



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1998

Sparsholt College

SUMMARY

Sparsholt College offers work-based training in a range of land-based occupations including horticulture, equine studies, service engineering, forestry and floristry. Trainees join full-time students in college for off-the-job sessions. Resources at work and college are good, providing a range of industry-standard facilities for learning. Staff are well qualified and supportive. Assessment is fair and takes place mainly at work. Selection procedures for staff and trainees ensure equality of opportunity. The college has well-developed systems for managing and assuring the quality of its mainstream training. Managers have been slow to recognise that these are not appropriate for the work-based training, resulting in poor controls and inadequate monitoring of the workplace element of the programmes.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive range of different land-based subjects
- ◆ good-quality human and physical resources at college and work
- ◆ selection procedures for staff and trainees ensure equality of opportunity
- ◆ good systems for trainee support at college

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ many missed training and assessment opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ inadequate support arrangements for trainees at work
- ◆ inadequate control of workplace training and assessment
- ◆ poor record-keeping and updating
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data to inform quality improvement

INTRODUCTION

1. Sparsholt College in central Hampshire is the largest land-based college in the further education sector. The 176-hectare site is a few miles outside Winchester and comprises a farm, woodland, and educational and residential buildings. The college contracts with Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to offer modern apprenticeships and other training, under the local brand name New Horizons, to young people in and around Hampshire.

2. There are 47 trainees at the college on work-based training programmes, 40 of whom are modern apprentices with seven on other youth training programmes. Modern apprentices are training in horse care and management; trainees work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3, all of them are employed and training is delivered on the job. A further seven clients are taking similar programmes under the full-time education and training option of the New Deal.

3. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers in Hampshire achieving five general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was high at 51.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. Twenty-three per cent of people in Hampshire are qualified to GCE A-level standard. However, a recent report on national learning targets by Hampshire TEC indicates that the standard of education in Hampshire is either remaining static or beginning to decline.

4. The unemployment rate in Hampshire is 6 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. The county is generally affluent with a gross domestic product per capita at 103 per cent of the UK average. Twenty-three per cent of jobs are in manufacturing, construction, utilities and agriculture, compared with 77 per cent in service industries. The minority ethnic population is 2 per cent, with the largest ethnic group within this minority being Asian at 0.4 per cent.

5. The inspection was carried out as part of a joint inspection with an inspection team from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The Training Standards Council and FEFC teams shared information, evidence sources, and session observation findings. Some feedback meetings with the college nominee were held jointly. Short sections of the FEFC's draft report, relating to college resources and quality assurance, are included in this report.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. The self-assessment report was produced as an appendix to the FEFC report in November 1998, and was compiled by the director of academic services, the quality and business development manager and the training and special projects manager, in consultation with other staff and college students.

7. Four inspectors spent a total of four days at Sparsholt College in May 1999. They interviewed 24 trainees and three New Deal clients. Twenty-one interviews were conducted with off-the-job training staff and 18 with off-the-job management staff. Inspectors visited 13 workplaces and met with 12 supervisors and employers. Twenty-six trainees' files and 12 portfolios were reviewed. Other documents reviewed included TEC contracts, external verifier reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, business plans, meeting minutes, staff development records, marketing material and monitoring data.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 3

Trainee numbers and programmes at the time of inspection

	Modern apprentice	Other	New Deal	Total
Horse care & Management	21			21
Horticulture	17	2	1	20
Floristry		2	1	3
Gamekeeping & Waterkeeping			1	1
Service Engineering	1	2		3
Forestry			2	2
Arboriculture			2	2
Agriculture	1	1		2
Total	40	7	7	54

8. Trainees are recruited by referral from careers centres, by school careers officers, through direct contact, from employers or by word of mouth. All the New Horizons trainees are employed and training takes place both on and off the job, except in agriculture, where all the training is undertaken on the job. Off-the-job training is delivered at the college. Trainees join existing groups of students at the college in either day-release or block-release sessions. There are no discreet groups of trainees due to the small number of those involved. Horticultural trainees join

day-release NVQ groups while green keeping and sports turf trainees attend on a block-release basis. Both these groups include trainees funded by various different methods such as through the TEC, FEFC or privately. Day-release service engineer trainees join a full-time NVQ course. Other trainees attend college for three days and a work placement for two days, each week. The company gave a higher grade in its self-assessment report than that awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ individual and flexible work-based training
- ◆ strong commitment to training by employers
- ◆ good-quality and well-resourced work placements
- ◆ good-quality college-based learning resources
- ◆ good use of accreditation of prior learning in equine training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ many missed training and assessment opportunities at work
- ◆ poor use of training and assessment plans in the workplace
- ◆ key skills not yet fully integrated and developed
- ◆ arrangements do not ensure adequacy of reviews in all cases

9. Off-the-job training is good. Most college-based training sessions are well planned with a good variety of activities. Effective use is made of assignments. Theory teaching sessions are interesting and informative. Trainees fit in well when joining students for these college-based sessions. All vocational area staff have productive links with land-based industries, and improvements to training have been based on advice from industrial liaison groups. Integration of trainees with full- and part-time students is well managed through flexible modular courses. At the start of their programme, each trainee is given an effective and well-documented basic skills assessment, and findings are used to develop training plans. Training for qualifications over and above those in the framework are delivered both on and off the job. The college provides access to specialist courses, for example in tractor driving and handling, foot trimming and assessor award training and assessment.

10. Trainees work with a wide variety of employers throughout Hampshire, usually with only one or two trainees at each establishment. These workplaces include a large country estate, a golf course, riding stables and studs, garden centres and nurseries. Trainees are invited for interview either at the college or, if already employed, at work. At that time, programme information is sent to both the trainee and to the potential employer. The trainee is enrolled onto the modern apprentice programme by a member of college staff at the work placement and is briefed on the programme requirements and the NVQ process by visiting college staff. After recruitment, the process is less well organised. Most trainees are provided with a four-week probationary period by employers before starting on the modern apprenticeship programme, but some have probationary periods up to 13 weeks, and a few have none at all. Those trainees who receive a shorter induction, or none at all,

are less aware of their rights and responsibilities than work-based trainees.

11. On-the-job training is very variable in quality. Most of the equine training is effectively planned and delivered. Across all vocational areas, on-the-job training and assessment plans are often incomplete or absent. Trainees rely almost entirely on visiting staff for formal training, which for some trainees is infrequent.

12. Workplaces provide appropriate opportunities, materials and equipment to support the training process. The quality and range of machinery and tools usually meets, and often exceeds, industry standards. Activities at work match the range required for each NVQ. Some employers are trained and qualified as assessors. Assessment at work is usually carried out by occupationally competent employers' staff, some of whom are qualified as assessors. Assessments in the college are rigorous and fair, although the quality and frequency of workplace assessments are less good. Portfolios are of an acceptable standard. Staff carrying out review, assessment and monitoring visits are occupationally competent and well qualified. Accreditation of prior learning is used widely in equine training, especially when trainees have several years' experience of riding and working with horses. Accrediting their prior learning helps these trainees to progress more rapidly with their qualification.

13. The practical aspects of off-the-job training are undertaken using the college estate, which includes gardens and glass-houses, a nine-hole golf course, engineering workshops and the college's 143-hectare farm. The college operates a diverse range of farming and land-based enterprises, and the estate contains a range of habitats and land uses. The management of each area or enterprise is carefully integrated with the educational, training or commercial taking place on the site. Although the ratio of computers to students is modest, students have access to the machines for 84 hours each week, including during evenings and weekends. Technical support for the computer system is good.

14. Sparsholt College began providing TEC-funded work-based training in 1997. As most of the trainees are modern apprentices and their training normally takes approximately three years, there have not yet been many trainees completing their qualifications. So far, 19 trainees have achieved NVQs at level 2 and most of these were in equine studies. The overall picture of achievement and retention in these relatively new programmes indicates that too many trainees are leaving without qualifications. The target for trainees' qualification achievements is unrealistic. Many trainees have target dates two years later than they actually complete their qualification. Other trainees are targeted to achieve their qualifications within two months of starting training. Key skills training at the college has been introduced for trainees on the equine programme, but attendance is poor. Some good key skills mapping and key skills support materials have been developed recently. However, key skills are not yet fully developed or established into all modern apprenticeship programmes. Equine studies is the only vocational area where accreditation of prior learning is effectively deployed in both assessor awards and vocational qualifications. The equine studies programme has a high proportion of early leavers, but many of them leave with all or part of a qualification. Several trainees on the equine NVQ level 2 programme benefit from a two-day training and assessment

session, which leads to assessor qualifications. This is a very short course, providing little time to demonstrate the breadth of skills needed to be an effective assessor.

15. Review visits for work-based trainees who do not attend college are undertaken approximately every 13 weeks. This time limit is occasionally exceeded. The review process does not provide adequate support for trainees learning to build their portfolios. They receive little advice on action-planning. The reviews of trainees' progress do not always include employers, trainees and college review staff.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

16. Sparsholt College has a detailed and comprehensive equal opportunities policy. The college charter includes reference to the college's support for equality of opportunity for all. Arrangements for equal opportunities meet the TEC's contractual requirements and those of legislation. Senior staff are responsible for implementing the equal opportunities practices which are clearly identified in the equal opportunities policy. Staff responsibility for daily maintenance of equal opportunities is understood but not included in job descriptions. Specific reference to equal opportunities is not made in the college's mission statement or included in the staff handbook. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ selection procedures for staff and trainees ensure equality of opportunity
- ◆ good access to training and support for people with disabilities
- ◆ well-documented complaints procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ policies and procedures not specific to work-based training
- ◆ inadequate promotion of equal opportunities in marketing materials
- ◆ weak analysis and use of performance data
- ◆ poor arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity at work

17. Staff fully endorse the college's commitment to equality of opportunity and they create learning environments free from discrimination and harassment. External promotion of the college's commitment to equal opportunities is inadequate. The great majority of marketing materials and college advertisements do not include a specific reference to equal opportunities. Recent recruitment display boards demonstrate varied gender and ethnic mixes among the student population. Marketing policies promote the use of materials which display positive images, to offset gender stereotyping, in occupational areas. However, marked gender imbalances exist within current trainee numbers. For example, 90.5 per cent of the equine studies trainees are women and 94.7 per cent of the horticulture trainees are

men.

18. College training programmes are promoted to a wide range of groups within the local community, through participation in careers conventions and organising 'taster days', and open evenings at college. Efforts to recruit people from minority ethnic groups have not been successful. Data for the year 1998-99 indicate that nobody from a minority ethnic group was recruited onto a work-based training programme. The local population figure is less than 2 per cent. During the same period, 4.3 per cent of trainees had disabilities.

19. Policies and procedures for equal opportunities have been developed primarily for college-based training and are not specific to on-the-job training. Arrangements for ensuring equal opportunities within work placements are weak. Management control of equal opportunities at work is through signed employers' agreements. A requirement for adherence by employers to the college's equal opportunities policy is not explicit in these contracts. Agreements emphasise the employers' need to be aware of equal opportunities issues and their compliance with statutory requirements. Monitoring by college staff of equal opportunities at work is informal and conducted during visits to trainees. Analysis and use of collected data are poor. Use of local and national data to measure performance is not yet routine. Evaluation of performance and target-setting for achievement are not systematic.

20. Procedures for staff and trainee selection are clear and well documented. The college's policy for academic staff development makes a formal commitment to equality of access to opportunities for professional development. Staff express satisfaction at arrangements for promotion and internal appointments within the organisation. Arrangements for interviewing and assessing prospective trainees are good and comply with the college's policy that all applicants are selected on merit. Complaints and grievance procedures for staff and trainees are well documented and comprehensive. The college undertakes to deal with complaints fairly and within 10 days of notification. Appeals procedures related to training are contained within the course handbooks issued to trainees.

21. College provision for people with disabilities is good. Staff are given written guidelines, including a flow chart for action to be taken for dealing with alleged abuse of students or trainees with learning difficulties or disabilities. The document includes reference to racial abuse. The college produces an annual disability statement which gives clear indication of the its support for people with disabilities. The college has established a learning difficulties & disabilities committee. It has a sub-committee, the disabled access group, to discuss the needs of people with disabilities and makes recommendations to senior managers. Building development strategies incorporate the needs of people with disabilities. Present college facilities for people with disabilities are adequate, although the split-level campus and the use of upper floors for training, does present access difficulties for trainees with mobility problems. Student support services and social areas are accessible. Staff have had disability awareness training through Hampshire TEC.

Trainee support

Grade 3

22. The department of academic services has overall responsibility for trainee support. The self-assessment report describes four strands to the college's support strategy: recruitment and careers, learning support services, personal welfare and counselling support, and tutorial and academic support. All of the support resources, mechanisms and personnel are described in the student handbook. The college hosts an annual careers fair in May. The self-assessment report relies on a section on college support for students written for the FEFC's self-assessment report, to cover this aspect of provision. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that indicated in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ very good off-the-job trainee support mechanisms
- ◆ systematic basic skills assessments
- ◆ well-documented support policies
- ◆ committed and qualified support staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ systematic learning support not fully accessible to work-based trainees
- ◆ inadequate support arrangements for trainees at work

23. Trainees at college benefit from a wide range of activities and procedures designed to support students to achieve their learning and employment objectives. Learning support resources are available in the college and include a well-resourced library and information technology centre, and a dyslexia diagnostic and support service. Staff roles and responsibilities relating to trainee support are clearly documented. Staff in the learning support department are well qualified. Trainees have access to clear and helpful work-based careers advice and marketing materials, as well as workshops and information packs dealing with a variety of topics from basic mathematics to interview techniques. Initial assessment does not cover key skills.

24. Recruitment interviews often take place in the workplace, and may involve several meetings to ensure that the trainees have chosen the correct programme. The effectiveness of workplace induction is poorly monitored by the college, especially when the trainee has worked for the employer for some time previously. Health and safety induction at work lacks rigour. Although there are health and safety induction checklists, these are often incomplete and unsigned. College staff, who are responsible for work-based trainees' placements, do not hold health and safety qualifications. Two college staff have recently attended a training session with the college health and safety officer, designed to specifically address land-based industry health and safety issues. Some trainees receive no health and safety information, other than being given a booklet, from either the college or their employer.

25. The many support resources designed for college students do not apply

comprehensively to work-based trainees. Support resources are all sited at the college to accommodate the greater concentration of students. Many trainees travel considerable distances to reach the college and attend for short periods of the week. Access to learning support by work-based trainees at college is not systematically reviewed or monitored. College staff who visit trainees at work are not qualified to address identified additional learning support needs. Guidance and support provided at work by employers is poorly managed and little monitoring is undertaken by the college.

26. There is no college charter specifically for work-based trainees. The student handbook does not describe trainees' rights and responsibilities, or those of the college or the employer in the modern apprenticeship process.

Management of training

Grade 3

27. Training at Sparsholt College is managed by a quality and business development manager and a training and special projects manager, as part of a number of other duties. They are supported by one full-time administrator who is primarily responsible for visits and reviews. The college had Investors in People status reconfirmed in May 1998. The self-assessment report recognises a need to establish and set targets against performance indicators, and to ensure that management information systems deal effectively with TEC-funded provision. The inspectors awarded a lower grade than that shown in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open and inclusive management style
- ◆ effective staff appraisal and development
- ◆ effective integration of New Deal clients to college courses

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited control of workplace assessment
- ◆ limited use of accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ unclear roles and responsibilities within off-the-job management team

28. The college management style is open, and managers are approachable and supportive. Many trainees, especially New Deal clients, have been hostile to formal learning environments and fear that their time at college may duplicate their negative experience at school. These concerns are effectively allayed by lecturers and tutors who make great efforts to create a supportive and stimulating learning environment. New Deal clients benefit from well-planned and successful integration with both trainees and students. Training and development for college staff enables them to understand and appreciate the diverse needs of their trainees. Staff appraisal and development procedures are established and well recorded. These effectively identify training needs related to work-based training. All college teaching staff have assessor qualifications.

29. Although the management team has produced a detailed brochure explaining accreditation of prior learning, there are several instances where the process is not effectively deployed. For example, one New Deal client on the full-time education and training option is currently on a four-week block of work experience in gamekeeping, on a large estate. This trainee has previously worked at the same estate for 15 months and demonstrates an impressive breadth of knowledge and skill in gamekeeping. He has not been adequately advised of the possibility of having his previous experience and learning accredited.

30. The team within the college responsible for managing work-based training is relatively new. It operates within a college-wide management structure which is only a year old. There is a lack of clarity about individual roles and responsibilities. In particular, the accountability for strategic matters, and for operational issues, is not clear.

31. The college works with a wide range of organisations to provide work placements. Relationships between the college and employers are cordial and the introduction of trainees to the process of work-based training is good. Beyond this, contact with employers is sporadic and casual. Assessment management is weak. Most assessment occurs towards the end of the programmes. Assessment is constrained by college term times.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

32. The college has a range of quality assurance procedures including those that cover strategic planning, course review and action-planning, external verifier reports and departmental operating statements. Monitoring occurs at section, department, senior management and governor level. The director of academic services and the quality and business manager are principally responsible for managing and reporting the quality assurance process. In the self-assessment report, staff acknowledge a need to disseminate good practice, improve monitoring, and seek the views of trainees. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective college-based quality assurance procedures
- ◆ detailed and rigorous workplace quality checks
- ◆ advanced development of quality assurance procedures appropriate to work-based training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ external verifier findings not circulated to off-the-job management team
- ◆ key documents poorly completed

33. Quality assurance for work-based training delivered by Sparsholt College is

largely reliant on the systems and procedures devised for the college and its staff and students. However, none of these systems and procedures were conceived for work-based training. The college and the work-based training team recognise this and are developing different quality assurance policies and procedures for the training programmes. This work includes the recent appointment of a quality manager for work-based training, the creation of a clear quality accounting line (including one member of the board of governors briefed to deal with work-based training matters) and the compilation of a draft quality manual.

34. There is a very clear commitment at all levels, both in the workplace and in the college, to assuring quality and improving performance. The college has an annual course and programme review procedure which covers training programmes as well as full- and part-time student courses. Each vocational area has a named member of college staff who systematically checks the quality of each workplace. The criteria for quality vary among vocational areas, and the most detailed are in equine training, but all ensure that workplaces and their staff meet minimum standards of suitability. However, the range of indicators needed to prescribe and monitor performance and quality across and between workplaces has not yet been accurately described.

35. Effective procedures have not been established or monitored and there are problems with Sparsholt's work-based training provision, such as identified learning support needs not addressed, absence of pre-placement checklists, failure to co-ordinate equal opportunities with employers, and poor workplace induction. The most significant of these weaknesses is the lack of the proper use of key elements of all work-based training such as the individual training plans which support trainees' progress through to qualification. The self-assessment report indicates that staff are also aware that there is inadequate monitoring of employer contracts. Employers sign a contract obliging them to provide for and plan training and assessment, but their compliance with this is not monitored.

36. Internal verification is well planned and is effective in maintaining NVQ standards. External verifiers' findings are not routinely fed back to all team members, except when major problems have been highlighted.

37. The self-assessment report for work-based training is a short appendix to a larger self-assessment report drawn up for the FEFC inspection. The circumstances of work-based training are not fully considered in any section and assumptions are made that the quality of training for work-based trainees is generally the same as that for mainstream college students. Trainees spend most of their time at work and the quality of that learning environment is a significant factor in evaluating the overall quality of their learning experiences. The report lacked rigorous self-criticism and all of the grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those proposed in the self-assessment report. Feedback from employers through questionnaires is not used and feedback questionnaires for trainees have only been recently introduced.