



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT

APRIL 1999

Bracknell and Wokingham College

SUMMARY

Bracknell and Wokingham College offers good training in construction and engineering. Training in business administration, retailing and customer service is satisfactory. Trainees are in workplaces that provide them with good learning opportunities. Training is well managed. Staff are committed to helping the trainees to succeed. Arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development are good. The trainee support system is well developed and effective. In particular, support for trainees with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is excellent. The college is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for staff and trainees. Quality assurance arrangements are good. There is extensive consultation about the quality of provision.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ employment of trainees in workplaces with good learning opportunities
- ◆ clear roles and responsibilities for staff
- ◆ good staff appraisal and effective staff development programme
- ◆ well developed and effective trainee support system
- ◆ excellent support for trainees with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- ◆ wide consultation on quality of provision

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure of some quality assurance procedures to cover work-based training
- ◆ some insufficiently systematic recording systems
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Bracknell and Wokingham College serves the southeast area of the county of Berkshire, in particular the communities of Bracknell Forest and Wokingham. The total population of the area is approximately 250,000. Eighty-three per cent of the college's enrolments come from the Bracknell Forest and Wokingham districts. The college owns and operates seven centres, three in Bracknell, others in Sandhurst, Woodley, Wokingham and Earley. Over 2500 programmes of study are offered from entry to postgraduate level. The ages of students range from 16 to, in certain instances, 100. The college has over 20,000 enrolments each year. The college's gross budget for 1997-98 was £7million. The college employs 242 permanent, full and part-time staff and over 450 temporary staff. Five full-time permanent staff are employed within the youth training section, which is responsible for work-based training.

2. The college's main source of funding is the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college is also one of the major training providers in the area. It has a contract with Thames Valley Enterprise the local training and enterprise council (TEC) for the provision of work-based training programmes. Programmes include those for national traineeships, traineeships, modern apprenticeships, the locally devised Starting Line prevocational training and New Deal. Programmes cover engineering, electrical installation, business administration, customer service, information technology operations, childcare, care, dental nursing, accounting and electronic servicing. There were 125 trainees at the time of inspection, two of whom were New Deal clients.

3. The college is involved in several local partnerships which include the Higher Education Funding Council, two Education Business Partnerships, Thames Valley Chamber, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham District Council. The careers service regards the college as a good provider. The college has three schools and additional units for student services and business development. The managing agency for work-based training is part of the business development unit and is managed by the business development manager. Staff include a training co-ordinator and three training advisors.

4. The Bracknell and Wokingham areas of the Thames Valley saw unprecedented growth in the 1970s and 1980s which came abruptly to an end in the early 1990s. Since then, the region has been in a period of recovery. The unemployment rate is below that of other areas in the region. In November 1998, the level of unemployment in the Thames Valley remained stable at 1.74 per cent compared with 2.7 per cent across the southeast and 5.2 per cent nationally. Levels of social deprivation are low. The work-force is highly skilled. There is growth in the occupational areas of health, banking, business services, hotels, leisure services and distribution. Higher value-added service sectors, particularly in manufacturing/electronics and information technology related manufacturing and service sectors are concentrated in the area. The proportion of school leavers in the



area who stay on in full-time education is high, at 72 per cent. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above was 88 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. People from minority ethnic groups constitute 2.8 per cent of the population of Bracknell Forest and Wokingham District.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. In February 1999, the college carried out self-assessment of its training provision. It is the college's intention to make this self-assessment process an integral part of the college's overall self-assessment arrangements, including those required by the FEFC. The self-assessment process begins with the review and evaluation of individual courses. Quality statements and criteria are disseminated through the college's intranet. In each area, a nominated member of staff takes the lead in the self-assessment process and is responsible for writing up the self-assessment for his or her area. Subcontractors are asked to carry out self-assessment and their findings are included in the main report. The final report is presented to the quality committee of the college's corporation and to the management team for approval. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. They considered some strengths, however, to be no more than normal practice.

6. A team of five inspectors spent 20 days at the college during April 1999. Inspectors examined college and awarding body documentation. They interviewed 48 trainees, visited 25 workplaces, met 27 workplace managers/supervisors and interviewed 26 college staff. Ten sessions of off-the-job training were observed.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction			1			1
Engineering		1				1
Business administration	1	1				2
Retailing & customer service			6			6
Total	1	2	7	0	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

7. There are 21 trainees in construction, all of whom are pursuing electrical installation engineering qualifications at NVQ levels 2 and 3. Six are modern apprentices and 15 are on traineeships. All trainees attend college one day each week with additional blocks of attendance when practical tasks are carried out and assessed. All trainees are employed. Trainees working for NVQ level 2 provide evidence of their performance in the workplace for their portfolios and this is endorsed by work-based supervisors and assessed by qualified assessors at college. Trainees working for NVQ level 3 have just begun their training programme. The

achievement rate can only be measured over one year and is 57 per cent, which is average for this occupational area. Inspectors considered that some strengths in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality portfolios
- ◆ comprehensive system for tracking trainees' achievement
- ◆ effective and rigorous internal verification
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ employers' high regard for the review process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no opportunity for continuation of training between academic terms
- ◆ little communication between on- and off-the-job training staff

8. The training provided at the college is well organised. It takes place in modern, well-equipped workshops with a good range of equipment and hand-tools. Training is well planned. It is carried out by staff who use their experience and expertise to good effect to engage and sustain the interest of the trainees. The majority of trainees produce high-quality portfolios. They contain good evidence, derived from practical projects at college and performance in the workplace, which is endorsed by their supervisor. Portfolios are well presented with good, clear drawings and descriptive work. Trainees are fully aware of their assessment process and are proud of their portfolios. There are very good tracking systems, which enable assessors and internal verifiers to identify the progress and achievements of individual trainees. Trainees have their own tracking system, which operates through their portfolios, and they are responsible for managing it. All trainees were able to explain the extent of their progress towards achievement of their NVQs. They knew what they had achieved and what they needed to do in order to obtain the full qualification.

9. Trainees work well with their off-the-job trainers and training advisor. They appreciate being in charge of their own portfolios. They value and enjoy their training and they are highly motivated. Trainees are proud of their achievements and are able to describe clearly how their skills have improved. One female trainee recently achieved a bronze award in the local TEC 'Trainee of the Year' award. The internal verification procedure is effective and rigorous. Approximately every 12 weeks, the internal verifier meets with the trainee and the assessor in order to observe assessment taking place and to verify assessment to date. Any shortfalls in evidence identified by the internal verifier are recorded on a field-evidence record and placed in the trainee's file.

10. A training advisor, who is employed by the college youth training department,

visits trainees regularly in the workplace. Visits take place every 13 weeks, but become as frequent as every two weeks, if this level of support is felt necessary. The training advisor is technically qualified and relates well to both employers and trainees. Employers are fully involved with the review process and are aware of trainees' progress at college. Employers value this process and see it as a fundamental part of the development of their trainees. The training advisor carries out a review with the trainee and employer, covering issues such as health and safety, the general well-being of the trainee in the workplace, the college course and the trainee's progress towards achieving the NVQ. The individual training plan is well used and amended as necessary to provide a clear picture of the trainee's current progress. Apart from the training advisor's liaison with workplace staff during visits, there is little contact between college staff and on-the-job supervisors. The training programmes are timetabled to take place during the three terms of the college's academic year. The college has no flexible arrangements for the programmes to run continuously, uninterrupted by college holidays, in order to benefit those trainees who clearly demonstrate the ability to complete the programme more speedily.

Engineering

Grade 2

11. Of the 18 engineering trainees, six are on mechanical engineering programmes and 12 are on electronic systems servicing programmes. There is one modern apprentice and one national trainee in mechanical engineering and five modern apprentices and six national trainees in electronic systems servicing. All trainees are employed and attend the college, or another local college, one day each week to pursue their chosen NVQ or a certificated course for off-the-job training. Qualified college staff carry out all training and assessment. For modern apprentices, assessment is carried out in the workplace by college staff. Assessors observe the trainees in their practical activities and receive witness testimonies about their performance at work. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report, but they considered that many were no more than normal practice. They found strengths and weaknesses which the college had not identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality employment providing trainees with specialist skills and knowledge
- ◆ enthusiastic and highly motivated trainees
- ◆ employers' involvement in, and support for, the review process
- ◆ innovative and imaginative approaches to training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to make key skills training an integral part of the whole programme
- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

This example shows an imaginative opportunity for a trainee to put a key skill into practice. A modern apprentice attended a national conference organised by the awarding body in London. The modern apprentice gave a presentation entitled 'A young person's perspective on life as an electronic systems servicing modern apprentice'. The modern apprentice was the only speaker to receive a standing ovation. This presentation was used as evidence of the modern apprentice's competence in communication for the purpose of key skills assessment

12. The college selects its associated employers carefully and all companies are based in relatively new premises, which are clean, bright and tidy. Some companies offer the facility for trainees to learn and develop a high level of specialist engineering skills. Aerospace and high technology automotive gear-box design and manufacture are two examples. International and large national companies employ trainees pursuing electronic systems servicing qualifications. Trainees value their employment with these high calibre companies. They are highly motivated, proud of their individual companies and enthusiastic about their training, both on and off the job. Employers are keen that their trainees should progress well and to agreed targets. They value the review process that is carried out by the college's training advisor. The training advisor and employers enjoy a good, productive working relationship. Reviews are carried out regularly and both trainee and employer are fully involved in the process. The training advisor reviews the trainees' welfare and safety and progress at work and at college. The individual training plan and college report are used to good effect in this process. One employer, in conjunction with the training advisor, is prepared to help the trainee change direction, even though this would mean leaving the company. The manager is prepared to use his contacts to bring this about. Good relationships exist between employers and other college staff. Qualified college assessors visit companies and negotiate arrangements for the trainees to take optional NVQ units, and carry out on-the-job assessments. In electronic systems servicing, trainees who enrol before the college course begins are given a scheme of work which allows them to develop basic skills such as soldering and the use of hand tools. The programme also provides them with knowledge of the theory of alternating and digital waveforms. As far as possible, trainees acquire credit for their theory work by taking appropriate NVQ units.

13. Key skills are not an integral part of the training programme. Trainees do not gather evidence of their attainment in key skills across every aspect of their work. Instead, key skills are taught as a separate element through classroom-based activities at the college. Employers are not aware of the need for trainees to develop key skills through workplace activities. In a few instances, trainees are able to produce good evidence of their attainment in key skills through occupationally related activities. However, many opportunities for assessing trainees' proficiency in key skills through work-based tasks are missed. One employer puts all its employees through internal training courses for gaining Microsoft Excel skills and knowledge but trainees still undergo similar training in spreadsheets as part of their key skills 'course'. Other naturally occurring evidence, such as that derived from the use of formulae and calculations in the workplace, is not used.

14. The college is currently involved in the use and development of an innovative training method and is using its contacts with employers to help with the piloting of this. Funding from the Electronic Skills Challenge project has provided a unique solution for in-company training of young, and more mature people, in electronic servicing and related skills. Trainees are provided with portable equipment and learning materials which they can use by themselves and which cover all the theory work for the NVQ in electronic systems service. The college and the awarding body have successfully adapted course materials to meet NVQ requirements. Two training

centres have been established in the college. A new practical workshop provides a replica of a commercial repair workshop with the latest equipment. Trainees work at their own pace on the computer-based training materials.

Business Administration

Grade 3

15. There are 35 trainees in this occupational area. Twenty-three trainees are working towards NVQs in business administration, including 10 modern apprentices and eight national trainees. Seven trainees are working towards NVQs in accountancy, including six modern apprentices. The five trainees working towards NVQs in information technology include two national trainees. Many of the trainees are also studying for additional qualifications. In business administration, the proportion per 100 leavers who obtained NVQs in 1997-98 was 73 per cent, and in accounting it was 60 per cent. The self-assessment report noted a number of strengths for this occupational area, some of which were found by the inspectors to be no more than standard practice. Inspectors found weaknesses which the college had not identified and they awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of occupational experience for trainees
- ◆ well-resourced off-the-job training
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to take additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ very little work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of awareness of assessment process
- ◆ narrow range of assessment methods

16. Trainees are working for a wide range of employers from small companies to multinational enterprises. A training advisor from the college visits employers at the start of training. He/she discusses the trainee's job with manager and trainee and how it relates to the qualification. The majority of trainees have jobs which provide a wide range of occupational opportunities and a few of the trainees have taken on extra responsibilities in the workplace since starting the training programme. In addition, trainees are offered good-quality off-the-job training opportunities at the college. The majority of trainees working towards their NVQs at level 2 in this area attend college on day release and are tutored by well-qualified staff. In addition, a number of the business administration trainees attend classes for two evenings a week to achieve a qualification in business and finance. Accountancy trainees attend college one day a week when they use the key skills workshop and study for additional professional qualifications. The college has recently introduced information technology training for work-based trainees. This training is provided as

part of a successful full-time course and 73 trainees are currently benefiting from it. Four of the work-based trainees working towards the NVQs in information technology are also taking additional NVQs in business administration or customer service.

17. In addition to the support provided by college tutors to trainees on day release, trainees are regularly visited in the workplace by college training advisors and assessors who provide them with help and guidance on the NVQ qualification and assess the trainees' work. Visits take place weekly or monthly, according to need. There is also a quarterly review meeting with a training advisor.

18. There is little work-based assessment. Training advisors and assessors use most visits to the trainees to check on the type of work the trainee is doing against the NVQ standards. Assessors set tasks for trainees at level 3 which they have to complete before the next visit. At the next visit, trainees' performance in completing tasks and in any college assignments is checked against the requisite standards. Gaps are then identified by the assessor, the trainees are set new tasks until they have completed all the necessary work for their NVQ. There are good relationships between the college and employers. Employers miss opportunities, however, to provide specific training in the workplace or to assess the trainees' performance in naturally occurring work-based tasks. Most employers do not know what trainees cover in their off-the-job training at college. Insufficient use is made of witness testimonies relating to trainees' competence for the purposes of NVQ assessment. The content of trainees' portfolios is good but, in some instances, trainees are given insufficient scope to manage their portfolios themselves. Both trainees and employers have a poor understanding of the NVQ assessment process. There is little direct observation of trainees' work by the assessor.

19. Trainees benefit from the facilities which the college provides for its full time students who are studying for NVQs. Key skills workshops are run during twilight hours from 4.30 to 6.30 p.m. Work-based trainees attend these workshops. This arrangement works well for accountancy trainees because the workshops are run on the day when they attend college on day release. However, business administration trainees come to college on a different day. A number do not return to take part in the key skills workshop on the day when this takes place.

20. Some trainees have an initial assessment of their basic skills, but some do not. Steps are being taken to rectify this and trainees starting in the two months prior to inspection have all undergone an initial assessment of their basic skills. It is intended that in the future, all trainees will be assessed initially. Trainees who are identified as having difficulties with learning, caused, for example, through dyslexia, receive good support. They are provided with additional tutoring and their jobs are carefully selected. In some instances, induction for trainees has been unsatisfactory. The college has devised a new induction handbook for trainees.

Retailing & customer service (distribution and warehousing)

Grade 3

21. The college has 30 trainees working towards NVQs in distribution & warehousing and customer service. Six trainees are on the modern apprenticeship programme and working towards NVQ level 3 in customer service. Fourteen trainees are undertaking training on NVQ level 2 customer service programmes. The remainder are working towards NVQ level 2 in distribution & warehousing. Four of the trainees have particular learning support needs. All trainees are employed, with the exception of two following customer service programmes. Local demand for service sector employees is strong. Out of the 31 trainees who started training in the past year, five left early without achieving a qualification. Of those trainees who remained, three achieved a qualification during the year and the others are aiming to achieve one in the next year. In September 1997, the college introduced training programmes leading to NVQs in distribution and warehousing and customer service and these are now expanding. On-the-job training takes place at the trainees' workplaces and some key skills training, for customer service modern apprentices, is provided at the college. The customer service training is managed by the college-based co-ordinator. A subcontractor manages the distribution and warehousing training. Inspectors considered that many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report, but agreed with the grade given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ opportunities for trainees to obtain additional vocational qualifications
- ◆ flexible assessment arrangements to meet individual needs
- ◆ well-resourced workplaces

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment
- ◆ insufficient variety of assessment methods
- ◆ trainees' lack of understanding of the assessment process

22. The college provides trainees with the opportunity to study for other vocational qualifications, as well as their NVQs in customer service, in order that they may increase their sector specific skills and knowledge and improve their employability. At the time of inspection, six trainees were aiming to achieve additional qualifications. Assessors can be contacted by telephone and are available to visit workplaces on demand in addition to their regular visits. Assessors give trainees as much individual attention as they can. For example, where an in-depth assessment visit is arranged with a trainee and other trainees are employed at the same establishment, assessors make a point of briefly visiting all trainees present. All

workplaces provide environments which meet or exceed the assessment requirements for the NVQ. In cases where the trainees are unable to develop and demonstrate the required competencies for the NVQ through their job role, employers are usually able to provide them with different tasks which are more appropriate to their needs. Assessors have a wide range of vocational experience. The college is able to ensure that customer service trainees are allotted assessors who have had experience of the type of workplace where the trainees are based. An assessor with in-depth experience directly relating to the sector, carries out assessment of distribution and warehousing trainees.

23. A number of employers identified that they are unaware of the content of the NVQs being undertaken by their trainees. Most employers are not involved in planning and identifying assessment opportunities. Some trainees attend training courses organised by the company for which they work. Their experience and attainment on these courses are seldom taken into account for the purposes of NVQ assessment. There is insufficient inclusion of witness testimony of trainees' competence in portfolios. Employers confirmed that there is insufficient use of such testimony. Most trainees are unable to provide a simple explanation of the content of their NVQs and of the assessment process. Trainees were frequently unable to identify assessment opportunities without the assistance or direction of assessors.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

24. The college has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures for equal opportunities. All subcontractors are aware of, and follow, the college's policy. Data for all trainees and staff are monitored by gender, age ethnicity and disability. Data are then analysed. Less than 2 per cent of the trainees are from minority ethnic groups compared with 3 per cent in the local population. Seventy-eight per cent of trainees are women and 22 per cent are men. Six trainees have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and with the grade given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities in publicity materials
- ◆ staff development for equal opportunities
- ◆ specially designed signs for people with impaired sight
- ◆ regular checks on harassment and discrimination issues in the workplace

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of equal opportunities

25. The college is committed to providing equal opportunities for all staff and trainees. The college's publicity material, particularly the full-colour prospectuses, include a section on work-based training and a statement that the college is open to all, irrespective of ability and attainment. A review group meets on a regular basis and looks at ways of making the policies and procedures more relevant. All staff cover equal opportunities as part of their induction. All trainees are accorded equal respect by college staff, employers and fellow workers. There is particular emphasis on helping trainees with particular learning needs. The college runs a programme called Starting Line. This lasts for up to six months and enables trainees, unsure of which occupational area they wish to work in, to try a number of short work placements in different occupational areas. This programme is also provided for trainees identified as having severe learning difficulties. The trainees also receive excellent one-to-one tuition and coaching. The college has enabled these trainees to achieve NVQs at level 1, and in some instances, at level 2 and to progress to full-time employment. The college also provides very good creche and nursery facilities, which are available to the work-based trainees.

26. The college has also provided specially designed signs, based on guidance from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, to assist poorly sighted students and trainees. All stairwells and lifts have signs in Braille. Public areas have larger and more clearly defined signs to help the dyslexic or the poorly sighted. There is good provision of ramps and chair lifts. Specially designed open evenings with staff and employers in attendance are held over a wide geographical area.

27. The college uses innovative methods to improve awareness of equal opportunities. Theme weeks are organised in which a quiz takes place within the college, videos on the subject are also shown, and in the next week, the quiz tutors go through the answers with the students and deal with any issues arising. This quiz is mainly for students on full-time provision but the work-based trainees attending on day release can participate in it. Topics for the theme weeks have included drug abuse and equal opportunities.

28. The college carries out regular checks to make sure that trainees are not subjected to any form of harassment or discrimination in the workplace. The college recognises, however, that work-based trainees have a poor understanding of equal opportunities. There is now a section relating to equal opportunities on the form which staff have to complete when they visit trainees in the workplace. The new trainee handbook contains a copy of the equal opportunities policy and clear guidelines on grievance procedures, but this has not yet been issued to the trainees.

Trainee support

Grade 2

29. The college aims to provide pastoral care and support for all its students. It

offers them a business-like education service through careful financial management. The provision of good support for trainees is well established and staff are committed to providing trainees with help whenever they need it. Assessors make regular visits to trainees in the workplace and the frequency of these is increased in accordance with trainees' needs. In addition, each trainee is under the care of a training advisor who monitors the trainee's progress and acts as the central link for other services such as additional support. Prospective trainees are given a thorough interview to assess their aptitude and interests. Trainees' basic skills are systematically assessed to identify potential learning difficulties or problems and establish what trainees need by way of additional support. Recruitment of trainees is carried out through a wide range of methods that include open evenings, with participation from employers. Opinion surveys showed that 81 per cent of employers who responded to questionnaires, thought that the college's provision met their expectations and 88 per cent rated the college as good or excellent. Ninety per cent of trainees considered the college to be good or very good. Both employers and trainees spoke well of the college. Inspectors agreed with some of the many strengths cited in the self-assessment report, but they considered others to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with the grade given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-developed and effective trainee support system
- ◆ rapid response to trainees' concerns
- ◆ specific guidance on progression
- ◆ focus in updated training plans on individual needs
- ◆ employers' positive involvement in support arrangements
- ◆ excellent support for trainees with learning needs/disabilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees' uncertainty about their rights and responsibilities
- ◆ insufficiently systematic recording of action taken to address trainees' problems

30. A training advisor carries out the induction of trainees and the quarterly progress reviews and is responsible for ensuring that all trainees receive the support they need. The advisor acts as a catalyst for trainee support and liaises with the employer and assessor to ensure that support is comprehensive in scope and properly co-ordinated. Trainees know they can contact college staff at any time, often using home telephone numbers. Problems and concerns are dealt with promptly to the satisfaction of both trainee and employer, but action on these is not always recorded. Some trainees have changed courses, have had working schedules changed and have benefited from intervention by college staff to sort out problems at work. Trainees have confidence that the support team is readily available. Employers feel that they have the full co-operation of the college and that, together with college staff, they are involved in helping trainees to progress and succeed.

Trainees feel confident that the college provides good help and support. Some trainees' past concerns were highlighted and in each case, the college had acted speedily to resolve them. Mid-way through their programme, some trainees have received guidance or made changes to their learning programmes in the light of their changed working conditions, responsibilities or aspirations and these are reflected in their individual training plans (ITPs). The ITPs are individualistic and are tailored to trainees' needs. They include a variety of additional courses and are creative and imaginative. Employers support the plans and many of them provide the trainees with additional care and assistance to help them to meet their training requirements. Some trainees progress to management studies. Others progress from the preparatory training programme to NVQ level 1 and then to level 2. The learning support staff at the college are imaginative and creative and encourage trainees to make excellent progress.

31. Some trainees were unsure of their rights and responsibilities, especially in relation to grievance procedures. At present, they are given no written information on grievance procedures but only a verbal explanation at induction. Some trainees were uncertain of how to handle any grievance or problem that could not be dealt with to their satisfaction by their training advisor.

Management of training

Grade 2

32. Since October 1998, the TEC-funded programmes have been part of the business development unit at the college and become the responsibility of the business development manager, who reports directly to the deputy principal. Prior to October 1998, this provision was administered through separate subsidiary arrangements. The programmes are run by a youth training section within the college. It has a team of training advisors, led by the TEC training co-ordinator, who work with course teams in the various curriculum areas. The college operates subcontractor arrangements with five local training providers. Investor in People accreditation was renewed in January 1999. Over the last year, there has been rapid growth, both in trainee numbers and range of qualifications offered by the section. In May 1997, there were 22 trainees. At the time of the inspection, there were 125. Further expansion is planned. The self-assessment report identified many strengths which inspectors considered were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses and the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and well-documented policies and procedures
- ◆ effective working relationships between staff, employers and subcontractors
- ◆ good internal communication
- ◆ clear roles and responsibilities for staff
- ◆ setting and achievement of clear and measurable targets
- ◆ thorough staff appraisal system and effective staff development programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of well-established procedures for work-based training
- ◆ weak links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some employers' poor understanding of NVQ process

33. There are well-documented policies and procedures for all aspects of the organisation and some procedures are being developed which relate specifically to work-based training. Hitherto, there has been a lack of procedures for work-based training and those trainees who do not come regularly onto college premises. Policies and procedures are updated regularly and the business development manager ensures they are integrated with the college's policies and procedures. These policies are working documents and staff refer to them regularly. There are regular formal and informal meetings between staff, employers and subcontractors. These meetings are planned and action is taken on decisions made at them. Work-based training is discussed at all levels within the organisation. Staff have close working relationships with employers. Management and staffing structures are straightforward. Staff know their roles and responsibilities and work as a team. All staff, including sessional staff, attend a comprehensive induction programme. There are clear and effective lines of communication between everyone in the organisation at all levels. Strong relationships exist between the managing agent staff and those responsible for providing training. Staff meetings are held regularly. Problems are reported on and dealt with. Written reports on trainees' progress are discussed and are used in the review process.

34. A business performance improvement plan contains targets relating to a wide range of aspects of the training. An action plan is made and progress towards reaching these targets is monitored. An extensive plan has been proposed to improve retention and achievement. Staff appraisal is annual and includes all staff on sessional contracts. Staff development is planned to meet the strategic and operational needs of the college. Extensive staff development is available and records of training provided are kept. There is an in-house training and development programme. Staff also attend external courses and have opportunities to update their professional skills. Sessional staff receive remuneration for attending staff development sessions.

35. There are few links between off-the-job training, usually on college premises, and on-the-job training. Work-based supervisors are unaware of the content of college-based training programmes. The college has devised an on-the-job training checklist, based on the requirements of the NVQ, which the trainee uses when gathering evidence of his or her competence in the workplace. However, use of this checklist is new and it is too early to judge its effectiveness. Employers have little knowledge about the NVQ the trainees are following. Opportunities for assessing the trainees in the workplace are missed. In some instances, trainees receive insufficient help from employers with the NVQ process.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

36. The college has an annual cycle of strategic planning and quality review. There is a well-established quality assurance framework, which is being systematically updated to include the work-based training provision. This meets TEC and awarding body requirements. Some of this updating has taken place and a separate set of procedures has been developed as an interim measure. The quality assurance group reviews and monitors the college's quality assurance procedures and reports to the senior management team. Inspectors agreed with strengths, weaknesses and grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-established and clearly documented quality assurance system
- ◆ effective annual quality assurance review
- ◆ useful analysis of feedback from employers and trainees
- ◆ rigorous system for selection of training subcontractors
- ◆ good self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure of some quality assurance procedures to cover work-based training

37. The deputy principal is responsible for quality assurance. Policies and procedures are well defined and published in a comprehensive manual. Documentation is strictly controlled and revisions to policies and procedures are systematically vetted. The business development manager is included in the management of the documentation and procedures. Some procedures have yet to be modified to include work-based training. All courses at the college are subject to an annual quality review, which incorporates the views of external verifiers, trainees and employers. Evidence is collected from written reports, performance and action plans, and surveys of employers and trainees' opinions. A formal meeting is held attended by trainee and employer representatives and a member of the work-based training management team. Action points made at these meetings have resulted in improvements in quality. Reports from these reviews and external verifier reports are checked by senior managers.

38. Employers and trainees answer comprehensive questionnaires, which ask them to grade and comment on the training process. Returns are logged and statistically analysed and an action plan made to address the issues raised. This process has resulted in changes to the provision. Subcontractors go through a rigorous selection procedure. The college checks on the subcontractor's centre approval documentation, staff qualifications and experience, premises and internal and external verification arrangements. College staff hold meetings with subcontractors regularly to discuss key issues and decide action on them. They also carry out regular observations of training and assessment and provide the subcontractor with



feedback on these.

39. Prior to inspection, the college had implemented new procedures to improve its quality assurance arrangements. It was, however, too early to judge whether these procedures were proving effective and whether, in particular, they were leading to an improvement in the quality of the trainees' learning experience.