



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

North East Chamber of Commerce Training Ltd

SUMMARY

North East Chamber of Commerce Training Limited has eight training centres throughout the Northeast region. The company provides excellent training in dental nursing. At the time of the first inspection, training in management and professional services was considered to be unsatisfactory. Upon reinspection a year later, however, it was found that significant improvements had been made and this training provision was good. Training in other occupations is good or satisfactory. Staff support trainees comprehensively throughout their time in training. The company requires unusually high entry qualifications for most of its programmes, and achievement rates are good. There is little attempt to monitor or analyse equal opportunities data. The on- and off-the-job elements of training programmes are often poorly co-ordinated. Some employers and trainees are ill-informed about the requirements of the NVQ framework. Quality assurance procedures have not eliminated the company's weaknesses in training and assessment practice.

As a result of the reinspection of North East Chamber of Commerce Training Limited, the original published report text for the area which has been reinspected (management & professional) has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report which have not been subject to full reinspection have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	2
Management & professional	4
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	2
Hospitality	2
Health, care & public services	1
Foundation for work	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management & professional	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ high levels of employment after training
- ◆ good qualification achievement rates



- ♦ outstanding training and resources in dental nursing
- ♦ wide range of additional qualifications available to trainees
- ♦ comprehensive trainee support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ♦ quality assurance does not ensure consistency across programmes and centres
- ♦ poor understanding of key skills
- ♦ poor co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ♦ limited assessment for awards at work

INTRODUCTION

1. The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry aims to deliver a range of high-quality services which meet the needs of customers. It aspires to the continuous improvement of its staff and resources. North East Chamber of Commerce Training Ltd (NECC Training) has its headquarters in Durham. It has eight training centres throughout the Northeast region. Two of the centres in Northumberland are new and are not yet fully integrated with the rest the company's work. NECC Training has contracts with six training and enterprise councils (TECs). They are as follows: County Durham, City of Sunderland, Tees Valley, Tyneside, North Yorkshire and Northumberland. NECC Training offers training credits, modern apprenticeships, adult training and prevocational training. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funds some of its work. The company also provides commercial training for companies. In agriculture, construction and manufacturing, some off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges of further education. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 1,300 trainees in ten of the Council's 14 occupational codes.

2. The region served by NECC Training covers Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham, Cleveland and North Yorkshire. This is an area of over 8,600 square kilometres, stretching from the Scottish Borders to North Yorkshire and from the North Sea on the east to the boundary of Cumbria to the west. The main centres of population are concentrated in the east of the region, including Darlington, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The region is the most rapidly changing in Europe. Shipbuilding and coal mining have declined to the point of extinction and have been replaced by the automotive and electronics industries and telecommunication companies. Labour market surveys indicate a future demand for training in engineering, customer services, health care, tourism and leisure.

3. The unemployment rate for the region in July 1997 was high, at 8.4 per cent. This figure compares with a national average of 5.1 per cent. A downward trend has been sustained for the past four years. There are local pockets of exceptionally high unemployment, including Hartlepool and some parts of Newcastle. Less than 1 per cent of residents of working age are from ethnic minority groups. In recent years, the proportion of 16 year olds entering training has decreased from 27 per cent in 1992 to 16 per cent in 1996. The proportion of school leavers entering training is nevertheless twice the national average of 8 per cent. There is competition among training providers, and NECC Training has to work hard to extend its market.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The manager of the company's Sunderland centre led the self-assessment process, and County Durham TEC provided support for the process on behalf of all those TECs with which NECC Training has contracts. Centre managers attended seminars delivered by consultants, giving them a clear understanding of self-assessment and their role in it. Managers briefed staff, using a company information pack. Each occupational area was assessed by a group of staff. Feedback on the company's work from trainees and employers was obtained using questionnaires. The self-assessment report was prepared using the draft framework. The report was comprehensive and well presented. Many of the strengths claimed reflected normal practice. Inspectors identified some weaknesses which had not been mentioned in the self-assessment report. With few exceptions, inspectors confirmed the grades given by NECC Training.

5. During the first inspection, a team of 18 inspectors spent a total of 64 days at NECC Training in May 1998. All 10 of the company's occupational areas were inspected and all of its sites were visited. The inspection team interviewed trainees, company staff, employers and staff in colleges to which the company subcontracts some of its work. On- and off-the-job learning were observed. Documentary evidence, including trainees' portfolios, assessment records, awarding body records and contract records were examined.

6. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors for a total of four days in June 1999. They interviewed four of the eight trainees, one workplace supervisor and five members of staff. Five portfolios of assessment evidence were examined. In addition, inspectors examined training session plans, the external verifier's report, internal verification documents, trainees' personal files and management information relating to the programme.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 3

7. Agricultural programmes are offered through the company's Hexham centre. Delivery and assessment are subcontracted to the agriculture training board. There were 35 trainees in agriculture at the time of the inspection. Three are on the youth training credits programme and are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 or 2. Thirty-two trainees are modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3. All modern apprentices are employed. Modern apprenticeships in agriculture are new and they are still being developed. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good initial assessment
- ◆ close integration of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ off-the-job training is well planned and competently delivered
- ◆ comprehensive on-the-job health and safety training
- ◆ trainees work well independently

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees and employers have a poor understanding of programme requirements
- ◆ outcomes of review process are unclear to trainees and employers
- ◆ company staff unqualified to evaluate employers' health and safety practices
- ◆ records of assessment and achievements inaccessible to trainees
- ◆ opportunities for workplace assessment frequently missed

8. At initial assessment, the occupational training requirements for each trainee are identified. The quality of training is good. It is effectively delivered, using a range of learning resources and equipment. Skills are demonstrated to high standards in the workplace. Trainees are able to work unsupervised. Health and safety training is given an appropriately high priority in relation to the potential dangers of agricultural work. Trainees are knowledgeable about safe working practices and put them into effect at work.

9. Trainees and employers have very little knowledge of NVQ programmes and about modern apprenticeships. Consequently, little evidence of growing skills is identified and gathered at work. Opportunities for assessment are frequently missed. Trainees and employers have too little information about the company's review process and are uncertain about the dates on which company staff are to visit and what they are to do. Written records of reviews are kept at the Hexham training centre. Copies are not given to trainees or their employers. Training centre staff who carry out health and safety checks on employers' premises are not sufficiently qualified or knowledgeable to do so properly.

Construction

Grade 3

10. There are 27 trainees in construction at centres in Sunderland, Newcastle and Hexham. There are trainees on both training credits and adult training programmes who are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in electrical installation, brickwork, carpentry & joinery and painting & decorating. All the trainees are in work placements. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges and delivered on a day-release basis. The strengths, weaknesses and grades in the self-assessment were confirmed by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ productive links with employers
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ trainees' work is of a high standard
- ◆ off-the-job training staff are well qualified and occupationally experienced

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees have a poor understanding of NVQ programmes
- ◆ trainees are unclear about what they should do after reviews
- ◆ insufficient on-the-job assessment
- ◆ co-ordination between trainees, subcontractors, employers and NECC Training is poor

11. NECC Training staff have developed good relationships with employers who provide work placements. However, employers and their trainees are not given sufficient information about NVQs for them to understand the qualifications' requirements. Management of the on-the-job elements of the programmes is poor. Training provided by employers is unstructured and unguided by NECC Training. Trainees are vague about the portfolio-building and assessment systems. They do not know where they stand, in terms of their progress and achievement of learning targets.

12. Off-the-job training is delivered well by college staff who are qualified both as teachers and in their subjects. There is poor communication between NECC Training staff, college staff and employers. Consequently, the connections between the content of the on- and off-the-job training elements are weak. The opportunities for reinforcing lessons learnt at work and through theoretical study, by timing them to coincide, are missed. Trainees' practical work is good, and the knowledge demonstrated in their portfolios is substantial.

Engineering

Grade 3

13. There are 243 trainees on training programmes in mechanical engineering, motor vehicle engineering, engineering production, fabrication and welding. There are three main centres at Wilton, Sunderland and Hexham, from which engineering qualifications are delivered. All youth trainees on the training credits programme are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3, and modern apprentices are working towards NVQs at level 3. Engineering programmes are popular. There are more applications for training than available placements. Eighty per cent of the trainees are employed. Employers range from heavy engineering, in dockyards or in the ship-repair industry, to high-precision textile machinery and component engineering. The pattern of training varies between NECC Training's centres, depending on the needs of local employers. All training programmes are led by employers, with the majority of training taking place on the job. Where off-the-job training occurs, it is usually

subcontracted to local further education colleges. Additional qualifications are offered to trainees to enhance their skills and career prospects. NECC Training's self-assessment report recognised some of the strengths and weaknesses which were identified by inspectors. The grade proposed by the company was higher than that awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ most trainees are employed
- ◆ good on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ regular reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ wide range of technical resources
- ◆ trainees encouraged to take additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor integration between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ individual training needs not systematically defined
- ◆ poor understanding among trainees and employers of NVQs and assessment
- ◆ missed opportunities for identifying and gathering workplace evidence

14. The quality of training delivered both on and off the job is good, but the two learning experiences are not co-ordinated. The relationship between them is not managed effectively by NECC Training. Employers and trainees are not given enough information about the qualification and programme requirements to allow them to contribute fully to coherence and effectiveness. This has led to an unhelpful separation in the minds of employers and trainees between work and qualifications. They view NVQs as the responsibility of NECC Training rather than an integrated part of their work. Opportunities for gathering evidence and undergoing assessment in the workplace are missed as a result. Individual training plans are not used effectively to identify the needs for work skills for each trainee.

15. Trainees are visited regularly by NECC Training assessors. Most of these visits occur monthly; some are weekly. The technical resources available to trainees are good, offering them the opportunity to develop an appropriate range of skills. Trainees are encouraged to add to their NVQs by taking additional qualifications which are relevant to their jobs. These awards help them to further their career prospects.

Manufacturing

Grade 2

16. There are 40 trainees working towards NVQ levels 2 or 3 in laboratory

operations, of whom eight are modern apprentices. Thirteen trainees are working towards NVQ level 2 in manufacturing. Trainees in laboratory operations also study for a national diploma at a local college of further education on a day-release basis. Off-the-job training for general manufacturing is delivered by NECC Training staff on their own premises. Employers offering work placements for laboratory technicians include companies involved in chemical processing, hospital and consumer-product testing, pharmaceutical research, development and manufacture. Work placements in manufacturing include baking, electronic assembly, fashion accessories and fabrication. Inspectors validated the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and found some additional strengths. The grade awarded was higher than that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and progressive learning among laboratory trainees
- ◆ high employment rates for laboratory trainees
- ◆ rapid progress among laboratory trainees
- ◆ additional qualifications available
- ◆ regular progress reviews for all trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment of manufacturing trainees
- ◆ key skills are not understood by trainees or employers
- ◆ little knowledge of NVQs among manufacturing employers
- ◆ opportunities missed for workplace assessment in manufacturing

17. The quality of the learning experience for trainee laboratory operators is higher than that for most of the manufacturing trainees. Off-the-job training for laboratory trainees is well planned and capably delivered by college staff. These trainees benefit from the additional study which they receive through their national diploma work. Laboratory trainees are given demanding and stimulating work to do. Forty per cent of them find work within six months of starting the programme, and, at completion, 90 per cent have jobs. Assessments and progress reviews are well organised and occur frequently. Trainees make rapid progress. One large employer in the chemical industry has trainees achieving NVQ level 2 within six months of starting.

18. Off-the-job training for manufacturing trainees is neither stimulating nor challenging. Work placement opportunities are of variable quality. Some offer a wide range of different working experiences and others insufficient variety to introduce trainees to the skills which they need to complete an NVQ. Employers are not given enough information about the qualification and assessment requirements to use them for the best interests of their trainees. Opportunities for workplace assessment are missed. Trainees are visited regularly by NECC Training staff who provide them with helpful advice about their progress. Assessors take too much

responsibility for decisions about what should be assessed and when. Trainees should be prompted to make these decisions, with guidance from assessors and supervisors at work.

Management & professional

Grade 2

19. NECC Training no longer offers the insurance programme referred to in the original inspection report. There are currently eight trainees in two training centres in Middlesbrough and Darlington. There are four youth trainees in Middlesbrough working towards NVQ level 2 in estate agency. In Darlington, there are two modern apprentices working towards NVQ level 3 and two youth trainees working towards NVQ level 2, in estate agency. Prior to the inspection, the Middlesbrough training centre was approved to offer the awards for all trainees on the programme. At the time of inspection, the Darlington centre had just been recognised by the awarding body as an assessment centre in its own right. In addition to the two modern apprentices, two youth trainees are employed. All trainees are working in estate agencies within the region. Each training centre has a tutor/assessor who is experienced in the industry and holds NVQ assessor and internal verifier awards. Tutors hold monthly off-the job training sessions, and visit trainees in the workplace at least once a month to provide them with support and carry out assessments.

Inspectors at the first inspection identified the following weaknesses:

- ◆ lack of suitability qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ no unit accreditation available to trainees
- ◆ no evidence that training is effectively planned on one programme
- ◆ off-the-job training is insufficient in both programmes
- ◆ trainees are poorly motivated and confused
- ◆ high levels of absenteeism during off-the-job training

20. Following the first inspection, NECC Training considered how the weaknesses identified could best be addressed. It decided to discontinue the insurance programme, which was the weaker of the two in this occupational sector. NECC Training recognised that the insufficiency of qualified and inexperienced staff was a key weakness in the provision. Two new members of staff with suitable qualifications and experience in estate agency were recruited. The staff have devised off-the-job training provision which trainees now value and attend regularly. In a subsequent self-assessment of provision in this occupational area, NECC Training identified four strengths. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths, but considered that the other two were no more than normal practice. NECC Training identified one weakness and this had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors found

one additional weakness. They awarded a grade higher than that given by NECC Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective teamwork by staff
- ◆ good-quality learning resources
- ◆ good use of observation for assessment at work
- ◆ effective cross-referencing of portfolio evidence to NVQ standards

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' slow progress towards NVQ achievement at Darlington

21. The two programme tutors/assessors and the two internal verifiers work well as a team, and have worked hard to improve and develop training in this occupational area since the original inspection. Records of regular teams meetings demonstrate that the teams have considered new initiatives carefully, including the new internal verification of assessment procedures. Feedback from the teams has gone to NECC Training's managers and to the external verifier, and staff feel that they have been fully involved with the programme development. The new internal verification procedure involves observation of assessors, and this has been carried out regularly. Assessment practice has been standardised and working relationships between members of staff teams have been strengthened.

22. Resources for off-the-job training sessions are of a high quality. Training rooms are spacious, and well-equipped. There is a wide range of learning aids, including flipcharts, an overhead projector and a video cassette recorder. Staff keep themselves informed of developments in the industry through the journals of two professional bodies to which they belong. One member of staff, who has extensive experience in the field of estate agency, is working for qualifications as a trainer and assessor in key skills and, in turn, is developing key skill training for the modern apprentices. Assignments are currently being introduced which enable trainees to develop the key skill of application of number through tasks at work. Where appropriate, trainees obtain evidence of their attainment in key skills within evidence of their performance to NVQ standards across the whole programme. Good use is made of observation of trainees' performance of tasks in the workplace as a method of assessment. Each time assessors visit trainees in the workplace, they take every opportunity to observe and assess trainees carrying out normal tasks and they keep detailed records of their assessment. Comprehensive plans and records are maintained and stored in trainees' portfolios. Assessors are fully familiar with the detail of the NVQ standards and guide trainees effectively in the compiling of their assessment portfolios. The assessment process is rigorous and efficient. In order to prevent trainees from duplicating evidence of their skills attainment unnecessarily, assessors show them how their performance in one particular task may meet several

NVQ standards.

23. In the Middlesbrough centre, three of the five candidates have achieved their awards. The remaining two have only one unit to complete. By contrast, candidates at the Darlington centre have not completed any units. Trainees have been gathering evidence and have been observed at work, but no recording of assessment has taken place.

Business administration

Grade 3

24. Business administration includes programmes in administration, accountancy and information technology. The company offers NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in administration and information technology. Accountancy can be studied up to NVQ level 4. Modern apprenticeships are available in all three main occupations. There are approximately 700 trainees. In administration, additional qualifications are available in health service reception and legal studies. All business administration trainees are offered additional computer skills and basic health and safety qualifications. Some also take keyboard qualifications. The majority of trainees attend off-the-job classes at NECC Training's premises on a day-release basis. Some modern apprentices in administration and information technology, and trainees working towards NVQ level 3 qualifications, do not attend off-the-job training. Most trainees are offered off-the-job learning in the evenings if their employers are unable to release them to attend during the day. Strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were different from those identified in the self-assessment report. However, it was impossible to compare the inspectors' judgements and grades directly, as the company based its self-assessment on the draft guidelines for self-assessment.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive range of up-to-date equipment for information technology
- ◆ on completion, 92 per cent of trainees are employed
- ◆ high qualification achievement rates
- ◆ good co-operation among staff, employers and trainees
- ◆ well-planned and competently delivered theory training
- ◆ good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not integrated with vocational programmes
- ◆ no off-the-job training for some NVQ level 3 trainees
- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ limited vocational experience among accounts staff
- ◆ weak links between on- and off-the-job training

- ◆ little advice to accounts trainees on development of their portfolios

25. Trainees on all these programmes broaden their skills by studying for additional qualifications. Most trainees have weekly off-the-job training sessions at one of NECC Training's centres. These sessions are well planned and well taught, providing trainees with appropriate levels of theoretical understanding. Off-the-job sessions include assessments and reviews of progress, but the quality of these activities varies among subjects. Accounts trainees are not given enough advice to help them with building their portfolio towards qualification. Progress reviews of trainees are thorough in administration and accounts, where staff refer back methodically to past reviews and action plans to ensure that learning proceeds steadily. Reviews in information technology are the most variable. In some centres, they are informal and their outcomes are not documented. Some trainees fail to meet their targets because they do not remember what they were and they have no records to guide them.

26. There are weak links between on- and off-the-job training. Employers and trainees are often ill-informed about learning requirements. Many employers are uninvolved in the learning and assessment processes of trainees who are placed with them, and the company does too little to ensure that these responsibilities are fulfilled. Training at work varies widely in quality. Workplace assessment is rare. Some modern apprentices have no off-the-job training and are, therefore, totally dependent on the training provided by employers in building their skills. Training in key skills is not provided as an integrated part of the programme, as is required under the modern apprenticeship regulations.

27. Training centres are generally well equipped. Some of the company's facilities for information technology are more modern and more sophisticated than those usually found at work. Some of the rooms at the company's training centres are poorly furnished.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

28. There are 103 trainees undertaking NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in retailing and warehousing. They are based at centres in Middlesbrough, Newcastle, South Shields, Sunderland and Hexham. There are 83 young people on the training credits programme, 18 modern apprentices and two people on an adult training programme. Most of the training occurs in the workplace, with regular off-the-job help available to trainees, with portfolio-building towards qualifications. These sessions also provide the opportunity for trainees to take additional qualifications to enhance their career prospects. The company has difficulty in recruiting qualified staff, and one centre had not had an assessor available for five months prior to the inspection. NECC Training identified this as a weakness in the self-assessment report and has taken steps to resolve the problem. The strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors do not match those identified in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is, nevertheless, the same as that proposed by NECC

Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective induction in the workplace
- ◆ regular review and assessment for most trainees
- ◆ work-based training is good
- ◆ most trainees have a clear and thorough understanding of the assessment process
- ◆ additional qualifications available

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate assessment and support at one site
- ◆ poor key skills delivery and assessment for modern apprentices retailing

29. In four of the five training centres in which 80 per cent of these trainees are based, training programmes are well planned and properly assessed. Assessment is regular and thorough. Records are up to date and accurate and are signed by both trainees and their assessors. These trainees are well informed about the qualification requirements and are given well-chosen work placements. These work placements often lead to full-time employment. Training in the workplace is good. It covers a broad range of tasks related to the NVQ, and workplace supervisors offer one-to-one coaching. Key skills training for modern apprentices in retailing is underdeveloped.

30. The lack of a qualified assessor over several months at one centre has prevented 20 per cent of the trainees from being assessed and progressing as quickly as they should. This shortcoming is the result of poor staff management. Qualified assessors are available at the other four sites, and their skills could have been called on. While there was no assessor, the centre continued to recruit trainees.

Hospitality

Grade 2

31. There are 39 trainees in hospitality working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. They are based at the company's centres in Hexham, South Shields and Newcastle. Programmes include training credits and modern apprenticeships. Most off-the-job training takes place in the company training centres, but some is subcontracted to a local college of further education. The strengths, weaknesses and grades proposed in the self-assessment report were verified by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive training plans focus on individual needs
- ◆ well-integrated key skills

- ◆ work-placement providers closely involved in assessment
- ◆ strong links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ high achievement rates
- ◆ high rates of progression to employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees progress more slowly than is necessary
- ◆ documentation of trainees' reviews is inadequate

32. The entry qualifications of trainees are high. They are well motivated, most achieving the qualifications and employment which they seek. Employers who offer work placements are carefully chosen to provide appropriate opportunities for learning. Trainees' individual learning plans are comprehensive in scope and detailed. They set out programmes of work which relate closely to their differing needs and abilities. Planning of both the on- and off-the-job elements of training is good. Employers and workplace supervisors are well informed about training matters and are actively involved in each trainee's progress and assessment. Key skills training and assessment have been carefully designed so that they integrate closely with the vocational elements of the hospitality training programme. Theory and practical learning are clearly related to each other by staff, so that trainees see the relevance and coherence of everything they do.

33. Assessment is regular and thorough. Documents which are used to record progress reviews are poorly designed, with space for several assessments, but only one signature. This single fault means that the person responsible for carrying out each assessment cannot be identified, opening up the process to potential abuse. Some trainees' progress towards their qualifications is slow. They have difficulty in arranging enough observations of their skills by an assessor, and across a sufficiently wide range of activities, to satisfy the awarding body.

Health, care & public services (dental nursing)

Grade 1

34. There are 61 trainees in healthcare, who are based at the company's Sunderland centre. They are all training to be dental nurses. The programme is growing in response to a demand from dentists. The dental nursing award entails three formal examinations at the end of a two-year course. Training takes place on one day each week at NECC Training's centre and on the remaining four days in dental surgeries. The grade awarded by the inspectors is higher than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training is effectively planned and well documented

- ◆ learning opportunities are flexible enough to meet trainees' individual needs
- ◆ wide variety of learning activities
- ◆ outstandingly good guidance and support from trainers
- ◆ extensive range of up-to-date equipment in the training centre
- ◆ employers fully involved in assessment and review of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ long waiting lists for training

35. Trainees are carefully assessed on entry. Individual learning plans are drawn up which meet their needs and abilities. Training centre staff teach theoretical aspects of the programme. These sessions are well-planned, well-organised and comprehensive in scope. Staff use a range of teaching methods to make their lessons lively and memorable. The work is challenging and trainees receive individual help as well as taking part in group activities. Dentists come to the centre to talk to trainees and answer their questions about the profession. The training centre has new, specialist equipment, which helps trainees to easily relate what they learn there to their experience at work.

36. Assessment takes place both on- and off-the-job. Formal reviews of progress are carried out every 12 weeks. They involve NECC Training assessors, workplace supervisors and trainees themselves. These reviews are thorough, and staff provide helpful advice to trainees on improving their work further. Trainees' files are well kept and they include notes of individual help which they have received from staff. The pass rate for the programme was 98 per cent in 1997-98, and subsequent employment rates are good. Some dental surgeries are waiting to provide work experience, owing to the popularity of the programme.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

37. NECC Training has eight trainees in foundation for work. Training takes place at the company's Prudhoe centre. The programme is used to develop job skills for adults who have experienced a period of unemployment. Referral is made by the Employment Service. Trainees receive numeracy and literacy support programmes at foundation level, after having their learning needs diagnosed through initial assessment. Many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are normal practice. Inspectors confirmed the grades proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent training materials
- ◆ detailed records of trainees' progress
- ◆ thorough reviews of trainees' progress every two weeks

- ◆ good trainee support
- ◆ thorough initial assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor access for trainees with mobility difficulties

38. The training in foundation for work is well planned and is structured to meet the individual needs of each trainee. Trainers carry out a comprehensive initial assessment of their learning needs and use the results appropriately to prepare personal training plans. The review system is thorough, encouraging trainees to discuss progress informally with staff on a daily basis. Every two weeks, trainees undergo a full review, at which their personal learning plans are used as the basis against which progress is measured, and new goals are agreed. Trainees are enthusiastic about the programme and praise the support and encouragement which they receive from staff.

39. The centre moved to Prudhoe only one week before inspection. Staff were re-establishing their systems and facilities. Training rooms are on the first floor of the building which has no lift. Trainees with mobility problems have difficulty in reaching the training area. There is no internal verifier experienced in the prevalent wordpower and numberpower qualifications. A member of staff has only recently started working towards qualifications as an internal verifier.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

40. NECC Training has an equal opportunities policy with which both staff and trainees are familiar. The company's self-assessment report identified a failure to monitor implementation of the policy as a weakness. A database to collate information on equality of opportunity is being tried in two centres. NECC Training selects its trainees on the basis of demanding educational entry requirements. In all programmes, except those at foundation level, trainees must have achieved at least four general certificate of secondary education subjects (GCSEs) at grades A* to C. This is unusually high, especially for applicants to level 2 programmes. There is no equal opportunities statement in the company's prospectus. The self-assessment report referred to similar strengths and weaknesses as those identified by inspectors – the proposed grade was verified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ firm commitment to increasing opportunities for women
- ◆ clear and simple information in the equal opportunities policy
- ◆ attempts to recruit under-represented ethnic minority groups

- ◆ effective complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities data are not systematically monitored or analysed
- ◆ little effort is made to promote programme choices for those trainees who counter gender stereotypes
- ◆ equal opportunities policy does not extend to employed trainees
- ◆ poor access to some training centres for people with mobility difficulties
- ◆ entry requirements exclude some applicants for whom NVQ awards are intended

41. NECC Training is working towards the Opportunities 2000 standard. This is a national standard promoted by Business in the Community, to encourage companies to take full advantage of the economic potential of women in the workforce. It requires that goals be set to increase opportunities for women by the year 2000. NECC Training has been involved in the 'take your daughter to work' initiative. Staff have participated in some career events specifically designed for ethnic minority groups.

42. NECC Training does not promote its equal opportunities policy to the employers with which it works. The training agreement drawn up between the company and these employers requires only that trainees should be treated in accordance with current equal opportunities legislation. This falls short of the company's own equal opportunities policy. The equal opportunities policy makes no reference to avoiding discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Physical access to training rooms at the Prudhoe centre is difficult, and some staff and trainees find the stairs hard to manage. In occupations, such as engineering and business administration, the gender profile of trainees matches traditional stereotypes, with no attempt made to challenge its relevance. The company's policy on educational entry qualifications excludes, at the outset, many applicants who would normally be accepted to NVQ programmes.

Trainee support

Grade 2

43. There is a strong commitment to supporting trainees as they seek to achieve qualifications and jobs. NECC Training has published targets for 1998 which include 1,500 jobs for trainees. All trainees receive an initial guidance interview at recruitment which ensures that trainees are well matched to training programmes. Consequently, drop-out rates are low. NECC has a well-structured induction programme, as does the employer. The two programmes are well co-ordinated. The fact that the company's self-assessment report in this area was based on the Council's draft guidelines made it impossible to compare it directly with inspectors' judgements or grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ support throughout training
- ◆ thorough and effective induction
- ◆ good guidance interviews on entry
- ◆ availability of additional qualifications to enhance employment opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic assessment of key skills on entry
- ◆ infrequent accreditation of prior learning

44. Reviews at which trainees' personal needs, as well as their progress in learning, are evaluated vary in frequency and quality across the different programmes, occupational areas and sites. Initial assessment of trainees' occupational skills, basic skills and key skills is also variable, and opportunities for accreditation of prior learning are frequently missed. This affects quality of trainees' individual learning plans adversely in many areas. NECC Training staff attend careers events, visiting schools and holding open days to inform prospective trainees about the company's service. Induction systematically covers health and safety issues. Most trainees are able to gain health and safety qualifications.

Management of training

Grade 2

45. The company acquired two additional training businesses in December 1997 resulting in changes throughout the organisation. The new management structure, with its new roles and responsibilities, is understood clearly by staff. There are staff development and appraisal systems. Inspectors confirmed the strengths, weaknesses and grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed change
- ◆ well-conceived plans for organisational development
- ◆ open communication among managers and staff
- ◆ effective resource management
- ◆ measurable targets for achievement are set and met

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor communication among centres
- ◆ poor co-ordination of the on- and off-the-job training programmes
- ◆ some personnel files are incomplete
- ◆ trainees' individual programmes not managed systematically

46. NECC Training is generally well managed. Communication within the organisation is open. Staff are encouraged to share information and to debate issues freely. Managers have the support and confidence of trainees, staff, TECs and employers. The growth of the company, which has taken place in recent months, and the changes associated with it have been managed well. The new staff and management structures are realistic and clear. Communication among centres is sometimes poor, resulting in failure to share good practice. Managers do not consistently take responsibility for both on- and off-the-job training, failing to co-ordinate the two. While the training delivered by employers is usually good, NECC Training does not manage each trainee's entire programme in a coherent manner.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

47. NECC Training holds the Investor in People and ISO 9001 external quality standards. It also meets the requirements of the awarding bodies and the six TECs with which it contracts. Opinions on the company's provision are sought, through questionnaires, from trainees and employers. The self-assessment report failed to recognise any weaknesses in relation to quality assurance, and the grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that proposed by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ quality assurance arrangements are well documented
- ◆ procedures are reviewed regularly
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements are understood by all staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ quality assurance arrangements do not result in continuous improvement
- ◆ quality assurance systems do not ensure consistency across the organisation

48. NECC Training's quality assurance procedures are well documented and are understood by staff. Some procedures are reviewed regularly by external agencies whose reports show that they make only minor criticisms, for which timely corrective action is taken. The views of trainees and employers are collected, but not used systematically to improve programmes. Quality management concentrates on ensuring that there are systems, rather than on ensuring that they result in continuous improvement across the organisation and, most notably, in the quality of training. Quality systems do not ensure consistency throughout the organisation. The occupational areas vary markedly in the quality of the learning experience and the assessment practices which they provide for trainees. In most cases, NECC Training's self-assessment process recognises these variations, but remain



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