



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT

MAY 1999

Mid-Cheshire College

SUMMARY

Mid-Cheshire College provides good training in engineering and a satisfactory standard of training in business administration. Trainees are highly motivated and are supported by enthusiastic employers. The college has excellent working relationships with local employers. Off-the-job training is of a high standard, but opportunities for workplace assessment are frequently missed. Workshop and classroom training facilities are good. College staff provide effective pastoral support for trainees, but trainees are often unaware of the full range of additional facilities and services available to them. Equality of opportunity is carefully monitored and the policy and procedures are widely promoted to staff and trainees. Training is well managed, but trainees' progress is adversely affected by adherence to the college's academic year. The college has comprehensive systems and procedures to ensure that the quality of training is regularly reviewed and that issues raised are promptly addressed.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly motivated and hard-working trainees
- ◆ enthusiastic and supportive employers
- ◆ high standard of off-the-job training
- ◆ high level of support for trainees

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based training and assessment
- ◆ key skills not integrated into occupational training
- ◆ trainees unaware of support facilities available
- ◆ insufficient management of trainees' progress

INTRODUCTION

1. In 1987, Mid-Cheshire College established Mid-Cheshire Training Services (MCTS) to develop and generate income through the provision of full-cost, customised, work-based training for industry and commerce. In 1996, MCTS became a managing agency, contracting with North and Mid-Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council (NORMID TEC) to deliver youth and adult training. In 1997, a further contract was agreed with South and East Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to deliver adult training programmes. As the managing agent, MCTS has an internal agreement with Mid-Cheshire College for the college to provide training for MCTS's trainees. Most trainees are in full-time employment and attend the college on a day-release basis or go to evening classes, attending courses that are run as part of the normal college programme for full- and part-time students. Some trainees receive training and assessment in the workplace from college staff.

2. MCTS operates within the area of Vale Royal and is located in Winsford, which is on the boundary between the regions assigned to NORMID and South and East Cheshire TEC. The main areas for the recruitment of trainees are Winsford and Northwich. The MCTS site is six miles away from the main college campus, which is in Hartford, near Northwich. In order to ensure effective communication between the two sites, each of the faculties within the college has a link person, who acts as a co-ordinator for their particular programme area. MCTS has seven full- and five part-time staff. Two of the full-time and one of the part-time members of staff are dedicated to overseeing the TEC-funded work. The college has been recognised as an Investor in People and, until January 1999, was a partner in the local business link, until it ceased trading. MCTS works with over 70 local companies to meet identified training needs. It is also a partner in three consortia for the delivery of training under the government's New Deal scheme; it provides training for clients at the initial 'Gateway' stage, on the full-time education and training option and the employed option, as well as providing support and guidance for those on the self-employment option.

3. There are 123 trainees on programmes with MCTS within the following areas: construction, engineering (including engineering manufacture), retailing, health care, hospitality, and business administration. There are 85 modern apprentices, one national trainee and three trainees on other government-funded youth training programmes. There are four adult trainees on training for work programmes. There are 31 clients on New Deal programmes, and of these, two are still at the initial 'Gateway' stage, 27 are on the full-time education and training option, and two are on the self-employment option. None of the trainees have been identified as having additional learning needs, although two trainees receive additional learning support within their training programmes.

4. The district of Vale Royal has a population of 117,500. The rate of population growth is very low, with an increase of only 0.5 per cent forecast for the period from 1996 until 2005. In contrast, it is predicted that the number of 15- to 19-year-olds will grow by 7.5 per cent between 1996 and 2001. The area is relatively affluent,

with higher-than-average levels of home and car ownership. Thirty-six per cent of local residents travel to work outside the Vale Royal area. The largest employment sectors within the area are retail, health and social work, and education. There has been a decline in the area's traditional chemical and salt industries. The business structure of the area is based almost entirely on small and medium-sized enterprises, less than 1 per cent of local companies having over 250 employees. The number of women in employment rose by 2.5 per cent over the period 1991-95. The number of part-time employees rose by 5.5 per cent in the same period. Unemployment stands at 3.9 per cent, compared with 5.1 per cent in the North West Government Office region as a whole and a national average of 5.2 per cent. In the overall NORMID TEC area, the proportion of the population who come from minority ethnic groups is 0.9 per cent, although the corresponding figure within Vale Royal itself is less than 0.5 per cent.

5. Eighty-six per cent of firms within the local area provide training for staff at all levels of their organisation. Only 16 per cent of these companies would use further education colleges for training, preferring private-sector training companies or consultancies. Seventy-one per cent of young people leaving school in 1998, in the Cheshire area, progressed to further education. Eight per cent moved to full-time employment with a planned training scheme, and 4 per cent to employment without training. The number of young people who entered work-based training, for example, on modern apprenticeships, has increased by 1 per cent since 1997. Rates for participation in further education have remained constant. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 53 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. The Director of Support Services at the college led the production of MCTS's self-assessment report in February 1999. Two members of staff attended a training session hosted by NORMID TEC that was designed to guide them through the self-assessment process. Additional guidance was also provided by members of NORMID TEC. The views of employers, trainees and trainers were sought and information gathered was incorporated into the report. A detailed action plan has been developed to address issues raised. The report was also evaluated and approved for submission by the college's own quality audit committee.

7. A group of four inspectors spent a total of 12 days at MCTS in May 1999. They inspected the engineering and business administration programmes. The other occupational sectors were not inspected because of the low numbers in training. Training taking place in the college was observed and 25 trainees were visited in their workplaces where both reviews and assessments were seen. Thirty-five trainees, 18 employers and 24 college and MCTS staff members were interviewed. Inspectors agreed with the grades given in the self-assessment report for business administration and trainee support. Higher grades were awarded in all other areas.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering	1	2	2			5
Total	1	2	2	0	0	5

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

8. There are 53 trainees on training programmes within this occupational area. Nineteen trainees are working towards NVQs in motor vehicle engineering, with a further 10 on programmes in mechanical engineering and seven on electrical engineering programmes. Seventeen trainees are working towards NVQs in engineering manufacture at levels 2 and 3. These trainees also have the opportunity to undertake an additional award in fabrication and welding. There are 30 modern apprentices in this occupational area, of whom 27 are currently working towards an NVQ at level 2, while three have progressed to level 3. There are five New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option, one adult on an adult training programme and two trainees on other youth training programmes. All modern apprentices are employed from the start of the training programme. There are good opportunities for employment for most trainees in this sector within the local area. Those trainees who are not in permanent employment are able to undertake periods of work placement. Most of the training is carried out by employers. The college

provides background theory and additional practical training during off-the-job training sessions, which are delivered on a traditional day-release basis. Most trainees work for small local firms. Due to the variety of firms involved and the small numbers of trainees in each separate sector, the college cannot always gather sufficient trainees to be able to run separate off-the-job training sessions for them. As a result, trainees are often taught within sessions being run for existing full-time courses. College staff carry out all NVQ assessment, which takes place either through the assessment of evidence gathered for portfolios or through the observation of trainees in simulated work environments within the college. A small amount of assessment takes place in the workplace. Some trainees attend an additional evening session each week to develop and gather evidence for key skills. Trainees have access to all the college's facilities, a well-stocked library and modern computer suites. Facilities are also available for trainees who are identified as having additional learning needs. Since 1996, six trainees have successfully completed their NVQ at level 2 within this occupational area. No trainees have yet completed a level 3 award. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but identified further strengths and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly motivated and hard-working trainees
- ◆ enthusiastic and supportive employers
- ◆ high standard of training in the college
- ◆ strong emphasis on health and safety
- ◆ good resource materials explaining technical theory
- ◆ good examples of workplace mentoring

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient workplace assessment in some areas
- ◆ slow progress towards NVQ achievement in motor vehicle engineering
- ◆ weak planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ key skills not integrated into occupational training

9. MCTS's staff maintain regular contact with local employers. This is valued highly by both the employers themselves and the trainees, who are extremely well motivated. Working relationships between MCTS staff and employers are frequently informal, but they are extremely productive and ensure a high level of support for individual trainees. The engineering faculty within the college also has extensive links with local businesses. Faculty staff work well with both employers and MCTS staff to identify where trainees have problems or need additional support to help them to complete units within their qualifications. College-based training sessions on both background knowledge and practical skills are well led. Staff take considerable care to provide highly participative sessions with extensive use of display pieces to

illustrate points. The engineering workshop is well resourced and includes computer numerically controlled (CNC) machines as well as sufficient traditional machinery and equipment. In motor vehicle engineering, there has recently been a very large investment in new equipment and generally the workshops are adequate. There is, however, no realistic working environment available at the college where trainees can be assessed for those parts of their NVQ which they are unable to cover within their own working environment. Comprehensive workbooks are issued to trainees that provide support material to cover all aspects of theory within their NVQs. These workbooks are highly valued as reference materials by both the trainees and employers.

10. Most employers make clear decisions about who will train their apprentices on the job. Sometimes this is one person for the whole period of training, but sometimes it is necessary for a number of different skilled people to undertake this training role. There are many examples of the mentoring role being performed well and with great care, especially in the early stages of training. Health and safety issues are consistently emphasised by all of those involved with trainees. Trainees themselves demonstrate a high awareness of their own responsibilities in the promotion of health and safety within their working and training environments.

11. Within the motor vehicle programmes, there was a six-month period when little workplace assessment occurred, and, as a result, progress towards NVQ achievement has been slow. Since the qualifications were introduced in 1996, few trainees have achieved many NVQ units and hardly any have finished whole NVQs. This led to some trainees becoming demotivated. The problem was recognised by the college and efforts have been and are being made to address this issue. The college has recently employed new staff to carry out workplace assessments. Workplace supervisors now sign off 'job sheets' and frequent visits are made by college assessors to carry out assessments on the job. Additional portfolio-building sessions are held at the college to complement the workplace assessment. This system is fully comprehensive, but it is restricted to motor vehicle engineering, and work-based assessment methods within other areas of engineering, such as engineering manufacture, have not yet been developed. The planning of on-the-job training is underdeveloped. College staff do not work with employers to ensure that areas of the NVQ are covered in the workplace wherever possible. They do not liaise to ensure the efficiency or speed of training that takes place while trainees are at work. Trainees are frequently confused as to how they will cover all of the elements in their programmes and are unsure as to the sequence in which the training will take place on the job.

12. Communication, number, and information technology key skills are taught through additional evening sessions, which include diagnostic testing to establish possible additional training requirements. These key skills are also developed through portfolio-building, and some individual support. Key skills are not integrated into occupational training. Some engineering trainees attend the evening sessions but it is very difficult to motivate motor vehicle trainees to attend and take part. The faculty is considering an alternative way of delivering key skills from September 1999, based on a more integrated approach.

Business administration

Grade 3

13. MCTS offers programmes in accounting at NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4, in administration at levels 2 and 3, in information technology at levels 1, 2 and 3, and in insurance at levels 2 and 3. There are 35 young people in training within this sector: 25 modern apprentices, one youth trainee and nine New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. One New Deal client is working towards an NVQ in accounting and one is working towards an NVQ in administration. Seven New Deal clients are on information technology NVQ programmes. Thirteen modern apprentices are working towards NVQs in accounting, while a further five are following administration NVQ programmes. Three modern apprentices are working towards NVQs in information technology and four are working towards NVQs in insurance. The youth trainee is working towards an NVQ in information technology at level 2. All modern apprentices are in employment. The youth trainee is on work placement with a local employer. MCTS is currently working with 24 employers within this sector. Off-the-job training and assessment are provided by the college's staff. Staff have relevant occupational and teaching experience. Twenty-three trainees attend regular off-the-job training sessions either on a day-release or evening-only basis. The three insurance trainees receive their training and assessment entirely within the company where they work. All of the accounting and information technology training and assessment take place in college. Of the 49 trainees who have started training programmes in this area since 1996, two have achieved an NVQ at level 3 and eight have achieved an NVQ at level 2. No trainees have successfully completed the full modern apprenticeship programme yet. Ten trainees have left their training programmes without completing their awards. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ enthusiasm and commitment of trainees
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of their NVQs
- ◆ trainees' involvement in the identification of their training needs
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ effective communication between those involved in training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no sharing of best practice across the occupational area
- ◆ poor linking of key skills to NVQs
- ◆ few challenging targets for trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace training and assessment
- ◆ poor awareness of modern apprenticeships among employers

14. Trainees are highly motivated and enthusiastic about their NVQ programmes and their job roles. They have a thorough understanding of the qualifications they are working towards and are clear about the evidence required to complete their portfolios. From the very beginning of their training programmes, they are actively involved in identifying the evidence that they will be able to gather from the workplace to incorporate into their NVQ portfolios. Supportive employers provide work roles with wide scope for training and development. These challenging work roles give trainees opportunities to collect naturally occurring evidence for their NVQs, to demonstrate high levels of occupational competence and, in many cases, to gain promotion. Employers appreciate the positive attitude of the college's staff. The staff are always available for consultation outside the times of formally arranged off-the-job training and company visits. Communication between all those involved in the training process is highly effective. College staff work well with employers and provide effective support to trainees both through college training sessions and workplace reviews.

15. There are no mechanisms in place to systematically share best practice across the occupational area. The staff who deliver the training and assessment come from two of the college faculties and the college's specialist business training centre, the Mid-Cheshire Business School, and these groups demonstrate a wide range of different practices on fundamental issues such as workplace assessment and internal verification. There are cases where internal verification is not continuous, but is timed to coincide with the end of the academic year. The links between key skills and NVQ units are not clearly defined. Evidence is not collected to satisfy both NVQ and key skills requirements. Key skills background knowledge is often delivered on completion of the NVQ requirements of the modern apprenticeship. In some areas, where most members of the training course are not TEC-funded trainees and have no key skills requirements, staff and trainees view the key skills as being an additional burden and prefer to focus upon meeting the requirements of the NVQ. Trainees are not always set challenging short-term and medium-term targets. Activities are frequently set within the college's academic year and are timed to last until the end of term. Despite the high quality of work experience, opportunities for work-based training and assessment are missed. In some NVQ programmes in this area, curriculum staff make no workplace visits at all. Employers have little awareness of their responsibilities within the modern apprenticeship scheme. They do not recognise that in signing the modern apprenticeship agreement, they take on additional responsibilities to their employees. Trainees are not always aware of their rights as modern apprentices and are unaware of the purpose of some elements of the modern apprenticeship programme.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

16. The college has a written equal opportunities policy that is reviewed and

updated annually. The policy and accompanying procedures are made widely available to all staff. There are no trainees from minority ethnic groups on any of the TEC-funded training programmes. All the trainees on engineering programmes are men. In business administration, 45 per cent of the trainees are men and 55 per cent women. No trainees are registered as having a disability. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Additional strengths and weaknesses were found during inspection and a higher grade was awarded than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-defined equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies
- ◆ regular equal opportunities monitoring
- ◆ proactive equal opportunities subcommittee
- ◆ effective equal opportunities practice to address learning support needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of employers' recruitment and selection practices
- ◆ lack of positive action to deal with traditional biases within occupational areas

17. Mid-Cheshire Training Services' catchment area contains very few minority ethnic groups. However, the college recognises its responsibilities to potential trainees from minority ethnic groups and offers good individual support, providing, for example, English as a second language courses. Recruitment of students from minority ethnic groups is monitored across all programme areas. Most equal opportunities issues dealt with by MCTS are concerned with disability and gender. There is wheelchair access to all college buildings, with ramps provided where necessary.

18. The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and disability statement, encompassing all of MCTS's work. The college's mission statement also includes a commitment to an inclusive approach to learning for all members of the community. The equal opportunities policy was developed and is monitored by an equal opportunities subcommittee of the college's academic board. This committee is responsible for action throughout the college to ensure the continuous improvement of equal opportunities practice. The student services department is a key focus for equal opportunities within the college. The department provides a very effective range of services for all students to ensure equality of access to the full range of college programmes. For example, they offer diagnostic testing as part of initial assessment to all college students and trainees to ensure that they have appropriate support where learning difficulties are identified. This department has good and productive working relationships with the teaching departments and MCTS. Trainees with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, are dealt with in a co-ordinated way by student services, the relevant teaching department, and MCTS's staff. The college issues a comprehensive handbook to all students and trainees that

outlines in detail all its equal opportunities policies and procedures. The handbook also explains the college's procedure for tackling complaints and arrangements for appeals concerning decisions on the award of qualifications. Concerns raised by trainees or employers are promptly addressed.

19. The college collects comprehensive equal opportunities statistics and monitors performance through the equal opportunities subcommittee and individual faculties. Across the college as a whole, the ratio of male to female trainees broadly reflects the proportion of men and women on government-funded training programmes in the local area. Recruitment literature does not reflect any form of bias and all materials publicise both MCTS and the college's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity. However, trainee recruitment within occupational groups strongly reflects traditional gender biases. All construction, engineering and manufacturing trainees are men and the apparent balance that exists within business administration is due mainly to the typically high number of male trainees on information technology programmes. Recruitment procedures for trainees include briefings for year-11 school students and direct referrals from the local careers service. Both these processes emphasise to potential trainees the opportunities available to them in all areas.

20. All contracts signed by MCTS and employers contain a clear requirement to comply with equal opportunities legislation and the TEC's requirements. MCTS matches applicants to training programmes to vacancies that local employers have advertised. Potential trainees are referred to employers for interview, but employers' recruitment practices are not monitored. A policy has been introduced to extend the college-wide practice of omitting names and gender from application forms to include all application forms sent to employers. The policy is due to take effect from September 1999, and is designed to ensure that employers select candidates for interview purely on the basis of individual merit. Most recruits, however, do not come through the formal process but are recruited directly by employers and then linked to MCTS either at the point of recruitment or immediately afterwards. The college has taken no direct action to raise employers' awareness of equal opportunities or to influence their recruitment policy in order to ensure that vacancies are equally open to all applicants.

Trainee support

Grade 3

21. Most trainees join training programmes with Mid-Cheshire Training Services after they have entered full-time employment. They are referred to MCTS by their employers who often have long-standing relationships with the college and want their trainees to take up apprenticeships. Some trainees are recruited from the full-time student population of the college, and others are referred by the careers service or the Employment Service. Training co-ordinators and college tutors interview potential trainees before they are recruited onto their training programmes. All trainees receive an initial assessment. Trainees' induction is carried out by MCTS's staff in the workplace and by faculty staff during off-the-job training in the college. Regular review visits are carried out by MCTS's staff, who have responsibility for

pastoral support of trainees in the workplace. The college provides a wide range of learning resource and trainee support services, where additional needs are identified. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good learning support facilities
- ◆ good support for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ development of local support partnerships
- ◆ high level of pastoral and vocational support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees and New Deal clients unaware of range of support facilities available
- ◆ trainees' poor recall of induction
- ◆ initial assessment not used to modify individual training plans
- ◆ underdeveloped support arrangements for New Deal clients

22. The college provides excellent learning resources, which are available to all students, trainees and New Deal clients of the college. These resources include a well-stocked library and an extensive information technology suite. The student development service runs a comprehensive initial assessment system covering numeracy and literacy skills. It provides professional support to trainees with identified learning difficulties and physical disabilities. The college is involved in a range of partnerships with local agencies to extend the support facilities available to trainees. For example, the college's internal careers guidance is provided in partnership with the local careers service. Public libraries near the college's satellite campuses are resourced to provide additional facilities for college students, trainees and New Deal clients. The college is developing internet access to its facilities through an initiative supported by the European Social Fund. Trainees are given pastoral and vocational support of a high standard, which makes them feel secure and valued both in college and at work. They receive regular visits by MCTS's staff in the workplace and are fully aware of whom to contact, should they have problems with their NVQs.

23. The college does not always successfully communicate to trainees and clients how wide a range of support facilities are available. It provides an effective careers service in partnership with the local careers service but trainees are not always clear as to how to access this service. Trainees have a poor recall of their induction. Most identify it with form filling before the start of their training programme. This is most noticeable in trainees who do not start at the beginning of the college year. There is a college-wide induction programme at the beginning of the academic year involving a series of road shows and faculty-based events. Induction at other times consists of a one-to-one meeting between the trainee and a tutor, using a college checklist. The results of the initial assessment are not always communicated to trainees. The results of initial assessment and accreditation of prior learning are not regularly used as a

basis for modifying individual training plans. New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option are not clear as to the support arrangements provided by the college. They are not aware of all the services the college offers and feel that the college does not respond to the specific challenges that they face in returning to education. Classroom support during the college vacations is sometimes poor, with New Deal clients feeling that they are being left to fend for themselves without adequate support from staff. Training taking place during the holidays lacks the formal structure of term time.

Management of training

Grade 2

24. Responsibility for the management of TEC-funded training lies with the college's business development manager. The college established MCTS as a managing agency to handle contractual negotiations with the local TECs. MCTS's staff are responsible for the recruitment of trainees onto training programmes and for the monitoring and review of trainees within the workplace. MCTS has a formal subcontracting arrangement with the college to provide off-the-job training for trainees. The college also has responsibility for meeting any additional training requirements that trainees may have. MCTS is viewed as a part of the college and as such it follows the college's policies and procedures within all areas of operational activity. The business development manager is a member of the college's management team and reports, through the director of support services, to the college principal and the board of governors. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but regarded others as no more than normal practice. They agreed with the weaknesses identified in the report, but thought that the college had been too harsh in only giving itself a grade 3 for this area. Accordingly, they awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective local partnership arrangements
- ◆ clear performance targets set and regularly reviewed
- ◆ good internal communication
- ◆ comprehensive staff development programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient management of trainees' progress
- ◆ few opportunities for staff to share good practice

25. The college has excellent working relationships with local employers and is involved in a wide range of partnership activities that promote work-based training opportunities across the region. The college places importance upon extending and developing its external relationships across all aspects of its business. Employers

and trainees have a high opinion of the quality of the training provided through MCTS and are supportive of the aims and objectives of the training programmes. MCTS has formed effective links with other local training providers and the two local TECs. Where MCTS is unable to provide an appropriate programme for an individual they are referred to an alternative training organisation. There have been occasions when MCTS's staff have worked in partnership with other local training providers to enhance the quality of the programmes available to MCTS's trainees.

26. MCTS has a business plan which establishes operational targets for the unit. This business plan forms part of the college's overall business plan and the board of governors reviews progress against financial targets every six months. Objectives within the business plan are taken from the college's strategic plan. These, too, are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are being fulfilled. MCTS's staff have performance targets for each area of operational activity. Every month they are asked to report on progress made as part of the unit's team meeting. All staff are aware of any problems that have been identified and are involved in developing action plans to address issues raised. The business development manager effectively monitors business performance. Data relating to trainee achievement and retention are collected and analysed and used as a basis for management planning. In addition to regular formal meetings, frequent informal meetings are held to discuss the performance of individual trainees and to tackle any problems arising. Working relationships within MCTS are good and internal communication is effective. As a part of the college's management team, the business development manager is able to ensure that staff at MCTS are aware of broader college developments. He ensures that college policies and procedures are fully operational within MCTS and participates in their annual review and revision.

27. All staff at MCTS have accurate job descriptions outlining their roles and responsibilities. The college's staffing policies and procedures are fully detailed and copies are available to all staff. Staff have an annual appraisal, during which their performance is reviewed and staff development needs are identified. There is a broad programme of staff development opportunities available to staff. These include externally validated courses in areas such as health and safety, and internal courses are provided to address specific issues such as key skills development. Each member of staff has a personal development plan in which responsibility for meeting training needs is identified. Progress against development targets is regularly reviewed.

28. Responsibility for all off-the-job training and assessment lies with the college's staff, who are managed within the college faculty structure. They maintain records that track trainees' progress and keep all documents that relate to any additional support that trainees receive. The trainees' individual training plans that are held by MCTS's staff are not updated to show the results of initial assessment or unit achievement. The manager of MCTS does not hold detailed records of trainees' performance or progress. Regular informal meetings are held between MCTS and college staff to discuss trainees' progress, but no records are kept of the outcomes of discussions. Most of the off-the-job training provided is designed to fit into the college's academic year and training programmes are designed to meet the needs of full-time college students. There is therefore little incentive for trainees to complete their awards in less time than is covered by the academic year. In one area,

assessment can only take place outside of term time because of the lack of flexibility within the programme timetable. Trainees' progress is therefore delayed if they are ready for assessment before the end of a college term.

29. There is little opportunity for staff working with trainees on NVQ programmes to meet to share good practice and to focus upon meeting the specific needs of the TEC-funded trainees. Staff work within their faculties and develop isolated pockets of expertise. In the area of key skills, for example, some staff have had more experience in delivery than others and have established methods of tackling key skills requirements within the modern apprenticeship scheme. There are no formal opportunities for them to share this experience with colleagues. Within some occupational areas, individual staff have taken on NVQ requirements more readily than others, for example, in relation to the need for workplace assessment, but there is no mechanism through which such good practice can be shared.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

30. Quality assurance arrangements for MCTS are incorporated into the college's overall quality assurance systems. An extensive range of policies and procedures are detailed in a staff manual and these are designed to cover all courses, not just work-based training. These are implemented across all courses and include continuous review and end-of-course evaluation processes. The processes required to manage and deliver work-based training organised by MCTS have been defined and most have been documented. The college is approved by a variety of awarding bodies to offer training and assessment leading to a wide range of qualifications. The college is accordingly subject to regular inspections by the Further Education Funding Council and visits by external verifiers. Self-assessment was carried out thoroughly and supported with clear evidence. The contents of the report were balanced and self-critical, although a number of issues stated as strengths are merely normal practice. Inspectors agreed with most strengths within this sector and identified further strengths during the inspection. Some of the weaknesses identified during self-inspection had already been satisfactorily dealt with by the time of the inspection. Inspectors therefore awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-inspection report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive quality assurance arrangements covering all programmes
- ◆ detailed course review process
- ◆ frequent management meetings for monitoring purposes
- ◆ continuing process for agreeing and implementing action plans
- ◆ well-developed system for monitoring trainees' performance data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete internal quality control procedures
- ◆ awarding body requirements insufficiently scrutinised

31. The college's staff manual includes policies and procedures on key areas such as quality, equal opportunities, health and safety, staff development, assessment and verification. All staff, trainees and programmes are covered by these and there is evidence of widespread implementation. There is a well-documented quality file for each course which includes action plans from previous reviews, course targets, aims, details of students' performance, trainee destination data, verifier reports and trainee feedback. At a strategic level, there is a business unit plan that describes the aims and objectives of MCTS, its organisation, key objectives, strengths, weaknesses, and action plans. There is a regular review of performance against set objectives as part of an internal focus upon improving the quality of both the training provided and the service given to local employers.

32. A detailed process of course evaluation is well established, both during, and at the end, of courses. Questionnaires and student consultation groups are used to obtain formal feedback from trainees and employers. Results are evaluated and any appropriate action taken. Action plans are created and implementation of actions is monitored by both line managers and committee. Regular monitoring of programme performance is achieved through weekly and monthly team meetings where current issues are raised and previous actions reviewed. Data on trainees are collated using a computer-based management-information system which tracks the trainees from initial entry through to final destination. Trainees' achievement information is carefully analysed to identify trends and areas for improvement.

33. The MCTS management team has recognised the need for a number of additional internal procedures to monitor and control its activities more effectively. A recent review identified the need to put additional controls in place in order to ensure a consistently high standard of training. In response, MCTS has recently introduced a formal training agreement with employers, and a system for reviewing the content of trainees' files. It is too soon to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other new procedures. There are no document control systems for paperwork used within MCTS and no internal audit process to ensure that staff comply with the documented procedures. There is no consistency as to the contents of trainees' files. Information on topics such as trainees' assessment and progress is not available from a single source, but is kept in several different locations across the college.

34. The requirements of awarding bodies are insufficiently scrutinised to ensure that all of the NVQ requirements are being fully addressed. For example, internal verification in some programme areas is left until the end of the academic year and is not carried out throughout the training programme. Trainees and assessors do not receive regular feedback on assessment decisions. The requirements for work-based assessment are not being met in areas such as accounting and engineering manufacture, although external verifiers' reports have highlighted the need to take action in several programme areas.

