



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

Intec Business Colleges

SUMMARY

Intec Business Colleges offer good training in management, administration and retail and customer service. There are very few retail trainees. Trainees enjoy their training and are provided with good work placements. Most of the training is well planned. Some employers are more involved in training than others. The training centres are well equipped and have good computing resources. The company is well managed and there is good communication across the seven centres. Trainees have lots of contact with their tutors/assessors and receive good advice and guidance. The initial assessment of trainees is too basic. Centres uphold equality of opportunity but its promotion is not monitored across the whole company. Data on trainees' retention are inadequate. The quality assurance system is good but arrangements for the evaluation of work-based training are underdeveloped.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	2
Business administration	2
Retail & customer service	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ frequent contact between staff and trainees
- ◆ well-structured key skills training
- ◆ availability of additional training courses for trainees
- ◆ good business planning
- ◆ effective and open management style
- ◆ effective communication between centres
- ◆ systematic internal quality audits

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak initial assessment of trainees
- ◆ inadequate central monitoring of promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ inadequate retention data
- ◆ underdeveloped evaluation of work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. Intec Business Colleges (Intec) is the trading name and the recruitment and vocational training division of IBC Human Resources Limited. Intec is a privately owned company and was established in Rugby in 1982 by the current managing director. Intec has seven centres throughout England in: Bristol, Lincoln, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Nottingham, Oxford and Rugby. Intec has contracts with Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, Greater Nottingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), WESTEC, Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, Lincolnshire TEC, Heart of England TEC and Northamptonshire TEC. Intec has a total of 110 staff. Each centre has a manager, several trainers/assessors and a sales and administration team. At Rugby there is a training centre and a separate head office, where the senior management team is located with the corporate marketing staff. Intec have restructured during the last year and they have ceased offering training for adults and have re-focused on the needs of young people. At the same time, there has been a new emphasis on the corporate management of Intec, Centres have been urged to improve communication and share good practice, whilst still maintaining autonomy to enter into local contracts.

2. Intec has 901 trainees in total, with 20 in management, 689 in business administration and 192 in retail and customer service training. Almost all the trainees are employed in companies in the locality of each centre. Modern apprentices and national trainees account for 75 per cent of trainees. The Lincoln centre has a small number of trainees on the New Deal training programme and a small number of trainees following care, hospitality and foundation training. Training and assessment take place in the workplace supported by the employer's workplace supervisor and Intec's tutor/assessor. Trainees attend Intec's training centres for workshops on a variety of skills.

3. The unemployment rates for the areas covered by Intec range from 2 per cent in Oxford to over 5 per cent in parts of Nottingham, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. Most of the Intec centres are situated in places where there is growth in areas of the service sector such as finance, distribution and tourism, and decline in manufacturing. For example, in Northampton, the clothing and footwear industry has diminished and in Nottingham bicycle manufacture has declined. Oxford and Milton Keynes have seen particular growth in computing services. A new university has recently been established in Lincoln.

4. The number of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above varies from 26.2 per cent in Nottingham and 29 per cent in Bristol to 46.5 per cent in Oxford and 48.4 per cent in Lincoln, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The self-assessment report was produced in February 1999 by a working group consisting of the managing director and three centre managers. Several centres also produced their own local report at the request of their local TEC. All members of staff were involved in self-assessment. Feedback from trainees and employers was sought for the report. The report identified the same strengths and weaknesses for all three occupational areas. Strengths and weaknesses for the generic aspects related to the company as a whole rather than individual centres.

6. Ten inspectors working in two teams spent a total of 58 days with Intec and visited all seven sites and the head office. They interviewed 94 trainees, 68 supervisors and 38 staff. They visited 83 companies, saw 64 portfolios and observed 10 training sessions and four assessments. Inspectors looked at trainees' files, management information, internal and external verifiers' reports, curriculum information, policies and procedures and promotional materials.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Management & professional			2			2
Business administration	1	4				5
Retailing & customer service	1	1	1			3
Total	2	5	3	0	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Management & professional

Grade 2

7. There are 19 modern apprentices and one youth trainee at Bristol, Milton Keynes and Oxford working towards a management NVQ at level 3 or 4. The modern apprentices work towards a key skills qualification at level 3. Intec also offers commercial management training to employers. Trainees at Milton Keynes have already completed a customer service or business administration qualification and some of their key skills qualification before starting the management training. At the other sites, trainees begin with work towards the management qualification. Trainees are employed in a range of companies including a family cleaning business, a food manufacturer and a cycle accessory company. Training and assessment take place in the workplace. There is one-to-one coaching assessment through direct observation of trainees' performance. Some trainees attend workshops on key skills at each Intec centre for one day every two or three weeks. Internal verification is carried out at the centres or at the head office depending on which of the three awarding bodies is used. The self-assessment report did not distinguish between the different occupational areas and did not identify specific strengths or weaknesses for

management training. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ devolution of a good level of management responsibility to trainees
- ◆ usefulness of training to employers
- ◆ trainees' success in gaining qualifications
- ◆ good variety of on-the-job training
- ◆ flexibly arranged training to meet operational demands

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently demanding work for some trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for trainees to help and support one another
- ◆ no sharing of training materials in management by centres
- ◆ some trainees' lack of awareness of progress

GOOD PRACTICE

Good practice was exemplified when a trainee negotiated a management project with her manager, before agreeing the details with the tutor. The project is of real use in the workplace and is valued by the manager and the trainee. The project will also enable the trainee to provide all the evidence needed for the key skills elements of the modern apprentice scheme.

8. Trainees benefit from a variety of good placements with employers. Trainees have many opportunities to extend their management experience through shadowing other managers and taking on responsibility for physical and human resources. Trainees' responsibilities are well matched to the requirements of level 3 supervisory qualification. Some trainees are working for the qualification to help them in their role as a manager, and others, because they have been promoted to manager. Trainees are confident and well motivated. They are keen to gain the qualification and to develop their management skills. Trainees see the qualification as a route to greater employability. Trainees enjoy their training and are flourishing. The trainees are bringing positive benefits to the business. The company is now more aware of the importance of feedback from customers and it is making changes in policy and supporting training. Trainees are keen to develop their staff as a result of their own personal development and growth.

9. There are only a few management trainees, but nearly all complete the programme and achieve their qualification. Some trainees also gain customer service and administration qualifications. Key skills training is well integrated with the vocational training through management projects, which are chosen through discussions with the trainees, their managers, and the tutor. The projects are of real value in the workplace. Trainees receive individual coaching from tutors/assessors who encourage trainees to think for themselves and work out their own solutions to problems. Trainees find that this style of teaching encourages them to reflect on their management tasks and plan carefully within their job roles. Employers provide a good variety of training covering time management, team building, budget handling, health and safety and first aid.

10. Trainees often have operational demands in addition to their training, which affect the extent of their portfolio development or key skills development, or the number of review meetings they can attend. Tutors/assessors respond flexibly to these demands and in some cases are prepared to put the training on hold for a few months to allow the trainee time to meet them. The assessment and internal verification of the training are satisfactory and staff have appropriate management experience. On achieving their qualification, trainees are presented with the certificates at the annual open day, in the presence of their employer.

GOOD PRACTICE

Good practice was exemplified when a trainee working in a company that produced sandwiches, carried out a research project into the customers' favourite choices. The results of the research were presented to the board of directors. New brands of sandwiches were produced and the marketing on others was revised, leading to an increase in sales.

11. Trainees who have already achieved a qualification in administration or customer service are less challenged by the management training. The format for collecting evidence, producing personal reports and cross-referencing does not stimulate some trainees. In many cases, they are merely re-using evidence from their work for previous qualifications. Most trainees do not have the opportunity to meet other management trainees during or outside office hours, to share good practice or discuss issues and alternative methods of management. One centre recently offered some management workshops for trainees to meet together and discuss management theory but only one took place because attendance was poor.

12. The management materials at the centres are varied and some are detailed, useful and well presented. These materials are not systematically shared between the centres and some trainees and tutors are unaware of their existence. Some trainees were unaware of the progress they had made and what parts of the management or key skills qualification they had achieved. They did not realise how much they had to do to complete their training.

Business administration**Grade 2**

13. There are 689 trainees following business administration programmes, of whom 87 are working towards accountancy qualifications. Three hundred and fifty-four are modern apprentices in administration, information technology, and accountancy. There are 113 trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 on national traineeship programmes with 135 on other training. Trainees can work towards NVQs up to level four. Almost all trainees on these programmes are employed. Some are on short-term contracts of employment for the duration of the training programme and a small number are on work placement. There are 32 members of staff responsible for programmes in this area. There are a few trainees with identified special training needs. The self-assessment report did not distinguish between occupational areas. Inspectors considered that a number of the strengths identified by the company were no more than normal practice. Some of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report did not relate to this occupational area. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and well-planned training to meet individual trainees' needs

- ◆ effective integration of key skills training with vocational training
- ◆ regular and effective feedback to trainees
- ◆ good computing resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate involvement of some workplace supervisors in training
- ◆ some trainees' poor attendance at key skills workshops

14. Trainees receive well-planned and effective training in the workplace. Individual training plans are clear and comprehensive. The tutors/assessors and the workplace supervisors discuss training needs on a regular basis. Trainees were observed in a variety of work settings. These all provided good opportunities for work-based learning. In those instances where the employer does not have the opportunity to provide trainees with specific tasks to meet NVQ requirements, arrangements are made for Intec staff to provide the training, either in the workplace or the training centre. The training is of a good quality and meets the requirements of the awarding bodies.

15. There are 87 accounting trainees. Intec uses two awarding bodies for accounting. At those centres where trainees may work for the qualifications of both bodies, trainees will initially register with the body which does not require candidates to sit formal exams. Those trainees who wish to take externally administered tests are then registered with the other body. Some trainees receive certificates from both awarding bodies. Although accounts trainees are visited by tutors/assessors in the work place, their contact with the specialist accounts tutor is normally at the provider's premises. There is little opportunity for employers to discuss the trainees' progress and training needs with the accounts tutor. Intec are reviewing the use of one of the two awarding bodies it uses for accountancy training.

16. Key skill workshops are offered in the training centres. These workshops are part of a strategy to improve the employability of young people and to integrate key skills training with vocational training. The first workshops have just concluded and Intec are evaluating the results. Trainees receive monthly visits from their designated assessor with whom they enjoy good working relationships. Frequent and regular assessments are carried out in the workplace and are well recorded. Trainees plan future action with their tutor at every review. The quality of assessment is sound and trainees receive regular and effective feedback on their progress. Trainees are highly motivated. They are well informed about the programmes they are following and speak enthusiastically about their studies. Formal reviews of trainees' progress take place every three months. Supervisors are not usually present when assessors meet with the trainees. Assessors will meet separately with the supervisor or provide them with written reports on a trainee's progress and training needs. All centres have qualified and experienced staff. Centres are well resourced with excellent computing suites, containing modern computers with industry standard software.

17. Some workplace supervisors do not have a full understanding of the NVQ process and are not fully involved in the training. Some draw a distinction between work-related and NVQ-related training. Although some supervisors have assessor qualifications, they seldom carry out any assessment. At some centres, trainees' attendance at off-the-job training is poor. Those trainees who are unable to attend key skills workshops receive their training from the assessor in the workplace. Some trainees benefit from the key skills workshops, whilst others do not find them sufficiently demanding. Trainees are achieving their key skills qualifications, however, and they are producing good portfolio evidence derived from real work projects.

18. Achievement data provided by Intec are not broken down into occupational areas. Inspectors found it difficult to form clear judgements, on the basis of these data, about trainees' levels of achievement within this occupational area. However, trainees make good progress. In its self-assessment report, the company acknowledged that retention rates at the centres varied and in some instances, they were poor. Inspectors did not have sufficient data to be able to agree or disagree with this finding. The company has made efforts to improve management data and increase trainees' retention rates.

Retail, Warehousing and Customer Services

Grade 2

19. Intec has 192 trainees working towards qualifications in retail, telesales, distribution and warehousing or customer service. Most trainees are on customer service programmes with only 13 trainees working towards retail qualifications. One hundred and twenty-eight trainees are on modern apprenticeship programmes, 13 are on national traineeships and 51 are on other youth training programmes. In addition, fifty-nine trainees in the business administration sector are also taking NVQ qualifications in customer service. Ninety-eight per cent of the trainees are employed and all others have full-time placements. Training is provided both on and off the job and all assessments are conducted in the workplace. It was not possible for inspectors to separate out trainees' achievement rates in this sector from the data on trainees throughout the company. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report but found others which the company had not identified. They awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent links with employers
- ◆ good, customised insurance training
- ◆ rigorous assessment practice
- ◆ good use of support material for customer service candidates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate training plans agreed with employers
- ◆ inadequate retail training and assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

Intec staff in Northampton have developed a customised training programme for an insurance company. This combines training leading to customer service, administration, key skills and insurance NVQs with a structured workshop programme ensuring that theory work is covered systematically. The company is delighted with the programme.

20. The training advisors maintain excellent links with a wide range of employers including large car dealerships, financial advisors and small businesses. On occasions, presentations have been given at large companies to highlight the benefits of training for both potential and existing employees. Customer service trainees are all in jobs that give them opportunities to collect appropriate evidence of their competencies for the purposes of NVQ assessment. They are employed as receptionists, in customer service roles in large companies or in financial, recruitment and insurance companies where they have regular contact with the public. Some warehousing trainees are in national distribution companies whilst others are in small furniture warehouses. In some instances, the supervisors for the trainees are themselves enrolled as modern apprentices in customer service or management.

GOOD PRACTICE

In Milton Keynes, a flowchart has been developed to assist in identifying whether or not a trainee is likely to be able to provide evidence at level 2 or 3 for the NVQ in customer service. Potential level 3 candidates are asked if they can organise their own work, balance the needs of customers and the company, and if they can propose and deliver solutions arrived at through their survey work.

21. Intec staff involve the workplace supervisors in trainees' action planning and assessments. The supervisors are encouraged to help their trainees to develop workbased projects that are relevant to the NVQ and involve the use of key skills. Most trainees were highly motivated. Most have gained confidence as a result of their Intec programmes. Many have been promoted in their jobs.

22. Accreditation of previous learning is carried out effectively. Trainees are given clear information about the variety of assessment methods used. All the assessments are conducted in the workplace and observations of trainees' performance are clearly recorded. Trainees receive immediate feedback on their assessment. They are notified of gaps in their evidence base for their portfolios and they are given an assessment plan telling them what work they will be assessed on at the next visit. Supervisors receive a copy of this assessment plan. They are encouraged by the tutors/assessor to suggest tasks that will enable the trainees to generate the requisite evidence and, at the same time, bring benefits to the workplace. For example, trainees have carried out customer service surveys and these have resulted in changes to working practices in answering telephones or responding to complaints. Trainees understand the structure of their NVQ and how to gather suitable evidence. There is a variety of evidence in the trainees' customer service portfolios, such as observations, witness statements, photographs, personal statements, answers to questions, picking lists and invoices. Trainees are involved with their tutors/assessors in cross-referencing evidence against the performance criteria and range statements.

23. Support materials including learning packs which trainees can work through on their own are available for developing personal skills, such as time management, and for covering background knowledge, such as business legislation. Tutor/assessors give these to trainees and in some cases mail them so that trainees do not have to wait until the next visit to receive them. In Milton Keynes, customer service trainees can attend structured workshops over a four-month period. In Bristol, workshops

are provided when enough trainees need them. Topics covered in these workshops include stress management, problem solving, managing working relationships, avoiding conflicts, telephone techniques and influencing others. Feedback from post-course questionnaires and inspectors' interviews confirmed the effectiveness of these sessions.

24. Intec staff do not record the specific training plan agreed with each employer. They do not identify the on-job training and how it complements or adds to the NVQ training. Some trainees are in placements where there is an excellent in-house training programme and many modern apprentices have received substantial training prior to enrolling on their programmes. Some trainees have time to work for their NVQ in the workplace; a few have a specific workstation but others have to use their days off and work at home on their portfolios. Receptionists in particular have problems finding space and time to concentrate on their NVQ portfolios. Other trainees are not allowed to work on their portfolios or make copies of evidence whilst at work. There are instances of trainees who are unable to attend workshops provided by Intec because of pressure of work.

25. There is no off-the-job training for the 13 retail trainees. All the training is carried out in the workplace as part of a trainee's normal job role but the knowledge and understanding elements are not adequately covered. The trainees do not meet together. Many retail trainees are unsure of the NVQ assessment process. At Bristol, trainees produce NVQ evidence, which is only monitored at the end of the programme. Trainees are not aware of their progress within the programme. At Lincoln, the Intec staff took over the training and assessment of some retail trainees from another provider twelve months ago. Some of these trainees are in placements that do not provide them with sufficient opportunity to gather evidence of their competence in retailing for their NVQ. Employers are not adequately involved in the NVQ process in the retail sector. Portfolios for the retail trainees are over-dependent on observations and personal statements and lack variety of evidence.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

26. Intec has an equal opportunities policy, which complies with current legislation and the requirements of the local TECs. Each centre has an action plan for the promotion of equal opportunities as part of its business plan. In most of the areas served by the seven centres, the proportion of persons from minority ethnic groups in local populations is less than the proportion for the UK as a whole. The number of trainees from minority ethnic groups is proportionate in relation to these local populations. Of all trainees, 29.5 per cent are male and 3.5 per cent have been identified, or have identified themselves, as having disabilities. Programmes for trainees with learning difficulties are offered only at the Lincoln centre. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses, some of which inspectors regarded as no more than standard practice. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded the same grade, as that given by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ annual review of the equal opportunities policy
- ◆ regular action planning at centre level

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities at a corporate level
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of employers' commitment to equal opportunities

GOOD PRACTICE

A new centre manager carried out a survey on trainees' recruitment and collected data on trainees' gender and ethnicity. He monitored practice in relation to receiving trainees' applications, short-listing interviews and the allocation of work placements. He was then able to identify that some trainees, such as females and those from minority ethnic groups, were given work placements where they were not treated fairly. The centre now has a clear action plan to ensure that trainees are given placements which are appropriate for them.

27. Intec's policy on equality of opportunity is reviewed annually and amended to ensure it meets current legislation. The policy covers all centres, is understood by staff and is included in staff handbooks. Although reference is made to trainees, the policy's main emphasis is on staff. Whilst it complies with statutory requirements, the policy makes no reference to such issues as age or sexual orientation and includes little guidance on harassment issues.

28. Centres produce local action plans on equal opportunities. Some of these are detailed. They include targets for recruitment from under-represented groups and staff training. The plans identify members of staff responsible for carrying actions out, and dates by which they must be completed. Other plans are less specific and are merely statements of good intent. These action plans are not reviewed at senior management level. At some centres, staff have recently undergone training to redress the gender imbalance in business administration recruitment. It is the intention of the company that further staff training will take place later this year. Developments successfully piloted at these centres will be applied across the others.

29. Equal opportunities data are not maintained through the corporate management information system. Data on ethnicity, gender and disability are not collected centrally. However, the personnel director is involved with monitoring the upholding of equal opportunities at centre level. The degree to which implementation of the policy takes place varies between centres and is dependent on the requirements of the local TECs and the priority given to equal opportunities by the various centre managers.

30. Data are collected and analysed, but are not always used effectively. The company acknowledges this weakness. Intec's equal opportunities policy clearly states that managers must keep records on applicants relating to disability, ethnicity, gender and marital status. The policy requires statistics to be analysed in terms of the number of applicants, the number shortlisted and the number selected. Intec staff do not always comply with this policy. The company's staffing profile was formally monitored in relation to gender, ethnicity and disability two years ago. The equal opportunities policy requires similar analysis in terms of trainees' applications. This has not taken place at all centres.

31. Where this analysis has taken place, it indicates that the number of Intec

trainees from minority ethnic groups is broadly proportionate in relation to the local populations. However, at Bristol, the number of Intec trainees from minority ethnic groups falls short of the current contractual target. The success of initiatives to increase recruitment from these groups in Bristol has not been effectively measured. Only 29.5 per cent of the trainees are men in what is traditionally a women's sector. The company identifies this failure to recruit more males as an issue in its self-assessment report but it has developed no effective strategies to address it. The company's new marketing campaign is designed to attract trainees from a broad cross section of the population. Publicity material depicts a range of images of men and women, some from ethnic minority groups. The images used do not include those of people with a disability and the campaign makes no reference to equal opportunities. Three of the seven centres have accommodation and facilities above ground-floor level, such as computing suites, which are not easily accessible to persons with restricted mobility. Doorways are narrow and toilets are inaccessible for people in wheelchairs.

32. There has been little effective regulating and monitoring of how employers promote equality of opportunity. Until a year ago, the training contract with employers made no reference to equal opportunities. There are still a few employers engaged under this old contract. Some employers do not have equal opportunities policies. The company has not checked the policies of other employers. Staff from the company have had little discussion with employers about the importance of promoting equal opportunities. The topic is covered during trainees' induction but a number of trainees can not recall equality of opportunity being discussed. It is covered in training for some NVQs but the subject is not raised during trainees' progress reviews. Trainees understand their rights and there are effective procedures to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly and effectively. Trainees are treated fairly, and staff are careful to use appropriate language to make all trainees feel included. The company has not taken specific measures to ensure the promotion of equal opportunities through every aspect of training.

Trainee support

Grade 2

33. Potential trainees receive a one-to-one interview with a training adviser and advice and guidance on the various training opportunities available. A basic assessment of the trainees' learning needs takes place. The Lincoln centre is the only centre that has a contract for supporting trainees with learning difficulties. Following assessment, unemployed trainees are given job interviews. Once training starts, all trainees undergo an induction. Tutor/assessors guide the trainee through their programmes. Trainees who are identified as having additional training needs are given extra support. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses which inspectors regarded as no more than standard practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good advice and guidance to trainees
- ◆ frequent contact between staff and trainees
- ◆ well-structured key skills training
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to receive additional training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment
- ◆ no initial assessment of trainees' key skills
- ◆ failure of some induction programmes to stimulate trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

Intec have identified a good way of attracting young people to find out about their services. They have produced a compact disc which details each of the programmes, occupational areas and centres. The disc is attractive and fun to use. It includes an application form which can be printed off and posted, faxed or electronically mailed.

34. Trainees receive good advice and guidance from training advisors about their choice of occupational areas, level of qualification and career prospects. Trainees who do not meet the entry-level requirements of Intec are referred to other training providers or careers advisors. The Lincoln centre has a contract to offer training for trainees with learning difficulties and it supports these trainees well. There is a well-documented and well-used system for assessing trainees' previous learning experiences. This system is used throughout the centres as part of the initial assessment and includes clear guidance notes for tutors. Those trainees who covered key skills on a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course at school were not required to follow key skills training at Intec. Following induction, responsibility for the trainees passes to the tutor/assessor and this arrangement usually works well.

35. There are good working relationships between Intec and other providers, careers advisors and particular schools. Many trainees are recruited from schools during school career fairs and open days. Intec is required to review trainees' progress every 13 weeks, but in practice, trainees receive on average, a visit in the workplace every four weeks. Trainees also visit the training centre for theory work, customised training, key skills training, and portfolio building. Visits are recorded and reports on visits are copied to trainees, workplace supervisors and assessors. Trainees have frequent contact with Intec staff. Some workplace supervisors receive an employer's pack containing the NVQ programme, the training contract, health and safety documentation and advice on equal opportunities. Some employers are less involved in the training than others and have little or no contact with tutors/assessors.

36. The key skills workshops are well structured with clear objectives. Trainees are given good handouts in workshop sessions. Trainees attend the workshops at the centre for half a day each week over a ten-week period. Key skills training is well integrated with the NVQ programme. Trainees make good progress towards their key skills award, although key skills work does not always stimulate trainees. Those trainees who are unable to attend the workshops receive key skill training in the workplace, and are not disadvantaged by missing the structured workshops.

37. Support staff are clearly accountable to centre managers and the senior management team. Some staff do not record action they take to assist trainees, and

their colleagues remain unaware of some of the problems trainees have. Intec encourage managers in the work placements to present certificates to trainees upon completion of their programme. There is also an annually published newsletter, which contains many stories outlining individual trainees' successes.

38. Trainees benefit from the extra courses the company makes available to them. One computing trainee attended a year 2000 compliance course, another received assertiveness training at the training centre, whilst many other trainees attend a telephone skills course. Several trainees whose learning has been adversely affected by personal issues outside work have received good help and support from Intec staff. One trainee has a daily taxi from his home to his work, which is paid for by Intec, at a cost of over £200 a month in order to enable him to attend training. One trainee was made redundant through no fault of his own. Within a week, Intec had arranged two job interviews and he obtained a job. Trainees receive advice and guidance on their careers and other training opportunities. The few trainees with disabilities or learning difficulties receive good one-to-one coaching and support.

39. The quality of initial assessment varies across the centres. Initial assessment is often treated as a TEC requirement rather than a valuable learning experience in itself. In most cases, the level of assessment is too basic for the trainees. The standardised scoring system is not always used and many trainees do not receive feedback on their assessment. The results of initial assessment are not always taken into account when drawing up a trainee's individual training plan. In one centre, however, effective use is made of the results of trainees' initial assessment to draw up a long-term training plan. There is no initial assessment for key skills at the start of the training programme and no formal assessment at the start of the key skills workshops.

40. In the workplace, trainees usually receive induction individually whereas they receive induction at the training centre in a group. In general, induction lasts no longer than two hours, although it is longer in some centres. Many trainees do not remember what they are told during induction. The induction covers all relevant issues but lacks depth and detail and does not stimulate trainees. The Bristol centre, however, was an exception in this respect as trainees there could recall their induction experience well.

Management of training

Grade 2

41. Each training centre has a centre manager who negotiates the TEC contract locally and is responsible for the centre's performance. Centre staff include training advisors, tutor/assessors, administrators and sales and marketing staff. The number of staff employed at each centre varies according to the level of contracts. Intec employs 110 staff. This number represents a reduction compared with previous years. There is a staff appraisal procedure. The training needs of staff identified during appraisal are reflected in the centre's training and development plan which, in turn, forms the business plan. Under its TEC contracts for 1999/2000, the company has to recruit 940 trainees and they have to achieve 922 NVQs. Intec identified

many strengths and weaknesses in its self-assessment report. Inspectors considered that many of the strengths were no more than standard practice or contractual requirements. The inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade equal as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured organisation
- ◆ open management style
- ◆ effective management of change
- ◆ clear business objectives
- ◆ systematic monitoring of progress towards reaching targets
- ◆ good communication between centre staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ adverse effects of extensive staff changes
- ◆ insufficiently detailed data on trainees' achievements and retention

GOOD PRACTICE

Staff training is systematically evaluated on two levels. Participants comment on the quality of training immediately after the event and then six months later. Together with their line manager, staff evaluate the effect of the training on their own work and performance.

42. The company has established a strong corporate structure with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The senior management team provides strong leadership to the staff and individual centre managers are given a great deal of autonomy. Levels of decision making are well defined. There is a culture of open management within the company. Managers discuss targets and goals with staff. The directors are accessible and are willing to discuss issues freely with all staff. Staff receive a personal copy of the business plan and each year the managing director prepares and circulates a progress report to staff. The staff are adaptable to change. They regard change positively and see it as a means of progressing towards new goals.

43. Staff induction is comprehensive and follows a centrally produced checklist. Staff have the opportunity of visiting other centres during their induction to obtain a wider view of the organisation. Staff work closely with colleagues during the first few weeks and do not have their own caseload until they are ready. After the initial on-the-job training, staff are allocated a workload and the nature of this depends on whether they are employed as training advisors or as tutors/assessors. Additional training is arranged according to individual needs. It is a company priority that staff should obtain training qualifications. Following initial training, staff are appraised. The majority of staff have training experience and assessor qualifications.

44. Business objectives are defined in terms of targets. The targets for each centre are based initially upon the requirements of TEC contract for that area. Senior management influences the framing of the company's overall targets and ensures that each centre is given TEC contract targets that it can attain. Responsibility for the attainment of targets rests initially with senior staff who delegate responsibility for overseeing the attainment of specific targets to individual staff. Progress towards

reaching TEC targets and the company's targets is monitored weekly. Each of the centres provides weekly finance reports and these are submitted to the finance manager. He collates these to produce a monthly report on each centre, and an overall report on the company. Findings are checked against the cash flow forecast. The centres also produce a monthly management report, which is combined with the finance report to make the sales analysis. The financial analysis is shown to staff and discussed at a monthly meeting at each centre.

45. There are well-established and effective channels of communication. Meetings are arranged in centres to an agreed schedule and these are formally recorded. There are regular meetings of head office personnel with a number of operational staff from the centres. Within each centre, the communication is both formal, with well-recorded meetings, and informal when only action points are recorded. The organisation has twice-yearly newsletter. Trainees' progress is monitored and recorded both manually and through a computerised system. Trainees' plans indicate progress review dates and the estimated dates for the completion of NVQ units and the achievement of the NVQ itself. These dates may be revised after each visit to the trainees by the tutor/assessor.

46. Employers receive a variety of information including the training agreement and in Oxford, they are given a copy of the NVQ standards. At the Bristol centre, there is clear guidance for employers but at other centres little information is given to employers in respect of their training responsibilities. In Bristol, coaching of trainees by employers is good. At all centres the trainee receives a copy of the NVQ standards and the standard TEC individual training plan. At most centres this plan does not set out training milestones or any details of assessments to be carried out. Not all employers receive a copy of the plan. However, at the Milton Keynes centre, a long-term comprehensive training and assessment plan is used.

47. Intec does not produce adequate data for each centre on trainees' achievements by occupational area, and on trainees' retention figures. During the inspection, a variety of data was produced at the request of inspectors but these data did not provide a detailed comparison of each centre's performance by occupation. These data are not usually produced for senior management and are not subject to an annual review. Similarly the data on the number of trainees who leave the programme before completing their individual training plan lack detail and centres record the data in different ways, according to the particular demands of the local TEC.

48. During the past year, many staff have changed roles. Some staff have left following the company's decision to focus on the core occupational areas and the phasing out of training for unemployed adults. The progress of some trainees has been delayed. These trainees have not been kept fully informed about developments in the company and some have become demotivated.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

49. Intec meets the contractual requirements of seven Tecs and three awarding bodies. Each centre has independently achieved the Investors in People award. Some centres have to be reaccredited next year but the company is planning to seek the Investors in People award for the whole organisation. There is a centrally produced quality assurance policy and a quality assurance manual that is used by all centres. Each centre adapts the manual to take account of local needs and TEC requirements. The manual is updated as necessary and reviewed annually. Local modifications to the quality assurance system are reviewed every six months. Copies of the quality assurance manual are available to staff and each member of staff receives a personal copy of the policy. Suitable extracts from documentation for the quality assurance system, particularly in respect of health and safety and equal opportunities, are made available to trainees. There is an internal audit system. The self-assessment report listed strengths but inspectors considered that many of these were no more than standard practices or were contractual requirements. They agreed, however, with the numerous weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the presentation of the self-assessment report was satisfactory. The failure, however, to cover occupational areas separately and the lack of data on trainees' achievement, detracted from the report's effectiveness. Inspectors agreed with the grading in the self-assessment report. The company considered the self-assessment process a valuable exercise.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and well-established quality assurance systems
- ◆ effective sharing of good practice between centres
- ◆ systematic internal audits of the quality of provision
- ◆ effective arrangements for obtaining feedback from trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped evaluation of work-based training

50. Intec has an established quality assurance system involving forms to be used in the centres. Each centre has its own additional quality assurance procedure and forms to meet the local TEC requirements. Each centre manager is responsible for the operation of the quality assurance system within his or her centre. The management team has appointed a quality assurance co-ordinator to oversee the quality assurance system on a day-to-day basis.

51. At one centre, some training is subcontracted to two local colleges of further education. One contract for 10 trainees is at the request of the employer and the training leads to a qualification. The provider monitors the training through regular reports and visits to the colleges. Intec intends to withdraw from this arrangement once the trainees have completed work for their qualifications. Centre managers

facilitate the sharing of good practice at their monthly meetings. In addition to the managers, senior training advisors attend once a quarter to discuss sales and marketing issues and senior tutors/assessors attend once a quarter to discuss training and assessment issues. Each assessor brings a trainee's recently completed portfolio to the meeting and this is examined and discussed. At the meeting in the last quarter of the year, the centre managers discuss strategic matters. Additional cross-centre meetings, for example of internal verifiers, are organised on a regular basis. Each centre holds meetings to share good practice. Focus groups are regularly established to examine a particular matter or to develop a new system or training method.

52. Every six months an internal audit is held to check that procedures are in accordance with the financial procedures manual. Subsequently a written report is sent to the centre manager who has four weeks to produce an action plan in response.

53. The company regularly monitors the implementation of the policy and the quality assurance policy and quality assurance procedures and centre managers report to the senior management team. At centre level, the centre manager, the quality co-ordinator and an administrator examine a range of activities, systems and records at monthly intervals to ensure that there is full compliance with the quality assurance system. Any non-compliance is identified and corrective action is taken. Non-compliance is reported and discussed at centre meetings to ensure it is not repeated. All meetings are recorded.

54. The company regularly seeks feedback from trainees on the quality of provision. The views of former trainees are also gathered through use of a post-course questionnaire. The findings from these opinion surveys are discussed at centre meetings and staff take action on significant issues. Members of head office seek and analyse the views of employers annually in order to identify ways of improving the service to employers. Appropriate action is then taken locally by centre staff.

55. There is no overall system for evaluating the training programmes or of assessing their benefit to trainees and employers. The senior management team views the production of the self-assessment report as the start of an evaluation process. Some aspects of provision are not covered by quality assurance. For example, monitoring of the company's promotion of equal opportunities, required by the equal opportunities policy, does not take place.

56. A new internal verification process is being developed with guidance from the awarding body. All centres have assessors and internal verifiers and most assessors act as internal verifiers. No one internal verifier has responsibility for the internal verification system in the company although centre managers take the lead locally. In one centre where there are six internal verifiers, there are no meetings to standardise the verification process and review the quality and effectiveness of internal verification. External verifiers' reports on the centres show that record keeping is good, staff have appropriate qualifications and portfolios are comprehensive. The recently revised internal verification system has yet to be formally evaluated, although two cross-company meetings have been held to review the system. This review is ongoing.

