



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 1999

# Milton Keynes Industrial Training Group

## SUMMARY

Milton Keynes Industrial Training Group provides outstanding training in engineering. While undergoing initial off-the-job training at the training centre, trainees acquire basic engineering skills of a high standard and are well prepared for the workplace. They are then given a wide range of learning opportunities in well-equipped companies, many of which are prestigious. The management of on- and off-the-job training is outstanding. Many trainees go on to achieve higher education qualifications. All trainees receive a thorough induction to their training. The company aims to attract trainees from all sectors of the community. The quality-assurance system is highly effective and it has led to year-on-year improvements in training.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	1
Management of training	1
Quality assurance	1

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive progression routes for trainees
- ◆ trainees' good achievement rates
- ◆ trainees' high retention rates
- ◆ inspirational project work in the training centre
- ◆ successful recruitment of trainees from groups under-represented on training programmes
- ◆ frequent reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ good use of accurate management information
- ◆ excellent co-ordination and outstanding management of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent quality-assurance system

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some missed opportunities for gathering key skills evidence in the workplace
- ◆ lack of promotion of equal opportunities throughout training
- ◆ no systematic assessment of key skills at the start of training
- ◆ no systematic collection or analysis of trainees' views during training

## INTRODUCTION

1. Milton Keynes Industrial Training Group (Milton Keynes ITG) was established in 1978. It is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The guarantors are local engineering firms, from which the directors and managers are elected as trustees. The company's main rôle is to provide engineering training. In addition to its commercially funded training, it provides work-based training programmes funded through Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) and Northamptonshire CCTE. The training offered covers mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering. Its headquarters and offices are above its 13,000-square-foot off-the-job training centre, comprising well-equipped workshops, electronics laboratory and classrooms. There are 22 full-time staff.

2. There are 225 trainees on modern apprenticeships or other programmes of work-based training for young people. Trainees are working towards achievement of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4. In addition to the NVQs, trainees are pursuing other qualifications which range from those at craft level to university degrees. After completion of foundation training in the training centre, trainees are placed with one of about 90 employers for the workplace element of training. Currently, over 98 per cent of trainees are employed.

3. The company recruits across a wide area of Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire. Milton Keynes is a new town with a population of around 230,000. The town has a relatively young age profile, with 46 per cent of the population under the age of 30. There are 5,249 employers, of which 76 per cent are in the service sector. Eighty-four per cent of the companies employ fewer than 20 people. Unemployment is low, at 2.1 per cent, compared with a national figure of 5.2 per cent. In Northamptonshire, unemployment is also low, at 3 per cent. The proportion of the population of Milton Keynes from minority ethnic groups is 6.6 per cent, compared with 3.5 per cent in Northamptonshire. In 1998, the percentage of Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 34.6 and 44.5 per cent respective, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Milton Keynes ITG produced its first self-assessment report in November 1998 in preparation for the inspection. The report was produced by the chief executive and the commercial manager, following extensive consultation with all the staff and representatives of Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire CCTE. The views of trainees, employers and subcontractors were all taken into account. Inspectors agreed with most of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report but they considered that the company had underestimated some of its strengths. They awarded higher grades for all aspects of provision than those given in the self-assessment report.

5. In February 1999, a team of three inspectors spent 12 days inspecting all aspects of the engineering training offered by Milton Keynes ITG. Inspectors met representatives of the CCTE, and managers and staff from the training centre, the colleges and employers. They visited one of the further education colleges used by Milton Keynes ITG, 23 employers' sites and the workshops and classrooms at the company's training centre. They interviewed 56 trainees and observed progress reviews, assessments and five training sessions. Inspectors also examined assessment records, training plans, trainees' files, portfolios and practical work, as well as numerous documents about training and its management. The following table shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed by inspectors.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering	1	3	1			5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Engineering

### Grade 1

6. Of the 225 engineering trainees carrying out a three-year programme of training, 162 are modern apprentices and 63 are on other programmes of work-based training for young people. Over 98 per cent of trainees are employed. Milton Keynes ITG provides outstanding engineering training. During their first year of training, trainees attend Milton Keynes ITG's training centre. There is a variety of modes of attendance, designed to suit employers' needs, but nearly all trainees, are in full-time attendance for the year. First-year trainees work towards achievement of an NVQ at level 2 in foundation engineering. Second- and third-year trainees carry out training in the workplace leading to an NVQ at level 3 and, in some cases, level 4. They attend a local further education college on day-release, where they follow courses leading to additional, nationally recognised qualifications, ranging from engineering craft to graduate level. Trainees choose to specialise in either mechanical, electrical or electronics engineering, and they follow programmes and take training and

additional qualifications which match their needs. Inspectors agreed with the main weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found a number of significant strengths which were not mentioned in the report and they awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ extensive progression routes for trainees
- ◆ consistently high standard of trainees' written and practical work
- ◆ highly motivated and knowledgeable trainees
- ◆ trainees' good achievement rates
- ◆ outstanding project work in the training centre

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some missed opportunities for gathering evidence of trainees' key skills attainment
- ◆ third-year trainees' poor understanding of the key skills requirements

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*The significant projects on which trainees have worked include a full-sized replica steam train, now displayed in Milton Keynes, and a full-sized working two-man submarine, involving the co-operation of the Italian navy. The current project is the design and manufacture of a specialist vehicle entered for the Shell mileage marathon.*

7. In Milton Keynes ITG's well-resourced training centre, trainees are closely monitored and rapidly make the transition from school to the working environment. Skilled and experienced staff provide good training through a combination of instruction, demonstration and practice, and trainees produce work to a high standard. After mastering the basic skills, trainees' practical skills are developed through work on large and well-designed projects, some of which involve several groups of trainees. Many of the projects entail work commissioned by companies which are paying for a professional job. Trainees are enthusiastic and well motivated. Trainees have a good understanding of the scope and requirements of their training programmes. They know that they need to collect and record evidence of their attainment, not only of the requisite NVQ skills, but also key skills. Employers regard the foundation training as an effective way of preparing trainees for the workplace.

8. Around 60 local companies provide trainees with employment in a good-quality engineering environment, offering a wide range of learning opportunities, and the use of the latest equipment. All employers are committed to training, and the company works hard to promote work-based training and vocational qualifications. As a result of encouragement and guidance from the company, many of the companies operate a well-planned system of mentoring which complements the support and guidance which trainees receive during the frequent workplace visits to them by Milton Keynes ITG's staff. Milton Keynes ITG's training advisers work closely with employers to ensure that trainees progress at an appropriate pace. Through negotiation with employers, the training advisers arrange for trainees to work in various parts of the company which provide them with the opportunity to work

### GOOD PRACTICE

*Trainees in one high technology motor-vehicle engineering company are working on the development of advanced Formula 1 racing engines. Although, for security reasons, access to many areas of the company is severely restricted, the working relationship with Milton Keynes ITG's training adviser is such that he is regarded as an employee of the company. He plays a full rôle in deciding the company's long-term training strategy.*

across the full range of skills required for completion of the NVQ. In addition to providing assessment in the workplace, Milton Keynes ITG has trained over 100 staff in companies to carry out workplace assessment of competence towards an NVQ.

9. The portfolios of evidence produced by trainees are of a high standard. They contain a clear record of the various sources of evidence claimed. Training officers carry out work-based assessment by direct observation, and this is supplemented by the witness testimony of mentors and workplace supervisors. The working relationship between trainees and their training advisers is excellent. In addition to the six-weekly progress review and assessment visits, the training officers visit when additional support is required or assessment opportunities at work present themselves. Of trainees in the last three-year group, only 6 per cent left their training early without achieving an NVQ, 84 per cent achieved their intended qualification and 70 per cent obtained both their qualification and employment. Trainees currently in their third year are unclear about the key skills requirements of their programme. Trainees miss opportunities to gather evidence of their key skills attainment in the workplace. Milton Keynes ITG has identified this issue and over the last two years it has progressively changed the structure of the training, so that first- and second-year trainees can provide evidence of their key skills. Additional help is being provided in an attempt to address the needs of the third-year trainees in relation to key skills.

10. The opportunities for trainees to progress are good. Encouraged by Milton Keynes ITG, employers are keen to see their trainees achieve their potential. On completion of their NVQ level 3, some trainees have gone on to achieve an NVQ at level 4. The colleges with which Milton Keynes ITG places trainees have good resources for engineering and are able to provide extensive progression routes, from engineering craft to degree courses. Many employers allow their more-able trainees to continue with their studies at college after completion of their apprenticeship. Several have achieved higher education qualifications. A few have gained a first-class honours degree in engineering.

11. Milton Keynes ITG is highly regarded by local engineering employers, many of which have worked with the group for many years. Their agreement to release their apprentices for an initial year's full-time training by Milton Keynes ITG testifies to the confidence they have in the quality of the company's training. Some of the smaller companies do not have sufficient resources to plan, monitor or evaluate their trainees' progress adequately. These companies are happy to allow Milton Keynes ITG's training advisers to control the review process and have confidence in the decisions made. The training group is well represented in several significant engineering training fora and is an active founder member of the confederation of group training schemes (COGS). This is an organisation comprising engineering training groups which seek to share good practice and, when necessary, resources.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

12. Milton Keynes ITG has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and a firm commitment to upholding equality of opportunity. The policy is part of the quality management system and has supporting procedures which are subject to regular audit. The policy is included in staff contracts of employment and departmental quality manuals. All trainees receive a training agreement which outlines the equal opportunities to which they are entitled. Recruitment of trainees is monitored within the terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. When placing a trainee with an employer, Milton Keynes ITG uses contractual documents, which require the signatories to confirm their agreement to operate within the terms of an equal opportunity policy. Inspectors agreed with all the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found strengths which the company had not identified and they awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and regularly reviewed policy
- ◆ successful recruitment of trainees from under-represented groups
- ◆ demanding recruitment targets
- ◆ sensitive approach to initial assessment

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of promotion of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ gender-offensive material displayed in some workplaces

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Milton Keynes ITG's recruitment adviser has been carrying out some outstanding work with the local Bangladeshi community. A group of students has recently visited the training centre, and the recruitment adviser has twice been to the local community centre and addressed the parents of Bangladeshi children, to explain the rôle of the modern engineer, the training and the career prospects which their children might have.*

13. As part of the company's quality-assurance system, certified to ISO 9002, the equal opportunities policy is subject to monthly review through the management review group meetings. The policy has supporting procedures which are subject to regular internal and external audit. All staff are knowledgeable about the policy and seek to implement it fully. It is prominently displayed at various points in the training workshops, alongside the quality policy. As a result of the self-assessment process, the managers have developed an equal opportunities action plan. The progress made in implementing the action plan is monitored monthly. A member of staff with particular responsibility for equal opportunities has recently carried out an equal opportunities awareness-raising course with the Northamptonshire CCTE as part of the staff development programme. Following the course, the staff member disseminated the information gained on the course to other members of staff in a special training session she organised herself. To increase its effectiveness in this aspect of its provision further, the company is to establish an equal opportunity working group, comprising a representative from each section of the company, with the intention of identifying and promoting good practice.



**GOOD PRACTICE**

*Milton Keynes ITG adopts a sensitive approach to the initial assessment of trainees. The results are statistically adjusted to avoid stigmatising trainees who require additional support.*

14. Through its partnership agreement, Milton Keynes ITG requires all employers with which it works to sign their agreement to operate a suitable policy of equal opportunities. A customer services adviser is responsible for setting up work placements and ensuring that employers and subcontractors implement an equal opportunities policy, before the contract begins. They then monitor the effectiveness of this policy throughout for the duration of the contract. Although equal opportunity is a feature of trainees' induction, many trainees are vague about Milton Keynes ITG's policy or their rôle in its implementation. Most could comment knowledgeably about the information about equal opportunities they have received from their college and employer.

15. Milton Keynes ITG's performance against the recruitment targets set by the CCTE is good. The CCTE sets a recruitment target of 3 per cent of trainees from minority ethnic groups. Milton Keynes ITG recruited more than double this proportion, at 6.1 per cent. However, Milton Keynes ITG set itself an even higher target of 6.5 per cent, based on labour market analysis of the area from which it recruits. This aim is a fundamental part of the company's equal opportunities statement. Milton Keynes ITG regards the failure to meet its own target as a serious issue and is seeking to remedy it. The company specifically seeks to recruit engineering trainees from groups currently under-represented on training programmes. It is currently targeting Girl Guide and Girls' Brigade groups and all the local girls' schools.

16. All trainees are aware of Milton Keynes ITG's effective complaints procedure, which is available to trainees and their employers. The views of trainees are sought during and at the end of their training. Any adverse comments are investigated and, if confirmed, are dealt with under the complaints procedure. All complaints are logged, thoroughly investigated and effective action is taken on them.

**Trainee support****Grade 1**

17. Milton Keynes ITG's clear and straightforward mission statement aims to inspire people to reach their full potential. Milton Keynes ITG's managers and staff work hard to ensure the statement is fulfilled. Through their recruitment and advice sessions in local schools, Employment Service events and work with engineering employers' groups, Milton Keynes ITG provides accurate advice and guidance for young people contemplating a career in engineering. In addition to the advice for those who become trainees, the company provides good advice and support for those applicants who are advised not to pursue training in engineering. Transport is provided to outlying areas, so that young people can attend the regular half-day programme of introduction to engineering which Milton Keynes ITG provides. All applicants for training are interviewed and their suitability for training is assessed. Inspectors agreed with the main weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but they found strengths which the company had not identified. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.



### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good advice, guidance and support for applicants
- ◆ thorough induction to training
- ◆ frequent and effective review visits to the workplace
- ◆ effective setting and successful meeting of short-term targets
- ◆ readily accessible training advisers
- ◆ high level of pastoral support
- ◆ identification and meeting of trainees' support needs

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic assessment of key skills on entry
- ◆ some unrecorded learning and pastoral support

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Trainees preparing for an outward-bound week in Wales have taken the opportunity to identify all the evidence for key skills which they will be able to claim, while away. This includes aspects of teamwork, leadership and communications skills.*

18. All applicants carry out a series of initial tests to determine their ability in basic skills, numeracy, literacy and mechanical aptitude. Milton Keynes ITG runs an effective employment service for the young people applying to become trainees. They arrange interviews with employers, to which they send the results of initial assessments. They help applicants to prepare their curricula vitae and advise them on interview techniques. They keep the applicants fully informed during this process and, in general, they find them appropriate placements with good employers.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*The training manager has recently achieved an NVQ at level 4 in production engineering, and all staff (including the chief executive) are currently working towards achievement of an NVQ in foundation health and safety. This is partly so that staff can appreciate the demands placed on trainees by the NVQ and partly to update all staff.*

19. Once in training, any additional learning support needs, identified during the initial assessment, are appropriately met by instructors, the further education colleges or specialists employed by Milton Keynes ITG. However, trainees' key skills are not systematically assessed on entry. The company's staff are vigilant in identifying and meeting any needs for additional support which the trainees may have. All trainees are given a thorough induction to training. There is further induction at college and again when starting in the workplace. The messages conveyed during induction are reinforced during the first few weeks' training, and trainees retain much of the information.

20. During their initial period of off-the-job training in the training centre, trainees' progress is carefully monitored and instructors make sure that trainees progress at a pace suited to their ability. All trainees in the centre receive a weekly progress review with their instructor, during which short-term targets for achievement are agreed on. Trainees enjoy their training, are well supported and achieve a high level of skills. Pastoral and training support for trainees are essential and fundamental elements of the company's provision. Inspectors rated what the company considered to be no more than normal practice, as strengths.

21. Milton Keynes ITG's training advisers visit trainees in the workplace at least once every six weeks. In practice, the visits are often more frequent and are in response to a request from trainees or their employers to address a particular issue. The workplace review visits have a clear focus on trainees' progress. Workplace

supervisors or mentors are fully involved in the reviews, and clear short-term achievement targets are agreed on for each trainee. Trainees' individual training plans are updated, and their progress against achieving the targets is monitored. Employers and the training advisers' work together closely to help trainees to achieve their NVQ as soon as they are ready to do so. Milton Keynes ITG has been successful in establishing a good mentoring system in several of the companies with which it works, thereby extending the range of support available to trainees.

22. Trainees are well supported at college and make good use of the additional learning support facilities there, such as open-access computer rooms and learning resource centres. Training advisers work closely with college staff and visit the college regularly to help trainees to derive maximum benefit from the available facilities. All trainees are given their training adviser's mobile telephone number and feel free to contact her/him at any time when they consider that they need support. Trainees feel well supported in all aspects of the training, irrespective of whether it takes place at the centre, college or in the workplace. Few trainees leave their training programmes before completion, but those who do are given appropriate advice and support before they leave. Trainees who lose their employment are offered a meeting to help them to find fresh employment. Where appropriate, they are taken back to the centre to continue their training, while another suitable employer is found for them.

23. Trainees have the opportunity to work together as teams, on not only their projects, but also an outward-bound week in Wales. Exchange visits with engineering companies in Germany have been particularly popular with trainees, and Milton Keynes ITG is justly proud of the fact that one German engineering company sent its apprentice to Milton Keynes ITG to carry out his apprenticeship training there. The wall displays in the entrance to the training centre celebrate the achievements of both staff and trainees, including the apprentice of the year award.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 1**

24. Training on and off the job is skilfully co-ordinated to provide trainees with a cohesive training programme within which all elements are linked. Management of the initial off-the-job training is outstanding. Training and assessment are thoroughly planned and relate directly to the practices found in the engineering industry. Milton Keynes ITG's close working with the employers serves to ensure that on-the-job training is relevant to the trainees' work. A board of directors, comprising representatives of some of the companies which own Milton Keynes ITG, determines policy, in conjunction with the chief executive. Management structures are clear, and staff understand their respective rôles and responsibilities. Milton Keynes ITG's good reputation, built over several years, is used to good effect by managers in order to secure employment for trainees with good employers who offer outstanding opportunities for engineering apprentices. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and they awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good management of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ accurate and up-to-date management information
- ◆ clear and effective lines of internal communication
- ◆ thorough staff appraisal linked to extensive staff development
- ◆ setting and achievement of demanding targets
- ◆ good use of management data in decision-making by management
- ◆ well-established lines of communication with employers and colleges

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor management of some aspects of subcontracted provision
- ◆ lack of staffing continuity in one area

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Through a series of standard forms, instructors and training advisers provide feedback, to administrative staff, on trainees' attendance, punctuality and progress, together with any other relevant information from college or the workplace. This feedback is used to update the management-information system daily, so that managers and staff work from up-to-date information.*

25. The chief executive, through a director of training and a commercial manager, manages the 22 staff in the company. Within the company's structure, responsibility for the various aspects of the company's work is delegated to appropriate sections. The trainers and assessors who work in the training centre are managed through a manager of training (internal), while the training advisers who visit the colleges and workplaces operate through a senior training adviser (external). Both of these managers report to the director of training. Many of the supervisors, advisers and managers have been with the organisation for some years. About a year ago, a trainer in the electrical section left, and the company has experienced difficulty in replacing him with a permanent member of staff. Over a two-month period, some of the electrical trainees have had four different members of staff responsible for their progress. This has caused some frustration for trainees. The company has now appointed a new member of staff and is providing staff development to help him to cover all aspects of the rôle.

26. Staff at the training centre, and those out supporting and assessing trainees in the workplace, are well informed about all aspects of Milton Keynes ITG's activities. There is effective informal communication among members of the management and staff team. Training in its centre ceases at lunchtime on Fridays, and the afternoon is dedicated to an updating and training session for staff. All staff and managers attend, and the opportunity to exchange information and share good practice is used to good effect. The computerised management-information system has been developed internally and provides accurate and extensive tracking of trainees' progress. Data on all aspects of the company's activities are collected and presented in a meaningful format. The system is networked, so that all staff, in their workshops or offices, have read-only access and can make use of current data.

27. The company places high priority upon the setting of targets and the monitoring of progress towards attaining them. Targets include those for business performance, trainees' achievements and the personal development of all staff. Formal meetings of

the management team, including a representative from each department of the organisation, are held monthly. Staff receive details of the outcomes of these meetings, and a quarterly newsletter is produced to help to update staff and managers. The company also issues carefully drafted memoranda about changes in policy or procedure. The decisions taken by managers and staff are well informed by the analysis of data from the information system. Trends in trainees' recruitment, retention, progress and achievements are analysed and taken into account by the management team in its planning. The management information system can produce extensive management data such as the date when a piece of equipment was given a safety check and when it is due for the next one.

28. There is a well-established system of annual staff appraisal. All managers and staff have a personal development plan and this is reviewed and updated at each appraisal. Staff development needs are identified during appraisal interviews. Staff development is provided at the request of individual members of staff or because it meets the company's strategic needs. Six months after appraisal, there is a formal review of the progress made by staff towards reaching their targets and, where necessary, these are adjusted. Staff development has included industrial updating, specialist health and safety training and opportunities to gain further vocational and assessors' qualifications.

29. Management of on-the-job training is good, and training advisers play a key part in planning and structuring trainees' activities. In some companies, advisers work very closely with the workplace supervisors and help to determine an annual plan of work for trainees, so that they are able to make systematic progress towards achieving their NVQ. Assessments in the workplace are planned well in advance and recorded on the management-information system, so that the assessors with the most suitable industrial background can be timetabled to carry them out.

30. Communications with employers and further education colleges are good. Training advisers regularly visit the subcontracted colleges which provide trainees with education and training leading to additional qualifications. They work closely with college tutors to ensure that the college's provision is appropriate to the needs of the trainees and their employers, and that the trainees are progressing satisfactorily. The company's management of some aspects of this subcontracted provision is not always effective. In particular, reporting on trainees to the company and employers by the college is sometimes too infrequent and inadequate. If the training adviser, through contact with the college tutor, is unable to secure improvement in the reporting process, then the company's chief executive contacts the principals of the colleges directly.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 1**

31. Milton Keynes ITG has had good quality-assurance systems for several years and has held the ISO 9002 quality standard since 1994. Staff understand and implement the company's quality-assurance system through their normal daily routine. Any changes to policy or procedure are communicated to staff at weekly meetings and confirmed by memoranda, instructing them to destroy all previous

copies. Regular internal audits and spot-checks are carried out to determine whether appropriate action has been taken and that staff are implementing the changed procedures correctly. Copies of all memoranda are kept in a day-memo file, currently being rearranged to bring it in line with the specifications in *Raising the Standard*. The quarterly newsletter issued to all staff refers to the quality-assurance system and any procedural changes made to it. Any member of staff can raise an “internal concern document” and appropriate action is taken to address the concern. Subcontractors and employers are made aware of the organisation’s quality assurance arrangements when a trainee is placed with them. When an initial request is made for an apprentice, a training adviser visits the employer in the workplace and a detailed partnership agreement is discussed and signed by both parties. This agreement includes details of Milton Keynes ITG’s quality assurance arrangements. There are also individual training contracts signed for each trainee or apprentice placed in the company. Many of the companies with which Milton Keynes ITG works have achieved ISO 9000. Milton Keynes ITG has a thorough internal-verification system, and its internal verifiers attend meetings of internal verifiers from similar organisations, to share good practice. Inspectors agreed with most of the main strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found some strengths, however, which the company had not identified and they awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good quality-assurance arrangements
- ◆ development of a unified quality-assurance system
- ◆ comprehensive target-setting
- ◆ use of trend analysis in planning action to improve quality of training
- ◆ effectiveness of quality assurance in leading to improvements over many years
- ◆ good self-assessment process

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some trainers’ slow progress towards achieving assessor’s qualification
- ◆ no arrangements for obtaining feedback from trainees during training

32. Milton Keynes ITG has a culture of continuous quality improvement. The vision statement and policy on quality are prominently displayed in various locations at the training centre, and files relating to quality assurance are colour coded and kept in the main office where all staff have access to them. The company’s arrangements for quality assurance have been developed over many years and have been steadily refined and improved over that time. All quality assurance procedures are reviewed annually and are a standing agenda item for the bi-monthly meetings of the management review group. Standing agenda items at these meetings, attended by

representatives from all sections of the company, include training programme reviews, internal and external audit reports, customers' concerns, complaints and any procedural changes resulting from action on concerns raised by members of staff.

33. In the summer of 1998, management restructured the quality-assurance system and rewrote the quality manual to bring the system closer in line with *Raising the Standard*. The company aims to have the fully restructured system, including financial and business quality assurance in a single framework, operational by summer 1999. The transition between the current system and the newly structured system is being thoughtfully phased in, so that the change can take place gradually.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*One internationally renowned engineering company, using another training provider, was experiencing problems because its apprentices failed to achieve. It was on the point of sacking its apprentices and ceasing training. Together with Milton Keynes ITG's director of training, a training adviser worked to produce a complete training and assessment plan for the company's apprentices. They arranged to transfer the apprentices to more appropriate courses at college leading to NVQs appropriate to their work. They also set up a work-based mentoring system in the company. Apprentices have now achieved NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Some have gone on to higher educational qualifications. The company is delighted and continues to recruit apprentices and work through Milton Keynes ITG.*

34. Objectives and targets are set for business performance, staff attainment, trainees' achievements and many other aspects of Milton Keynes ITG's activities. The progress towards these targets is closely monitored and recorded. Year-on-year analyses are used to identify trends in the extent to which key targets are missed or exceeded, and procedures are modified and good practice is disseminated accordingly. Some training instructors have been slow in achieving their assessor qualifications. Milton Keynes ITG now has a commitment to ensuring that all new staff achieve their assessor's qualifications in their first year with the company. Feedback from employers and trainees is analysed to inform decisions about training. The company has formally sought trainees' views over the last 10 years. However, the views are sought only on completion of training. Through the self-assessment process, Milton Keynes ITG has identified the need for more frequent feedback from trainees, and a new set of questionnaires is being developed, which will be put to trainees during their training.

35. The self-assessment carried out by Milton Keynes ITG took account of the views of trainees, employers and college staff. The self-assessment process was rigorous. The action plan produced from the process is realistic and detailed. Improvements to the quality of training have already resulted from the self-assessment process. For example, in response to feedback from employers, the number of trainees allocated to each training adviser has been reduced. Training advisers are now able to spend more time in each company. Both trainees and employers welcome this improvement.