



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

# Uxbridge College

## SUMMARY

Uxbridge College offers satisfactory training in engineering. Trainees are offered the opportunity to gain qualifications in addition to their NVQ and the college has developed good working relationships with a range of local employers. The college's approach to equal opportunities is very thorough and is well supported by all staff and employers. It is also subject to a continuing and effective cycle of review and improvement. Trainee support arrangements are comprehensive and include a team of well-qualified support staff. The overall management of training is good and management information is effectively communicated to all staff. Quality assurance arrangements help to ensure that training is consistently of a high quality.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective integration of key skills into occupational area
- ◆ additional qualifications offered to all trainees
- ◆ effective external promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities review arrangements
- ◆ wide range of trainee support services
- ◆ excellent supported learning centre resources
- ◆ managers encourage open debate among staff
- ◆ comprehensive and accurate self-assessment report

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poor documented reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ key skills not systematically assessed on entry
- ◆ some management and quality systems do not extend to work-based training programmes

## INTRODUCTION

1. Uxbridge College is a general further education college situated on the outer fringes of west London. It is the only further education college in the London Borough of Hillingdon. It employs 340 staff and has 6,621 students who are, in the main, funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college attracts students and trainees from the bordering boroughs of Ealing, Harrow and Hounslow, and from Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. An increasing number are drawn from the east and south of the borough and the proportion of students and trainees from minority ethnic groups has increased to 52 per cent in the last three years. The college has two campuses, one at Hayes and one at Uxbridge. The campuses are of roughly equal size, although located in very different communities. The Hayes campus is subject to major redevelopment. Uxbridge, in contrast, is a large campus with buildings of modern construction. The college receives funding from a variety of sources including the FEFC, grants, income from fees and a contract with West London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for its small work-based training for young people contract. This TEC-funded work accounts for less than 0.3 per cent of the college's total income. Trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering trades.

2. West London is an economically active area, with an advanced logistics sector based around Heathrow airport. The surrounding area has a high concentration of information technology companies and corporate headquarters. The economic development of old manufacturing sites has led to a high concentration of industries using advanced technology and the excellent economic infrastructure of west London ensures that it is a major area for international business investment. The local unemployment rates in January 1999 for the area covered by West London TEC are: Ealing 5.1 per cent, Hillingdon 2.6 per cent, Hounslow 3.9 per cent and Richmond 2.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds varies from 6.6 per cent for the Richmond area to 36.6 per cent for Ealing. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 50.6 per cent for Richmond and 44 per cent for Hillingdon, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Uxbridge College is subject to the FEFC self-assessment and four-yearly inspection process and is, therefore, familiar with the concept of self-assessment. It produced its self-assessment report for the Training Standards Council four months before inspection. Staff from the business unit of the college and the appropriate occupational areas were involved in the process.

4. A team of two inspectors spent a total of four days at Uxbridge College during March 1999. Inspectors examined college and awarding body documents. They interviewed 10 college staff and seven trainees and held discussions with five employer representatives. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and the portfolios being compiled for NVQs. Inspectors observed three training sessions, the details of which are tabled below:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

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

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Engineering

#### Grade 3

5. There are seven engineering trainees on modern apprenticeship programmes, working towards NVQs at level 3. Three of these trainees are working towards motor vehicle qualifications and four are working towards mechanical engineering qualifications. All trainees are in employment, training on the job and attending Uxbridge College on a day-release basis to gain background knowledge and undertake some training and assessment and key skills development. Most trainees are also taking additional qualifications. Staff are occupationally qualified and experienced and hold trainer and assessor awards. There is a small number of qualified assessors in the workplace. College tutors visit trainees and carry out assessments in the workplace. Trainees are visited regularly and their progress is reviewed in the workplace. All trainees undertake an initial assessment as part of a college-wide policy but there is no systematic initial assessment of key skills upon entry, although prior learning is accredited where appropriate. The self-assessment report contained some strengths and weaknesses more relevant to the generic aspects of provision. Inspectors agreed with the remaining strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ staff have extensive knowledge of the industry
- ◆ effective integration of key skills into occupational area
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to gain additional qualifications

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poor documentation of trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ low awareness by trainees and employers of NVQ programmes

6. College staff are all vocationally qualified, hold, or are working towards, assessor awards, and have had considerable experience working in their respective industries. Workplace supervisors are encouraged to register for assessor awards and workplace assessment is beginning to happen. Reviews of trainees in the workplace are regular and a supportive relationship exists between tutors, trainees and workplace supervisors. The key skills workshops in the college are well structured and assignments reflect the vocational work of the trainees. The final assignment is based on a project related to improving the way of working in the trainees' place of employment, encouraging involvement by employers. Some trainees take additional qualifications in order to improve their background knowledge. These include qualifications for motor vehicle trainees and mechanical engineers. A number of trainees are about to complete modern apprenticeships, but the programme is not sufficiently established to provide any information regarding trainees' achievements.

7. Good working relationships exist between all parties involved in the training process and good training takes place both on and off the job, but there is no co-ordination between the two. A number of employers are keen to gain more information to improve the effectiveness of the on-the-job training and, in particular, relate the skills developed at college to the workplace. Leaflets and schemes of work are currently being produced for employers by the college to provide this information. The tutors who carry out trainee reviews on the job are the same tutors involved in the off the job programme of study at the college. These reviews are used to validate evidence gathered in the workplace rather than to negotiate and agree rigorous progress targets with each trainee. The process is not well documented, especially for motor vehicle trainees. Most trainees are aware of the portfolio-building process and evidence gathering, although some are uncertain about the NVQ programme and their rate of progress. All first-year trainees understand key skills but some trainees, close to completion, have only just become aware of the need to collect evidence towards a key skills portfolio. Resources in the college are adequate but, in some cases, out-dated, not reflecting current working practices.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 1

8. Uxbridge College has comprehensive equal opportunities arrangements in place and is committed to widening participation by the local community and ensuring that their courses are open and accessible to all. This commitment is detailed in the college's strategic and operational plans. According to these plans, equality of opportunity is a core value of the college, both in relation to employees and to students and trainees. The college has an equal opportunities policy designed to prevent discrimination and harassment in the recruitment and management of employees. Another policy protects all students and trainees. The college has already, or is in the process of, taking action to deal with weaknesses identified through self-assessment. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified by the college and found additional strengths. The grade awarded was higher than the grade proposed by the college in the self-assessment report.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective external promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ good awareness by staff and trainees of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ excellent resources to support trainees with disabilities
- ◆ wide range of equal opportunities data collected and analysed to inform future actions
- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities review arrangements

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*The college recently promoted its courses and services through a local commercial radio station. A series of advertisements were produced and broadcast. One of the advertisements was broadcast in Hindustani. The broadcast time of this advertisement was planned to target not only Hindustani-speaking students and trainees but also their parents.*

9. The college's commitment to equal opportunities is effectively promoted in all marketing and promotional literature. The college has used local radio advertising as a promotional tool, and has produced advertisements in languages appropriate to the local community. Images within printed marketing materials adequately reflect the local community and promote men and women in non-traditional occupational roles. The college has recently employed a full-time community outreach officer to encourage wider participation among all sections of the local community, with a particular emphasis on under-represented groups. All college staff attend equal opportunities training workshops as part of an annual staff training programme. The college is closed to students and trainees for several days each academic year, so that all staff can attend one of around four different workshops. One of the factors influencing the content of the training workshops is an analysis of equal opportunities data, which is regularly collected by the college. Statistics are collected in relation to students' and trainees' age, ethnic background and disability. These data are analysed and measured against previous data to inform future marketing and recruitment targeting for under-represented or declining groups.

Similar sets of data are collected and analysed in respect of employees, but in addition, their training records are analysed to ensure equal opportunities awareness training is current and available to all. The equal opportunities arrangements of the college are regularly reviewed. Each section of the college has an input into the process and the review group has a panel on which students and trainees are represented. Once the review is completed, all staff have an opportunity to comment on and influence the process through the monthly staff briefing sessions.

10. The college provides excellent access for trainees with disabilities. Wheelchair access is freely available, via wide access and automatic doors, ramps and lifts, to all areas of the college campus, apart from one block on the main Uxbridge site. Should a trainee or student require access to this block of teaching rooms, staff rearrange lesson timetables and teaching locations to overcome the problem. This has been done on at least two occasions in the past. Trainees with a hearing impairment are very well supported by the college. There is currently one full-time member of staff who is trained as a communicator for the hearing-impaired and the college has access to a further six trained communicators.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

11. The modern apprenticeship programme at Uxbridge College accounts for a very small percentage of the total student population. Trainees join the college modern apprenticeship programme directly by referral from employers or transfer from full-time courses, once employment has been secured. Trainees undergo an induction programme at the college and have a good memory of the contents. Throughout the training period, trainees are well supported by their tutors, both on and off the job. Reviews are regular and work based assessment and evidence gathering is encouraged. The college environment is welcoming, with prints and paintings on all the corridor walls. The staff are friendly and helpful. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, with the exception of one strength which was regarded as being no more than normal practice. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified and inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the college.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ each trainee allocated a personal tutor
- ◆ dedicated support staff available to all trainees
- ◆ excellent learning centre resources
- ◆ good progression advice and support

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ key skills not systematically assessed on entry
- ◆ trainees not always clear about availability of resources and support

12. Trainees gain places on the modern apprenticeship programme as a result of employer contact or referral from careers office. College staff promote the programme at education and industry conventions. All prospective trainees are interviewed and a report sheet has recently been introduced to standardise the process. An initial assessment of trainees' basic skills ability is used to identify any additional learning needs and suitable learning support is organised through the college's support team. Trainees are allocated a nominated tutor as their contact person throughout their programme. It is this member of staff who completes trainees' on-the-job progress reviews. All trainees attend a college induction and are issued with a handbook containing policies and procedures. All trainees can use the library and learning centres on the college site, which are well stocked with programme-related software and appropriate learning packages. Dedicated support staff assist in these areas and can be called upon by any trainee at any time. Representatives from higher education establishments and various employers are invited into the college to advise trainees on progression routes. The college has a guidance and advice service which is well resourced with a wide range of information for the benefit of all trainees. Trainees are also able to arrange confidential advice sessions with well-qualified guidance and support staff.

13. Trainees demonstrate an excellent understanding of key skills and apply them effectively to their tasks, but there is no systematic assessment of their key skills ability on entry. Individual training plans are limited to detailing units of the expected outcome qualification. The same information is contained in all individual training plans and all trainees work towards the same level of key skills. The individual training plans meet contractual requirements but are not generally used as working documents. However, in addition, each trainee has an individual college learning agreement, kept by their tutor, which records any accreditation of prior learning and is updated each term to note any amendments to the original agreement. Feedback is not systematically sought from all trainees or employers as part of the college monitoring and evaluation process. Some trainees are unsure of their progress on the NVQ programme and are unaware of how to access all the facilities and support available to them.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 2**

14. Uxbridge College employs 340 staff, five of whom are directly engaged in the delivery of government-funded training. Overall responsibility for the management of the contract with West London TEC lies with the vice principal but responsibility is delegated to staff who work within the college's business unit. The staff who manage the modern apprenticeship programmes have their own administrative support as well as that which is provided by the wider college. The college has a three-year strategic plan covering the period 1997 to 2000. This is supported by annual development plans prepared and presented by each area of the college, including the business unit. The self-assessment report was generally accurate in identifying the key strengths and weaknesses relating to the management of training. Resulting action plans are clear and much work has been completed or is well



underway. Inspectors found additional important strengths and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ excellent internal communications
- ◆ managers encourage open debate among staff and recognise the efforts of individuals and teams
- ◆ staff well trained to support trainees with diverse needs
- ◆ well-documented procedures for staff recruitment and development

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some management systems do not extend to work-based training programmes

15. The college has made careful arrangements to ensure effective internal communication. Staff are well informed, through a variety of media, on a range of issues affecting all aspects of the college. There is an open approach to the sharing of information. Following each monthly senior management meeting, a briefing note is prepared for the next level of managers. Managers then use the briefing note as a basis for their own departmental meetings with staff, adding local issues where appropriate. During these meetings, staff are given a feedback sheet and encouraged to respond to the issues presented by senior managers in the briefing note. The feedback is then reviewed by individual senior managers or, in the case of more general feedback, by the senior management team. The college principal holds regular, surgery-style, confidential discussion days for all staff. Staff are able to drop in or make an appointment to discuss any issues with the principal. This approach is well respected by all staff and seen as being of great benefit. Through internal memoranda and a newsletter, the efforts and achievements of individuals and teams are celebrated with all staff.

16. There are comprehensive staff recruitment, appraisal and development procedures in place. Trainees have access to staff who are well trained to support their individual, and sometimes specialist needs. This includes support for basic skills and for those trainees with dyslexia or hearing impairments. All staff hold a clear job description and, together with a range of jointly agreed targets and objectives, this is formally reviewed through an annual appraisal and six-monthly review process. In support of this process, there is a system of classroom observations, in which all teaching staff are observed at least once a year. Their performance is recorded, and detailed feedback is provided to the observed member of staff at the time of the observation. The records are used to inform the appraisal process and to assist in the identification of both individual and generic staff development needs. The observation of staff has been extended to include the observation of non-teaching employees. This recent development is not systematic across all areas of the college and as yet does not include those staff responsible for government-funded training. A wide range of management information is regularly collected and analysed to inform management decisions and actions. Students'

achievement and retention targets are set and rigorously reviewed, but this level of detail is only available in respect of the main college curriculum. While modern apprentices are included in the curriculum targets, they are not currently identified as a separate group.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

17. Uxbridge College has a comprehensive quality assurance manual which meets TEC and awarding body requirements. There is a clear commitment from management and staff to deliver good-quality training to trainees and local employers. Quality assurance arrangements are well documented, fully understood and supported by all staff. Trainees and employers are also provided with comprehensive information regarding these arrangements. Quality assurance procedures and policies relate to the whole college, as do review and monitoring arrangements which are focused on the college curriculum activities. The self-assessment report accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in respect of the quality assurance of training programmes. Inspectors found that the timescale of the action plan produced to address perceived weaknesses was realistic. Inspectors also identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance manual and procedures
- ◆ quality assurance understood and implemented by all staff
- ◆ quality assurance procedures lead to improved performance by trainers
- ◆ comprehensive and accurate self-assessment report

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some quality assurance arrangements not extended to work-based training programmes

18. The college has a set of comprehensive quality assurance procedures which, in the main, relate to courses funded by the FEFC. There is no specific reference to government-funded work-based training and none of the quality assurance activities relate specifically to trainees. In reality, however, most arrangements do extend to cover trainees and work-based training programmes. The college recognises that the procedures need updating and has already completed a new procedures manual specifically relating to work-based training. Quality assurance arrangements are fully understood and supported by staff. All staff encourage the sharing of good practice and welcome opportunities to improve any aspect of their working practices. They regard the observation of classroom sessions positively and respond well to constructive feedback. Internal verification is ongoing and involves systematic observation of assessments in the college and in the workplace. Details of the review and evaluation procedures are given in the procedures manual. These

procedures include work-based trainees, and require staff to seek the views of students and trainees on particular courses, but there is no systematic review of the modern apprenticeship programme. Where trainees' views are sought, they are systematically analysed and used to inform improvement activities. Effective internal auditing arrangements ensure that procedures, policies and reviews are carried out to the standards defined by the college.

19. The college is able to draw upon its experience of FEFC self-assessment and inspection in its approach to self-assessment for work-based training. Occupational area teams consider the strengths and weaknesses in each area using the analysis of trainee and student feedback as a starting point. This process is supported by those staff who are directly engaged in the delivery of government-funded training. Additional third-party feedback is collected from, among others, the TEC, employers and awarding bodies. This has resulted in a thorough, informative and generally accurate self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessed grade for the occupational area of engineering and for the generic area of trainee support. They awarded higher grades than the college in the remaining generic areas of equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance.