



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1998

REINSPECTION MARCH 2000

Henley College Training Services

SUMMARY

At the time of the first inspection, Henley College Training Services offered specialist programmes in three occupational areas. Training in fork-truck maintenance, which was satisfactory, has since ceased, and hairdressing training has been transferred to external salons. This now gives trainees access to well-resourced work facilities and a good range of models. However, the introduction of new material to teach key skills has not been fully implemented for hairdressing trainees and there is little target setting during progress reviews. The quality of childcare training is very good. Many valuable work placements are used, and employers frequently donate demonstration equipment to support learning. Initial assessment of trainees' needs is insufficient. Trainees are well supported throughout their programmes. However, good practices in internal verification procedures are not uniformly shared. Data are not collected, analysed and used systematically to promote equality of opportunity or to inform management decisions.

As a result of reinspection of the Henley College Training Services, the original published report text for hair and beauty has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 report which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Health, care & public services	1
Hair & beauty	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Hair & beauty	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of on-the-job practical training in hairdressing
- ◆ comprehensive trainee support
- ◆ consistently high quality of training in childcare
- ◆ excellent work-placement opportunities
- ◆ effective working relationships between the college and subcontractors
- ◆ good provision of modern equipment by employers to support off-the-job training



- ◆ independent counselling support available

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour and target setting during hairdressing reviews
- ◆ unstructured training in some work placements
- ◆ inconsistent initial assessment of trainees' basic skills abilities
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment at work
- ◆ internal verification procedures are not rigorously applied in all areas
- ◆ limited analysis and evaluation of data to improve training

INTRODUCTION

1. Henley College Training Services (HCTS) is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Henley College, a tertiary further education college at Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. At the time of the first inspection, it offered training funded by Thames Valley Enterprise Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) in the occupational areas of engineering, hairdressing, business administration, information technology, childcare and special learning needs and had 68 trainees on programmes. Two-thirds of trainees were either on hairdressing or fork-truck training programmes. Currently, there are 46 trainees taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs), with 20 in hairdressing, 14 in childcare, 10 undertaking customer service qualifications and two taking business administration. HCTS is recruiting many trainees directly from employers. Hair and beauty, engineering and health, care and public services were the only occupational areas inspected at the first inspection owing to low numbers of trainees in the other areas but all trainees were taken into account for the inspection of generic areas.

2. HCTS operates at the intersection of three county boundaries: Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. It is the only training provider in the immediate local area. Educational achievement in the three counties is satisfactory or good compared with the national average at the level of general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs). In 1998, the average GCSE results in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire were 46.5 per cent, 54.5 per cent respectively, compared with a national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, the results were 47.9 per cent, 56.8 per cent and 61 per cent respectively compared with a national average of 47.9 per cent. There is very low unemployment in Henley, particularly among young people. Only two people aged 16 to 24 are registered as unemployed. In 1998, 83 per cent of local 16 year olds continued in full-time education. The Thames Valley is prosperous and has a low unemployment rate of 1.2 per cent compared with a national average of 3.9 per cent, in March 2000. In 1998, this was 2.2 per cent, compared with a national average of 5 per cent. Representation of those from minority ethnic groups in the area is low at around 1 per cent. Many residents travel to work in nearby towns or commute to London. Labour market trends published by Thames Valley Enterprise demonstrate that business services and health and social work account for over a quarter of the workforce.

3. Since the first inspection, there has been considerable re-organisation of the college staffing at Henley College. HCTS is managed part time by the head of commercial training who reports to the director of student services. Most of HCTS's staff are part time, on variable-hours contracts, equating to 1.7 full-time members of staff. There are three training development officers. Seven qualified assessors and a similar number of internal verifiers are supported by two administrative assistants. Training in fork-truck repair and maintenance is no longer offered.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The self-assessment report for the first inspection was produced during the college's summer vacation and lacked the opportunity of contribution and debate from staff. Work-placement hosts and trainees did not contribute. The report covered all vocational areas for which it had trainees. The report is easy to follow, with clear reference to readily available supporting evidence. Staff responsibilities and target dates are identified in the accompanying action plan. The report lacked critical evaluation and often failed to identify the strengths and weaknesses reported by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's grade for trainee support and raised those for childcare and management of training. Inspectors reduced the grades for the remaining aspects. Following development of the approved action plan, the college-based hairdressing training ceased, apart from monthly theory sessions for some trainees, and all practical training and assessment is now undertaken in the workplace. For reinspection, the college prepared a short report to describe the action taken to address the issues found during the first inspection. College staff contributed to the report, and included the views of the employers. The college did not suggest a new grade in the report.

5. During the first inspection, a team of five inspectors, plus a specialist adviser for fork-truck training, spent a total of 26 days observing and reporting on the training offered by HCTS during October and November 1998. Inspectors sampled three occupational areas: fork-truck repair and maintenance, childcare, and hairdressing. Inspectors were based at Henley, and two members of the team visited the fork-truck training recently transferred to North Warwickshire and Hinckley college. Training staff accompanied inspectors to seven work-placement locations, meeting 41 trainees. They observed assessments and reviews of trainees' progress being carried out and witnessed seven training sessions. Inspectors observed training facilities at both colleges of further education, meeting a total of 39 trainees. They interviewed college staff and HCTS's managers, training and administration staff. Inspectors examined documents, including trainees' files, assessment records, portfolios and the reports of internal and external verifiers and managers.

6. Reinspection was undertaken by a team of two inspectors for a total of four days. They interviewed 10 trainees, two workplace supervisors and three of HCTS's staff. They visited three hairdressing salons and had discussions with three assessors and the internal verifier. Trainees presented their portfolios to inspectors who also reviewed a range of related paperwork and observed three training sessions which they awarded grade 2.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering (fork-truck repair & maintenance)

Grade 3

7. HCTS delivers the City & Guilds 3870 fork-truck repair & maintenance award, with agreement from the local government office as there is no NVQ for fork-truck activity. The delivery of off-the-job block-release training has recently transferred to North Warwickshire and Hinckley college, Nuneaton, through subcontracted arrangements. Thirteen employed trainees are currently placed with employers throughout the United Kingdom. Training at Nuneaton consists of a combination of theoretical lessons and practical workshops delivered in four blocks of training for a total of eleven weeks each year. Trainees sit two written test papers annually, on which the qualification award is based. Inspectors found more weaknesses than those identified by HCTS in its self-assessment report and reduced the proposed grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ significant improvement in achievement rates in the past year
- ◆ all trainees are employed
- ◆ additional skills base given to trainees
- ◆ training enhanced by employers' capital equipment donations
- ◆ excellent training facilities to support learning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unsafe work practices during off-the-job training
- ◆ induction in health and safety issues not given to late-starting trainees
- ◆ irregular workplace reviews
- ◆ no planned training objectives in work placements
- ◆ unrecorded training achievements in the workplace

8. Significant efforts to work in partnership with employers has increased recruitment, reduced drop-out rates and improved examination pass rates. Trainees' achievements have risen in the last year, from 38 per cent of all starters gaining a qualification to 64 per cent in the current year. High standards are set for employers wishing to participate in the programme. All trainees currently on the programme are employed. Employers' commitment to improving off-the-job training facilities is demonstrated by their generous donations to Hinckley college of modern capital plant and equipment for trainees' use. Employers are encouraged to help to identify trainees' learning needs to enable appropriate additional training to be

carried out, resulting in trainees' undergoing a much broader range of skills training than that outlined in the City & Guilds' 3870 syllabus. The recent decision to subcontract off-the-job training has provided trainees with excellent training facilities, significantly enhancing their learning opportunities.

9. Three trainees who began training at Nuneaton a week later than the main group had not been given a safety induction before starting practical workshop training. Trainees are generally aware of the need to wear personal protective equipment, but, during one supervised practical session, they were observed hammering test pieces to determine the strength of welded joints, without wearing appropriate eye protection. Many workplace progress reviews are behind schedule, with some trainees having had only one or two reviews since they started training in August 1997. Trainees have no measurable training objectives or plans for their time spent at work, resulting in some being given repetitive tasks dictated only by jobs passing through the workshop at any particular time. Achievements at work are rarely recorded. Progress reviews are superficial as gaps in training are left unidentified.

Health, care & public services (childcare)

Grade 1

10. Childcare training is offered at NVQ levels 2 and 3. All trainees are on a two- or three-year programme while employed. Practical training occurs at work, with further specialist occupational training identified and supplied by employers. Theory and key skill workshops take place on a monthly half-day-release basis and are supported by monthly mentoring sessions. A monitoring officer visits trainees at work every two months for progress reviews. The local authority screens all prospective trainees for their suitability to work in a childcare environment. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report and found additional strengths awarding a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality, well-resourced work placements
- ◆ excellent working relationships between trainees and assessors
- ◆ excellent internal verification process
- ◆ effective back-up communication to employers and trainees
- ◆ good achievement of NVQs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient time allocated to theory workshops for new trainees

11. Trainees benefit from carefully chosen work placements, well resourced with experienced staff. After one day's initial induction at HCTS, further comprehensive induction is carried out at each placement. Trainees complete health and safety audits to confirm their full understanding of responsibilities in the childcare sector. Qualified work-based assessors carry out most assessments through direct observations at work. Peripatetic assessors visit placements to assist trainees' portfolio-building, theoretical knowledge and understanding. They also carry out additional observations. Monitoring visits include input from trainees and employers and are promptly followed by written communications to confirm any issues raised or actions planned. Monitoring officers also carry out thorough health and safety risk assessments on each workplace, and any remedial action is noted and followed up at the next visit. Trainees work at their own pace, but are encouraged to achieve within realistic target times. Assessors meet bi-monthly and share good practice, with work-based assessors attending at least two sessions each year. Internal verification is thorough and ensures that progress is clearly tracked and achievements logged. Each completed unit is verified within seven days of receipt and the outcome promptly reported to trainees. Success is celebrated by in-house certification of each unit. In 1996-97, all trainees on the programme successfully achieved their qualification and the awarding body's director presented an achievement award to the college acknowledging the first 100 NVQs gained.

12. While the standard of training is good during the monthly off-the-job training, the time allowed is insufficient to cover all of the planned content. The instructor made provision to cover the remaining content at the next session, but it is scheduled to be in one month's time. Attendance is rigorously monitored and recorded, but absence from one session results in a two-month gap between one workshop and the next.

Hair & beauty (hairdressing)

Grade 3

13. Following the first inspection, practical training and assessment in hairdressing is now provided solely at the workplace. The college no longer provides facilities for this. Practical training is given within employers' salons each week. Trainees practice on models under supervision and assessment is carried out by qualified salon trainers supported by staff from HCTS. Theoretical training is given either by HCTS's staff visiting salons or by trainees attending the monthly sessions held at the college. There are now 20 employed trainees on programmes, of whom 11 are modern apprentices and three are national trainees. The remaining six are on other work-based programmes for young people. A qualified member of HCTS's staff undertakes all internal verification. The short self-assessment report prepared for reinspection indicated the action taken to address the issues found during the first

inspection, but did not award a grade.

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

- ◆ in-house training provision does not meet trainees' needs
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities at work
- ◆ college internal verification procedures not rigorously applied
- ◆ achievements of NVQ level 2 trainees are in decline

14. Inspectors identified that considerable improvements had been made to training. There is good work-based training and trainees' achievements have increased. All of the weaknesses identified at the first inspection have been addressed in some way. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the short report, and identified new strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced work-based training
- ◆ high standard of on-the-job practical training
- ◆ extensive range of models enhances trainees' experience
- ◆ flexible training to meet employers' needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards unit accreditation
- ◆ incomplete implementation of new key skills teaching package
- ◆ reviews and target setting lack rigour
- ◆ poor use of accreditation of previous experience

15. All training is undertaken in good town centre-based salons. They are well equipped with good-quality tools and products, and provide a wide range of opportunities for trainees. All trainees are allocated to a qualified stylist who acts as their mentor. The assessor to trainee ratio is good at one assessor to every two trainees in each salon providing sound individual tuition and support. Training is tailored to the individual and they progress at their own pace. High fashion work is encouraged and actively promoted. Leading manufacturers provide more intense technical tuition enabling trainees to gain skills in advance of their time on the programme. In one salon, potential trainees are brought into practical sessions to prepare them for life in the salon and to hone their practical skills ready for full-time work. All salons provide a broad range of varied models, both men and women and across the age spectrum, which ensures that the criteria of the NVQs are fully met

and trainees learn more quickly. Some trainees undertake NVQs at level 2 in customer service increase their employability. HCTS has found that flexibility in training is the best approach for this programme and its training packages are tailored to meet the individual needs of employers. Some trainees undertake level 2 NVQs in customer service, which increases their employability. There are comprehensive internal verification procedures for all portfolios to be sampled. Achievement rates for 1999-2000 are good, with 73 per cent of trainees gaining their target qualification and only a quarter of those who start leaving early.

16. Although trainees are quick to gain skills, their formal accreditation is slow in both theoretical and practical activities. Most assessment is undertaken during training sessions and opportunities are missed to record activities during the working week. A new tracking system has been developed to address this issue. Some training areas are within the working salon and do not allow for a varied range of teaching styles. Dedicated training facilities are planned at some salons. A new package to enhance the teaching of occupationally relevant key skills is being prepared. Some trainees have delayed working on key skills in the expectation of the arrival of this new package. They are now behind in their programme schedules. Reviews are undertaken quarterly and include written comment from both trainee and trainer but they lack rigour, so slippage in assessment schedules has gone unchecked. Target setting is not a routine element of reviews. Some trainees are unclear what they should be achieving and cannot capitalise on the good training they are receiving. The problem has been recognised and a new tracking system has been designed to address this issue. This has yet to be fully tried and tested. Trainees have not received a copy of their review report and resulting action plan to date but the new system includes facilities for this to be remedied for trainees to use it as a reference to focus their training. Although HCTS has a system for recording previous experience, assessment is no more frequent or early for the more experienced trainees to accelerate their achievement.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

17. There is a 4.4 per-cent representation among trainees of those from minority ethnic groups – above the local percentage of 3. Gender analysis of all trainees over the last three years shows slightly more females than males, reflecting a continuing pattern over the past six years of recorded data. There are no trainees with disabilities. Inspectors agreed with the judgements of the self-assessment report, but found additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-defined and widely disseminated equal opportunities policy

- ◆ publicity and recruitment material reviewed annually
- ◆ comprehensive complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of action-planning to address gender and ethnicity imbalance
- ◆ equal opportunities not promoted in all publicity literature
- ◆ collection of data does not inform policy

18. The organisation has a fully up-to-date equal opportunities policy which complies with current legislation and TEC requirements. It is given to all staff and trainees at induction. Terms, such as harassment and discrimination, are clearly defined, as are the detailed rôles and responsibilities of staff and trainees. An equal opportunities support group meets each term, comprising representatives from staff, management and trainees, charged with implementing and monitoring the policy. Recruitment and publicity materials are reviewed annually by a member of the support group who also has responsibility for student liaison in the college. There is a comprehensive complaints procedure, although there have been no reported incidents. Childcare trainees cover equal opportunities issues in considerable depth as part of their training programme.

19. There is an imbalance of gender and ethnicity in the occupational areas of childcare and fork-truck training and no action-plans to address this. Equality of opportunity is mentioned only in some brochures and handbooks. It is not a routine statement in all literature, such as mission statements and letterheads. Equal opportunities data are systematically collected and monitored, but little use is made of the information to inform decision-making.

Trainee support

Grade 2

20. The college's resources are used to support trainees. Both HCTS's management and staff are based on the college's campus and readily accessible to trainees on a daily basis. New staff are currently being employed in the hairdressing sector to monitor placements. There is a recently introduced mentoring system to assist trainees with progression of training. Fork-truck trainees at Nuneaton have access to the local college's facilities. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective mentoring systems assist progression

- ◆ specialist counselling facilities available to trainees
- ◆ key skills assessment carried out by all trainees
- ◆ good, supportive and caring staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ accreditation of prior learning not always systematically used
- ◆ initial assessment procedures and materials not fully developed

21. All trainees are given an initial assessment of key skills, using diagnostic testing, the outcomes of which determine the entry level to their programme. Individual support is given to trainees by HCTS's staff to assist them with learning or personal difficulties which could impede their progress. Drop-in mentoring sessions are provided both day-time and during the evenings. Childcare sector trainees have mentors who visit them at work. All trainees on the Henley campus benefit from access to comprehensive specialist counselling services, together with daily help provided by the college's student service department. Trainees based at Nuneaton have yet to be fully integrated in the college system.

22. Accreditation of prior learning is not systematically used to enhance the progression of trainees who have appropriate industrial experience before they begin their programme. Consequently, their learning programme is longer than it need be. Initial assessment of basic skills is not used to address any learning difficulties which trainees may have with numeracy and literacy, and no extra support classes are offered to address identified problems.

Management of training

Grade 2

23. Following the decision of senior management to close some provision, arrangements have been made to provide alternative opportunities for trainees. Annual staff appraisal is linked to staff development and includes both career and performance reviews. The organisational structure of the service is clear and well understood by staff. The college achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1996. The strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report were validated by inspectors, and some additional ones were identified. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and well-understood management structures
- ◆ effective administrative support
- ◆ good teamwork enhances training
- ◆ effective staff appraisal and development

- ◆ targets used to improve staff performance
- ◆ positive arrangements to honour commitment to current trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees' progress is restrained by rigid schemes of work
- ◆ employers are not always aware of training requirements

24. The management and staffing structures are clearly defined, even though some considerable change has recently taken place. Appropriate arrangements have been made to ensure that current trainees are not disadvantaged by the college's decision to close its facilities in fork-truck and hairdressing training. The alternative facilities are closely monitored and reviewed. Managers operate effectively, working closely with their staff to provide a high level of encouragement and support. Administrative and management support is of high quality. Teamwork among staff is good. They are well motivated, using good communications skills at both informal and formal levels. Communications are enhanced by the use of voice-mail facilities and trainees' access to mentoring sessions. There is a comprehensive annual cycle of staff appraisal which staff value. Piloting of new appraisal documents takes place; this is well suited to the working circumstances of part-time and specialist staff. Appraisal clearly identifies training needs and directs plans for appropriate staff development. Both staff and division managers raise development needs, in response to emerging issues which are addressed promptly. Management performance and facilities are enhanced by the quality of umbrella management provided by the college as a whole.

25. There are schemes of work for each occupational programme, but some trainers stick rigidly to the timescales prescribed. Many employers are unaware of the content or specific needs for off-the-job training. Their awareness of the overall training programme requirements is generally low, and opportunities are missed to engage employers in contributing meaningfully to trainees' achievement.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

26. The Henley College takes an overall approach to quality assurance. It provides a quality assurance framework, supported by a cross-college management structure within which it has developed and implemented its own procedures. This arrangement meets the quality standards of Thames Valley Enterprise. The self-assessment report listed many strengths, some of which were no more than normal practice. Additional weaknesses were identified, and inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented and -managed quality assurance systems
- ◆ comprehensive and well-understood quality assurance procedures
- ◆ effective annual quality review informs management decisions
- ◆ rigorous system for selection of training subcontractors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective use of trainees' performance to measure quality
- ◆ incomplete analysis and evaluation of customer feedback
- ◆ insufficiently analysed destination and leaving information
- ◆ inconsistent internal verification procedures

27. Quality assurance arrangements are well documented and based on measurable standards. The quality assurance systems are managed effectively by a director of quality, assisted by a quality manager who works closely with relevant line managers. The quality manual produced by HCTS is well written and supports good levels of understanding by all staff. The administrative officer ensures that the quality system is effectively delivered in close liaison with monitoring officers. Implementation and understanding of the quality assurance system among staff is good. There is a healthy formal and informal communications network for consultation and feedback. Feedback about the quality of operations is sought from staff, trainees and employers. The audit-based approach to annual quality review has recently been replaced by an evolving system based on self-assessment, validation and action-planning. This involves the use of evaluation forms which contribute considerably to the judgement-forming process. The review is careful to take account of both national standards and the college's operational strategy in respect of HCTS's development. The arrangements for selecting training subcontractors are thorough and comprehensive and have led to high-quality placements and other training facilities.

28. Feedback is sought annually from employers and half yearly, through questionnaires, from trainees. The range and breadth of questioning used in the questionnaires are limited, producing an insufficient information base to improve trainees' experience. Subsequent evaluation is only partially effective in contributing to continuous improvement of training. The exit programme for trainees is underdeveloped, resulting in limited analysis and evaluation of leavers and their destination information. Exchange of information among monitoring officers and other training staff is informal, usually taking place at fortnightly staff meetings. Internal verification procedures are variably applied across occupational areas. While rigorous and extensive internal verification is carried out in the care programmes, the procedures are less satisfactory in hairdressing and engineering.