It takes into account feedback from trainees and students at mid-year, as well as contributions from assessors, trainers and lecturers within each school.

4. For the first inspection, six inspectors spent 18 days at Norton Radstock College in March 1999. They observed training sessions, assessments and reviews, and interviewed 52 trainees, 21 supervisors and employers and 28 members of college staff. Inspectors examined portfolios, trainees' files, assessment/ verification records and other documents.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture			2			2
Engineering	1		1			2
Media & design						
Foundation for work		2	1			3
Total	1	2	4	0	0	7

5. Reinspection was carried out by two inspectors and a technical expert in printing, over three days. They observed training sessions in college and assessments in the workplace, interviewed 16 trainees, eight workplace supervisors, and 11 members of college staff. They examined portfolios, trainees' files, college records and minutes of meetings, records of assessment and verification, and other relevant documents.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Hairdressing		1	1			2
Media & design			2			2
Total	0	1	3	0	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture (horticulture)

Grade 3

6. There are four trainees working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in amenity horticulture at levels 1 and 2 and one modern apprentice working towards NVQ level 3. A further three trainees follow a programme leading to NVQ level 2 in environmental conservation (landscapes and ecosystems). Three trainees are receiving training to NVQ level 1 in animal care and level 2 in caring for animals. There is one modern apprentice working towards NVQ level 3 in animal welfare and management. Horticultural trainees attend college one day a week for core theory sessions and assessment and attend for one-week blocks for their optional units. The college grounds provide opportunities for the development of nursery and hard-landscape skills, and the college has arrangements locally for access to sports and amenity turf facilities. In animal care, trainees attend college for between one and three days a week depending on their placements. There is a small-animal care unit at the college, adequately stocked with a range of domestic pets, including some exotic species. Theory sessions for environmental conservation training take place in college. Trainees then work on conservation projects for local landowners, voluntary-sector organisations or local authorities. The college's self-assessment report claimed strengths which are no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with some weaknesses but identified others. They awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear understanding by trainees of NVQ requirements
- ◆ well-planned and realistic environmental training and assessment
- ◆ good range of additional qualifications available in environmental conservation
- ◆ training valued by trainees and employees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no workplace assessment in horticulture or animal care
- ◆ missed opportunities to use work-based evidence in horticulture and animal care
- ◆ overemphasis on theoretical session teaching in horticulture and animal care
- ◆ slow NVQ unit achievement in horticulture and animal care

7. All trainees are aware of the programmes and qualifications they are working towards. They have a teaching plan for the academic year and are clear about when they will be working on specific subject areas. Environmental conservation and animal care trainees have begun to use the college's new progress file to direct their career development and identify further training needs. The environmental conservation programme is relatively new to the college, but is well-planned. Trainees are strongly motivated and work well on individual projects. They apply knowledge gained from college sessions to their work on conservation projects. Assessment is regularly carried out and based around actual tasks, with cross-referencing to appropriate units of the NVQ. Trainees are encouraged to use a wide range of evidence for their portfolios, including examples of voluntary conservation work carried out at weekends. Additional qualifications, including chainsaw certificates and the use of pesticides enhance the training and increase trainees' employment prospects. Employers are satisfied with the training and the college has a good reputation.

8. None of the employers in horticulture or animal care has a qualified assessor, and college assessors do not visit the workplace to assess competence. Recently, animal care staff have visited to give advice on suitable workplace evidence. In horticulture, there is little use of workplace evidence. Animal care trainees' portfolios show a wider range of evidence in portfolios. There are examples in horticulture and animal care where trainees, including modern apprentices, have carried out high-quality work with their employers, which has not been used as evidence in portfolios. Some trainees are being assessed at college for skills which they have already demonstrated in the workplace. Training in horticulture and animal care is over-reliant on theory, delivered in a classroom setting. In horticulture, little attention is paid to the relevance of theory sessions to individual trainees' work requirements, resulting in the delivery of theory inappropriate to employers' needs. Until recently, college horticulture staff were unaware of the awarding bodies' amenity horticulture workbooks which standardise the requirements for underpinning knowledge.

9. Horticultural theory is assessed by examination. There is no recording of oral questions used during practical assessments. Underpinning knowledge in animal care is assessed through assignments. All programmes make use of college-designed assessment books to record trainees' development towards competence in each NVQ unit. Awarding bodies' log books and assessment documents are not used. Portfolios are underdeveloped and do not contain summaries of progress. Some trainees are uncertain of the progress which they have made towards the

award. NVQ level 2 trainees take two years to complete their award. Programmes are inflexible and unit certification is not considered.

Engineering (mechanical engineering and motor-vehicle)

Grade 3

10. There are 43 motor-vehicle and six general engineering trainees. Of the former, 24 are modern apprentices working towards NVQ level 3. Eighteen trainees work towards NVQ level 2, seven of whom are following a national traineeship programme. One trainee is working towards NVQ level 1. In the group of general engineering trainees, two are following a modern apprenticeship programme and three are national trainees. The remaining trainee is working towards NVQ level 2. All trainees attend college one day each week. Forty-one of the 43 motor-vehicle trainees are employed; all six engineering trainees are employed. New motor-vehicle workshops are currently under construction, including space to expand the heavy-goods courses. Retention and achievement rates are reasonable. The self-assessment report identified many strengths with which inspectors did not agree. Inspectors, however, agreed with the grade awarded by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ active heavy goods vehicle employers' forum
- ◆ additional support available for trainees
- ◆ total commitment of modern apprentices to their programmes
- ◆ high standard of work placements

GOOD PRACTICE

Employers value the calibre of modern apprentices. Trainees demonstrate potential for modern apprentice status and are not automatically accepted on the scheme, even though they have achieved appropriate GCSE grades. The status of modern apprentice has worth in the eyes of both trainees and their employers.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in general engineering work placements
- ◆ no workplace visits by general engineering tutors
- ◆ under-resourced college motor-vehicle workshops
- ◆ lack of understanding of, and commitment to, NVQs by employers

11. The college's staff hold vocationally relevant qualifications and have considerable industrial experience in their own subject areas. Staff draw on their experience to make complicated theory more interesting and easy to understand. Employers also value staff's expertise and experience. A heavy goods vehicle employers' forum promotes vigorous debate and reflects the college's commitment to this area of road transport engineering. The college has its own modern heavy goods vehicle, and trainees carry out all its maintenance. The vehicle offers opportunities for learning about advanced systems to which trainees cannot always have access in the workplace. Trainers offer support for trainees outside normal

working hours, which helps to ensure trainees' commitment to their programmes. The modern apprentices demonstrate exceptional levels of competence and enthusiasm, and their portfolios show a broad range of evidence, carefully compiled and well-presented. The high standard of work placements maintains trainees' motivation.

12. In motor-vehicle programmes, good use is made of evidence gathered in the workplace, and vocational staff regularly visit to verify trainees' progress. Good working relationships have been built with workplace providers, allowing potential problems to be identified early and resolved. The same is not true for trainees following general engineering NVQs. Working relationships with companies are not so well established. College staff do not systematically liaise with employers, and workplace supervisors do not always understand the content or structure of the NVQ. Work-based activities are sometimes repeated at the college solely for the purpose of assessment. Local employers do not subscribe to the ethos and philosophy of NVQs. They regard college and work as two separate activities, the college being the place where training takes place, even though trainees are there for only one day a week. Trainees are aware of key skills, but they are not integrated into NVQ programmes, either at college or in the workplace. The college motor-vehicle workshops are under-resourced, and lack technician support. Trainees have to waste time looking for tools, as there is no organised system for their storage.

Business administration

Grade 3

13. There is one trainee on a work-based training for young people programme, following the supporting information technology course, and five modern apprentices, three in administration and two on an information technology course. There are 10 adult trainees following information technology programmes. The college offers qualifications in administration, using information technology and supporting information technology at NVQ levels 2 and 3. There is a 100 per cent retention rate for modern apprentices, and 50 per cent for other young information technology and administration trainees. The retention rate for the adult trainees is high, with 10 out of 12 trainees completing the course. Trainees are interviewed when they arrive. The only selection criteria are willingness to carry out the programme, although youth trainees cannot have a place on the programme unless they already have a placement. Off-the-job support for portfolio-building for youth trainees is offered once a week. Modern apprentices are employed in jobs in local companies, spread over a wide geographical area. College staff carry out workplace reviews of trainees' overall progress every 12 weeks, in accordance with the TEC contractual requirements. There is no unit accreditation. Adult trainees rarely go out on work placement, although they are encouraged to find their own. Only one trainee was on placement during the inspection. Five trainees following the using information technology programme are based at a local organisation which provides them with real administrative work, supplemented by work from the college and local employers. This gives trainees a chance to

GOOD PRACTICE

Accounting practitioners are used as part-time trainers for the off-the-job accounts training. The full-time trainers also work regularly as accountants to update their occupational skills.

experience some of the pressures of the real work situation. The five adult trainees on the supporting information technology programme work in the college on the information technology help desk. They have the opportunity to work on a variety of machines and increase their communication skills. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with all weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report and identified additional ones. They awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective planning and monitoring of training
- ◆ trainees' awareness of progress towards the NVQ
- ◆ highly motivated and enthusiastic staff
- ◆ good support for updating staff in information technology

GOOD PRACTICE

A modern apprentice gave a presentation to a group of adult trainees on the various types of software which she uses at work. This session provided evidence for her key skills in communication and gave the adult trainees an insight into the types of operating systems and software which they are likely to encounter in the world of work.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few work placements
- ◆ not enough trainers
- ◆ outdated equipment at one organisation
- ◆ infrequent on-the-job assessment

POOR PRACTICE

One modern apprentice explained that she is unable to download material from her workplace to take to college, because the machines at the centre are too old. This means that she is unable to work on information with her tutor.

14. Most of the modern apprentices are positive about their experience. All comment on the high quality of tutoring in the college. Portfolios are well laid out, of high quality, and contain much creative work. All trainees understand the NVQ process and know where they are on the programme. Most are motivated to complete their work. This is particularly noticeable among the adults, many of whom have never touched a computer before. There is a good atmosphere. Trainees work alongside workplace staff, and are frequently given letters and mailshots from the company and the college to work on. They also have a chance to work on graphics programmes. On one occasion recently, they were given a flyer to produce by a local bank which gave them a real opportunity to practise their desktop skills. Much of trainees' day-release time is wasted, as they must have that material worked on in the previous week seen by the assessor before beginning more. Equipment is not up-to-date and much time is wasted by frequent breakdowns. The lack of up-to-date equipment is affecting the quality of the learning experience and the pace at which trainers can progress. The problem has been recognised by the college, and 12 new computers are presently waiting to be installed over the Easter break. Although the college has done much to simulate a real working environment for adult trainers, much of the simulation is narrowly focused. There are too few trainers, and many trainees, especially young trainees, complain about not having enough time with their tutors. There is little on-the-job assessment for modern apprentices. Assessors' visits are infrequent. Only one took place in the 12 months before inspection.

Hair & beauty

Grade 3

15. Norton Radstock College currently has eight trainees on hairdressing programmes, of whom three are national trainees, four modern apprentices, and one an adult trainee. All of the youth trainees are employed in hairdressing salons locally. The adult trainee had a local work placement until just before the inspection, but it came to an end, and the college is finding her another. The college's peripatetic assessor undertakes some assessment of trainees' practical and key skills. Few of the salons have qualified work-based assessors. All trainees receive an induction to both the college and the hairdressing programme and undertake a basic skills initial assessment. First-year trainees attend off-the-job training for six hours at the college on one day a week during term time. During this time they learn hairdressing theory, undertake practical training and assessment, are given tutorials and receive help with portfolio building. Second-year trainees attend college for three hours a week for theory sessions, tutorials and portfolio building. Hairdressing tutors have relevant vocational trainer and assessor qualifications and have considerable occupational experience. All trainees have the opportunity to work towards an additional qualification in First Aid. The college workplace co-ordinator who is not occupationally qualified in hairdressing undertakes reviews at the workplace. The peripatetic assessor, the off-the-job tutor and the workplace training co-ordinator all monitor trainees' progress towards achievement of their qualification, and this is recorded. Of the 20 modern apprentices who have started over the last four years, two have completed their frameworks, four are still on the programme, and 10 have left early with no qualification. Of the other four early leavers, two achieved an NVQ at level 2, and two achieved an NVQ at level 3. At the time of the reinspection it was too early for any of the national trainees to have completed their programme.

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

- ◆ staff changes disruptive to training
- ◆ new trainee assessment plans not yet implemented
- ◆ no work-based assessment
- ◆ trainees unaware of appeals procedure
- ◆ late issue of candidates' log books
- ◆ no visits to the workplace by tutors
- ◆ employers unaware of the NVQ standards
- ◆ full requirements of modern apprenticeship framework not being met

16. Considerable improvements have been made since the first inspection, but it is too early to evaluate their effect on trainees' retention and achievement. The self-assessment report identified both strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths but considered most to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with the weaknesses. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ new and well-structured programme
- ◆ generous trainee:trainer ratio
- ◆ careful monitoring and recording of trainees' progress and assessment
- ◆ effective key skills training as an integral part of the programme
- ◆ good teamwork by staff
- ◆ effective action on trainees' responses to questionnaires

GOOD PRACTICE

The assessor puts herself out to be available for when trainees are ready for assessment. It is quite usual for her to attend to assess on a Saturday, or in the evening, if that is when an appropriate assessment opportunity has been identified.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' low retention rates
- ◆ no formal accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ some employers' lack of up-to-date knowledge of NVQ developments
- ◆ necessity for trainees to change rooms during training session

GOOD PRACTICE

Most of the key skills are thoroughly integrated into the workplace assessment. The exception is information technology since none of the local salons has computers. The college has produced its own hairdressing-based case study to help trainees to develop the information technology key skills, and they find this helpful and relevant.

17. Since the previous inspection, the programme has been restructured. A tutor has now been designated to co ordinate the on- and off-the-job training. There has been a complete review of the internal verification procedure. There is a robust system for monitoring and recording trainees' progress, managed by individual assessors and the internal verifiers. A further member of staff has achieved her internal verifier's qualification. Three other members of staff have also been working towards this qualification and are waiting to have their portfolios verified. All members of the team have individual targets and action plans. Their line manager regularly reviews the extent to which they are meeting their targets and implementing their plans. A newly produced handbook for trainees outlines the framework, the NVQ structure and the content of the learning programme. The college has recently established an employers' consortium, to enable employers to share good practice and receive updates about awarding body requirements. All prospective trainees have an initial interview with the cross-college, work-based training co-ordinator. They receive a second interview with the occupational specialist who explains the specifications of the NVQ they aim to obtain and what qualities they need in order to be successful on the programme. Trainees who are uncertain of their future career path are directed towards the college's career advisors.

18. The college's salon is well equipped, open to the public and it provides trainees with a realistic work-based training environment. Accommodation for theory work is spacious and well organised. The ratio of trainers to trainees on the off-the-job programme is generous. For example, there is usually one trainer to five second-year trainees for theory, portfolio building, tutorial and key skills sessions. Two first-year national trainees are taught theory on their own and they join a group of students, who have their own tutor, for practical skills training and assessment. On average, the college's peripatetic assessor visits each trainee every three or four weeks to carry out work-based assessment.

19. Trainees' progress and assessment are carefully monitored. All the trainees use an individual training log to record their achievement of NVQ units. Before each assessment, the trainee completes an assessment plan. The assessor discusses the results of assessment with the trainee and employer. These are recorded and stored in the college office, where they are available to the off-the-job training tutor. These form the basis of discussion in tutorial sessions and are taken into account when drawing up reports on trainees' progress. Employers receive copies of these reports each term.

20. Key skills training is an integral part of programmes. Key skills are mainly taught through the occupational components of the programme, during off-the-job training sessions. The college has produced an occupationally specific case study relating to information technology. The peripatetic assessor carries out assessment in the workplace of the key skills of communication and application of number as an integral part of assessment of the trainees' NVQ competencies.

21. Trainees feel involved with the development of their off-the-job training. In responding to a recent questionnaire, trainees identified problems with an unsuitable room. The trainees were delighted to see their concerns being addressed and that another room was allocated to them. However, there are still problems with room allocations. Trainees' learning is disrupted by their having to change rooms towards the end of their three-hour theory session. Tutors do their best to structure teaching and learning round this disruption, but even so, it causes the trainee to lose concentration. Staff work well together as a team and are up-to-date on NVQ and national training organisation framework requirements. The programme co-ordinator arranges regular staff meetings for which there are recorded minutes and action plans. At these meetings, the trainees' progress is discussed.

22. Trainees' retention rates are poor. Of the small number of trainees who joined programmes this year, half have left early. The provider knows what has happened to each of them, and why they have left without obtaining their qualification.

23. There are no systematic procedures for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning. During their initial interviews, trainees are asked about their prior learning but this is not taken into account when drawing up their training plans. Trainees are expected to follow the same programme, irrespective of whether they have already covered part of its contents before. For example, some trainees have spent considerable time working in salons on Saturdays, or during their school holidays, but the college does not have any process for identifying skills trainees already possess, and modifying their training programme accordingly.

24. Some employers are not fully up to date with NVQ developments. Although the college has sent them written information and college staff have held discussions with them, they still do not have a clear understanding of the key skills component of the framework.

Media & design (printing)

Grade 4

25. The printing department has ten young people working towards NVQs and other vocational qualifications at level 2, in either machine printing, origination, or print finishing. All the trainees are modern apprentices except one who is a youth trainee. All are employed in printing companies in the area, although some come from as far afield as Bristol, Bath or Swindon. There is a well-established employers' consortium. All trainees attend college one day a week for theory training for two years. The third-year trainees do not attend college. At college, the trainees receive theory training. Trainees have personalised portfolios and workbooks covering the requirements of the NVQ, and separate ones for their key skills. The only full-time member of staff in the department acts as peripatetic assessor, and visits trainees in the workplace to assess for the NVQ. Trainees are expected to complete work for their NVQ at level 2 in the workplace, and then to progress to work towards an NVQ at level 3 in their third year. Second-year trainees also have key skills training and assessment sessions in college. There are no work-based assessors, although most companies have registered expert witnesses. There are normally two other part-time members of teaching staff in the college. One of these acts as internal verifier. At the time of inspection, the staff member providing the computer-based training in print origination and desk-top publishing had just left.

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

- ◆ few workplace assessments
- ◆ disruption to learning in off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate resources
- ◆ some trainees unaware of programme requirements
- ◆ second-year trainees not yet started on portfolio-building
- ◆ concern by some employers about trainees' progress

26. After the inspection, an action plan was drawn up to rectify these weaknesses. Some of the actions specified have been achieved, but others have not, and further problems have occurred in the year since the first inspection. The self-assessment report produced for the reinspection identified a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors did not agree with some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report and considered others to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with some of the weaknesses but found others the college had not identified. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed training sessions on printing theory
- ◆ trainees' confidence in and respect for their trainers
- ◆ trainees high success rates in theory examinations

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ infrequent assessments
- ◆ trainees uncertainty about the extent of their progress
- ◆ ineffective links between off-the-job training and employers
- ◆ little use of machinery and equipment in college
- ◆ no key skills assessment for many trainees
- ◆ inadequate computer-based training at college
- ◆ little opportunity for trainees to be assessed for NVQ level 3
- ◆ trainees' slow progress towards achievement of the NVQ
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification procedures

27. The theory training sessions at college are very detailed, and the tutors are very experienced and knowledgeable about the industry. However, the numbers of trainees are low and year-one and year-two trainees following programmes in origination, machine printing, and print finishing, are all together in the same groups. Some trainees find this arrangement unsatisfactory, as they have to cover some work they do not consider relevant to their individual aims. But in general, trainees find the theory work they do at college complements their workplace practice and helps them to improve their skills. Trainees usually pass all their theory examinations.

POOR PRACTICE

One trainee was unclear about what he was required to do for his assessment. With his supervisor, assessor, internal verifier, and visiting external verifier all watching him, he could not replace the parts of the machine he had been required to take apart and clean. He had never performed this task before.

28. The college has commissioned some new workbooks to help trainees with their learning in the workplace. Trainees are expected to read and complete these, however, with little help from the college. Many of the trainees are not motivated to use the workbooks on their own, although some have done so. Trainees are frustrated by not being given access to the printing equipment in the college. Although printing presses are available for demonstration and teaching purposes, teachers do not make use of them but rely on visual aids such as diagrams on whiteboards and handouts copied from textbooks. Employers have expressed concern, shared by the trainees themselves, that trainees are not getting enough practice on college machines during off-the-job training sessions, before they practise their skills on employers' expensive and delicate machinery.

29. Although assessment visits to companies are planned for every four to six weeks, many trainees are not aware of a specific date or time for their assessment. They do not have a clear assessment plan with details of what is expected of them when they are assessed. On many occasions, assessments are not made by the visiting college assessor, but are being left for the expert witness to carry out. The college has developed training leading to certification for expert witnesses in most companies. Most of these witnesses, however, are still relatively inexperienced in assessment, and some are waiting for guidance from the college. Many trainees are uncertain about the extent of their progress towards achievement of their qualification. None of the trainees who completed their second year at college last June has managed to complete work for their NVQ at level 2 in the nine months

since then, although they have already done all the work for the theory part of their qualification. Many second-year trainees are confused about which units they have to achieve for their theory qualification.

30. Although the college has an employers' consortium for printing, half the employers with trainees on the programme either do not know about the consortium, or do not consider it worth their while to attend it. Many employers are uncertain whether responsibility for training and assessing the modern apprentices, including those who have completed their two years of day-release training, lies with them or the college.

31. Key skills training and assessment are available in college, for the second year college trainees. In order to attend key skills sessions, however, the trainees have to be withdrawn from theory sessions. They have to copy notes on theory from other trainees who are able to attend the theory sessions because they are taught key skills in their workplace. The key skills workbook is attractively presented. Each trainee receives a copy, although some trainees experience delays in receiving it. However, there is no key skills assessment in the workplace, and trainees who do not complete their key skills work in their second year, are not offered any help with key skills after that. Third-year trainees were offered the chance to come into college for key skills sessions in the evening, but most trainees and their employers were unenthusiastic about this arrangement and it has been withdrawn. During their first year of college, trainees receive no key skills assessment or training. No trainee has completed a key skills portfolio.

32. The computer-based training has been delayed until suitable software has been acquired. Training in this area has been subject to considerable disruption. There have been staff changes. Some trainees have a greater level of expertise than their tutors in this area, and are impatient with the college's inability to set them work appropriate to their ability level. The college has not been able to offer sufficient training to satisfy the needs of the origination trainees.

33. Some trainees who are theoretically working towards an NVQ at level 2 are undertaking work at a higher level than this but are not being advised to work towards an NVQ at level 3. No trainees has yet completed work for an NVQ at level 2 within the expected timescale and no trainee is currently registered for an NVQ at level 3. Some employers do not have the resources or type of work to support trainees working at level 3. Others have no information about the requirements of NVQs at level 3. There is now an internal verifier in the course team. He does not have sufficient seniority or status to enable him to plan and develop the assessment process.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

34. The college's equal opportunities policies and procedures are comprehensive. Information about applicants and trainees is collected and analysed. Trainees are introduced to equal opportunities during induction and are given copies of the student handbook, student charter and disability awareness booklets. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda item on senior management team meetings. The college is working towards achieving the Equality Foundation Bronze Award. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, although some strengths reflected no more than normal practice. Additional strengths were identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that awarded by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and well-documented range of policies and procedures
- ◆ awareness-raising days on specific issues
- ◆ positive promotion of equal opportunities in publicity and marketing materials
- ◆ active involvement in equal opportunities promotional groups
- ◆ good access for trainees with mobility difficulties

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no regular promotion of equal opportunities with employers
- ◆ gender imbalance in some vocational programmes

GOOD PRACTICE

Noticeboards display a comprehensive range of material about equal opportunities, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and posters highlighting issues of racism. The noticeboard is in a prominent position, and petitions (eg about vivisection) on the board are regularly signed.

35. The college's definition of discrimination is comprehensive, clearly presented and included in the student's handbook. Awareness of equal opportunities forms a part of induction to the college. Trainees are given the student charter booklet, containing a section on equal opportunities, and the disability statement handbook. College publicity and marketing materials reflect the college's commitment to equal opportunities. The handbooks and charter booklet have been revised by the equal opportunities group to make the content easier to understand. The section on bullying and workplace harassment has been omitted from the latest versions. Awareness-raising days are held regularly focusing on specific issues such as AIDS. A large display to promote mental health awareness is prominently positioned and challenges stereotypes about gender and mental illness. The college's equal opportunities working group meets regularly. It has inserted material on the college's intranet, which includes an awareness-raising quiz for students and college staff to test their knowledge of equal opportunities issues. The group produces a newsletter, outlining changes and giving up-to-date news on equal opportunities issues. Access for trainees with mobility difficulties is good, and signage is clear.

36. Employers are introduced to the college's equal opportunities policy, but equal opportunities are not regularly promoted in the workplace. Trainees are not made aware of issues which might arise in the workplace. The college is aware of gender imbalances in some programmes. In printing, there are no women, and no men doing hairdressing. There are few women in motor-vehicle training, although there have been considerable efforts to promote the image of women in engineering. Although the equal opportunities group has been successful in widening participation among some under-represented groups, it has been less successful at challenging gender stereotyping in schools.

Trainee support

Grade 3

37. The college treats its trainees the same as its students. Rights and responsibilities are the same and support facilities are equally available. Additional specialist help is available for trainees identified as needing help with literacy and numeracy or extra support in the classroom. Specialist tutors run key skills sessions for national trainees and modern apprentices. Individual training plans are kept up-to-date. The college is developing a 'progress file' to record trainees' personal development and progress in key skills. Placement officers carry out regular reviews in the workplace. Workplace supervisors participate in the process. A careers adviser is available for consultation in the college. The self-assessment report claimed some strengths with which inspectors did not agree and omitted a significant weakness. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

POOR PRACTICE

A modern apprentice, who had previously successfully completed an intermediate general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) course, including certificated key skills, was not allowed accreditation of prior learning for the key skills which he had already achieved, towards his modern apprenticeship framework. He was required to come to college to carry out simulations and exercises, for a qualification which he already had.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ full range of student support services
- ◆ comprehensive induction process and supporting pack
- ◆ 'twilight' sessions to suit trainees and employers
- ◆ thorough, well-documented review system
- ◆ promotion of trainees' achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic assessment of basic skills
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ misleading information at initial interview
- ◆ little integration of key skills
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning

38. The college offers a good range of support services to all students and work-based trainees, including a well-equipped library, Internet café, enrichment programme and counselling service. Free transport is provided to nearby towns and

villages. A few trainees do not attend the college at all. Trainees receive a comprehensive induction into the college. The student handbook includes clearly expressed statements of students and trainees' rights and responsibilities. Placement officers carry out quarterly reviews of trainees' progress, fully involving the workplace supervisor or employer wherever possible, and recording in detail the different types of skills developed by trainees. Extra support needs are identified through this process, although the level support provided is not always clearly recorded on trainees' files. The college arranges 'twilight' sessions for trainees who cannot easily attend during the day. Both trainees and employers value this facility. Individual members of staff also provide out-of-hours training and support with portfolio-building, when required. Trainees and students' success stories are displayed around the college, creating a positive expectation for new trainees.

39. The assessment of basic skills is thorough, but not all trainees are assessed at the beginning of their programmes. There is no assessment of trainees' level of key skills achievement when they start, although plans are in hand to establish an initial assessment system. Potential trainees are informed at interview that they are expected to find their own work placements, although the college may be able to offer some help. Little detail about the training programmes is available at interview. Potential trainees without work placements are offered places on a full-time college course until placements become available. There is no integration of key skills in the NVQ programmes for national trainees and modern apprentices. Evidence for key skills portfolios is collected separately, through simulations and exercises which have been developed in each occupational area. There is no system for accreditation of prior learning.

Management of training

Grade 2

40. This is the first college in the area to be awarded the Investors in People standard. The work-based training programme is an integral part of the college's activities. Most staff involved in training have other duties in the college. A senior manager, assisted by a personal assistant, co-ordinates the unit's activities. In addition, there are two work-placement officers who visit trainees in their work environment regularly to review progress and give general support to trainees. The placement officers also monitor health and safety in the workplace and assist employers to carry out risk assessment. A health and safety consultant is employed to assist these officers. Eight college lecturers act as course co-ordinators in their relevant specialist occupational areas. They review the technical progress of trainees as they work towards their NVQs. There are active links between the college and the community. The college has a learning support unit which provides additional support to those trainees who need it. All staff have job descriptions and appraisals of performance against objectives are held annually. During appraisal training and development needs are identified. Some strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weakness and awarded the same grade as the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly defined areas of responsibility
- ◆ well-developed staff appraisal system
- ◆ clear management commitment to development of staff
- ◆ effective links with industry, education and employment services
- ◆ good management of health and safety

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little sharing of information on trainees
- ◆ insufficient information for employers about trainees' progress
- ◆ TEC contract management system not yet integrated with college management-information system
- ◆ little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

41. All staff have job descriptions which clearly define their duties and responsibilities. They have annual appraisals at which objectives are agreed for the next 12 months. Objectives are formulated with reference to the strategic business plan and the needs of the unit. Progress against these objectives is formally reviewed at the next appraisal. Training needs are identified at the appraisal interview by the line supervisor and the individual. There is a clear commitment by the college to enable staff to fulfil their potential and maximise their contribution to the college. A member of the senior management team co-ordinates staff development across the college. Communications within the training unit are good. Most information is passed on informally, but some unit meetings are minuted and actions clearly allocated to specific personnel. Management operates an open-door policy. The college has formed close links with the community to promote its activities. It offers taster sessions and homework classes to young people. It works with schools to offer programmes for disaffected pupils and to collaborate on promotion of educational opportunities for young people aged 16 to 18. The college has close links with the Employment Service, which refers adults for guidance in occupational areas. The unit placement officers review health and safety with workplace providers regularly and advise on risk assessment procedures. An external consultant is employed to offer advice on health and safety to workplace providers in specialist areas.

42. Placement officers are not always present at occupational sector meetings which review trainees' progress, and do not receive copies of trainees' tutorial review sheets. It is frequently difficult for the training unit to extract end-of-term reports or trainees' performance details from occupational area staff. There is no centralised information system which placement officers can access to enable them to communicate a trainee's performance and progress to an employer. The trainee information system was set up, using local TEC software, and it is used primarily to generate reports for managing the TEC contract. It is possible to extract non-standard reports, but staff are still developing this facility. The college has plans to

improve the information systems so that they produce better and quicker information for management. Specialised information requirements rely on manual extraction of data from standard reports. Information about individual trainees and groups of trainees are not extracted from the college's management-information system. Trainees' retention and achievement data cannot routinely be used to provide a basis for reviewing the success of individual programme areas or individual qualifications. Because of the low level of interaction between college academic staff and the workplace, there is no management by tutorial staff of on-the-job learning and little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training elements.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

43. The college has been developing its quality assurance systems. Two major and recent restructurings of the college has made some senior staff available to take up quality assurance roles. Policies and procedures for quality assurance cover many of the college's activities. These have now been extended to ensure they relate to work-based training. The college's success in being recognised once again as an Investor in People has raised staff awareness of the importance of quality assurance. The previously fragmented quality assurance arrangements have been brought together to form a more coherent quality assurance system. They should also take into account trainees' views from questionnaires, but employers' views are not included. The academic board takes overall responsibility for quality assurance arrangements in teaching and learning.

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

- ◆ inadequate internal verification systems in some areas
- ◆ no sharing of good practice in assessment
- ◆ trainees' achievement data not used to measure programme quality
- ◆ self-assessment process not integrated in quality assurance system

44. Measures to rectify each of these weaknesses have now been implemented, but it is too soon for them to have had their full impact on all areas of work-based training. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the short report produced before the reinspection, and with the weaknesses in the main self-assessment report. Inspectors considered many of the strengths in the main self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ programme of observation of teaching and learning
- ◆ cross-college system for internal verification
- ◆ new initial assessment system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete course review data from some schools
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment

45. Senior managers co-ordinate the new programme of observation of teaching and learning. Staff find that the focus of the observations on the quality of learning not just teaching makes it easier for the observer and the tutor to have objective discussions about what is taking place in the classroom. Tutors and lecturers who do achieve satisfactory grades through the observation process, may undergo a second observation within a short time of the first. Lecturers who are experiencing difficulties in the classroom, are encouraged to ask for support before they are observed, instead of waiting until their problems have become more serious. Staff welcome the fact that the senior manager carrying out the observations does not have line management responsibility within any of the schools, because they maintain it is then easier for discussion on the quality of the sessions to be objective.

46. Since the first inspection, a cross-college system of support for internal verifiers and the sharing of good assessment practice, has been organised. The system has been well designed and through it, internal verifiers receive support different from, but complementary to, that offered by external verifiers. The internal verifiers themselves set the agenda for their discussions, focusing, for example, on the particular problems encountered within small teams, or in supporting work-based assessors.

47. The college has established a new initial assessment system with the aim of improving retention rates and ensuring that trainees are suited to their programmes. Trainees and students now experience structured interviews to ascertain the extent of their occupational awareness, interest, and knowledge. All trainees and students undertake a computerised test in key skills. The results of this test, together with the trainees' school record and information about prior education achievements, are used to identify trainees' needs for additional learning support in basic skills. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangement for initial assessment.

48. All schools are required to complete and submit review and evaluation forms for the courses they offer, including summaries of trainees' responses to questionnaires. There is, however, no effective system to ensure that schools observe this requirement in respect of all their courses. The views of employers are not reflected in course reviews. The returns for one of the programmes subject to reinspection had been submitted too late for their inclusion in the papers for the recent academic board meeting. The trainees' responses to questionnaires indicated that compared with college students in other departments, trainees were not as well satisfied with their programmes. Since the last inspection, there has been a requirement for the relevant work-based training officer to be included in the course team meetings. Some course teams, however, have failed to provide dates on which they are to meet. Despite these shortcomings in the formal quality assurance



systems, the informal systems within the college have been sufficient to enable senior management to become aware of the problems within one course area. Discussions on them has begun, although they do not feature in the college's action plan.

49. The new self-assessment report prepared for both the TSC and FEFC inspection identifies the needs of the work-based trainees separately from those of the college students. In writing it, the college followed the guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. However, it is less self-critical than the short report produced by the work-based training department. Inspectors considered many of the strengths to be no more than normal practice and they found some serious weaknesses the college had failed to identify.