



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

In Touch Care

SUMMARY

In Touch Care (ITC) provides good training in care of older people, early years care and education, and for care assessors. In addition, the organisation provides a wide range of other care and healthcare training programmes. The company has contracts with Sheffield Training and Enterprise Council to provide training under a wide range of funding initiatives, including a small amount of provision for New Deal clients. Highly qualified and suitably experienced staff carry out training sessions. Some trainees, however, make slow progress. ITC takes positive action to attract persons from groups under-represented on training programmes, but it does not monitor the promotion of equality of opportunity comprehensively. Trainees are well supported. Their successes are celebrated. There is effective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Staff training is afforded a high priority. Achievement rates, especially those of younger trainees, are low. Staff have a strong commitment to the continuous improvement of provision.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality training
- ◆ highly qualified and suitably experienced staff
- ◆ positive action to attract trainees from under-represented groups
- ◆ highly effective individual support
- ◆ celebration of trainees' success
- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ well-resourced staff training and development programme
- ◆ strong commitment of staff to continuous improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ delay in the assessment of some work-based trainees
- ◆ no continuous monitoring of promotion of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- ◆ no systematic procedures for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning
- ◆ low achievement rates on programmes for young people
- ◆ monitoring and evaluation systems not fully established

INTRODUCTION

1. In Touch Care Ltd (ITC) is a private education and vocational training company, based in southwest Sheffield. The company was established in 1994 and is owned by the executive director, who is an experienced nurse and nurse educator, and her husband. The executive director is responsible for management of the organisation. At the time of inspection, she was supported by a deputy and an operations manager. The deputy also acted as development manager and headed the team of teaching staff. This person was due to leave the company imminently and a replacement had been recruited. There are nine additional members of teaching staff. The operations manager is responsible for the finance, administrative and other support staff. The company has been recognised as an Investor in People and has held ISO 9000 accreditation since 1995.

2. ITC offers training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in care of older people and in early years care and education at levels two and three. It also offers assessor training and a range of courses designed for nurses returning to practice or for nurses from overseas who wish to work in the UK. Training for child minders is also provided. The company has contracts with Sheffield TEC under a wide variety of funding programmes, and these include a contract for New Deal provision. At the time of inspection, there were few New Deal clients.

3. Sheffield is a predominantly urban area with a population of just over 500,000. It has experienced higher than average unemployment levels during the past two decades. The average level of unemployment in Sheffield is 6.6 per cent, with levels varying between four and 14.5 per cent in different parts of the city. The proportion of unemployed people who have held no previous job is 25 per cent above the national average. The proportion of people from minority ethnic communities in Sheffield is growing and is currently estimated to be 6.6 per cent. In some areas, members of minority ethnic communities form 25 per cent of the population.

4. Sheffield had a significant metals industrial base in the past. As this has contracted, the area has experienced substantial industrial and economic decline. This decline is continuing and economic forecasts remain poor in the short and medium terms. In the longer term, growth is forecast in business services and communications. At present, the largest occupational areas in Sheffield are health and education. The number of school leavers achieving GCSE certificates at grade C and above was 33.9 per cent in 1997. This compares with a national average of 53 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The self-assessment report was drawn together by the executive director and the development manager, following staff involvement in identifying strengths and weaknesses. Staff were aware of the contents of the final report and felt it gave an accurate picture of the organisation's work. The report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of these but considered that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. They found both strengths and weaknesses the company had not identified.

6. Five inspectors spent a total of 15 days with ITC. Inspectors interviewed a total of 70 trainees; five interviews were conducted with ITC managers and 22 with staff. Inspectors visited eighteen workplaces and interviewed 16 employers and work-based supervisors. They looked at 28 trainee files and 18 portfolios, TEC contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance policies and procedures, minutes of meetings and marketing materials. Inspectors observed and graded seven training sessions, and observed four reviews, four assessments and three internal verification sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Health, care & public services		7				7
Total	0	7	0	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

7. In Touch Care (ITC) currently has 181 trainees, of whom 104 are on care programmes, 40 are on early years care and education programmes and 37 are receiving assessor training. In addition, there are 32 trainees from overseas, undertaking an adaptation course in healthcare. Of the assessor trainees, 28 are on care and nine are on childcare programmes. Of the trainees on care programmes, 70 are working at level two, 30 at level three and four are on the practical caring skills course. Thirty-nine are national trainees, 15 are modern apprentices and there is one New Deal client. The remainder are on a range of other programmes. In childcare, 17 trainees are working at level two, 14 at level three and nine are on the practical caring skills course. There are seven national trainees, five modern apprentices and three New Deal clients with the remainder on a range of other funding programmes. New deal clients normally take a key skills level one or skills power course, along with other qualifications, such as a certificate in first aid. Some have then moved on to an NVQ course. Trainees are registered with the

appropriate awarding body a minimum of 10 weeks before completion of their programme.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexibly arranged training programmes to meet trainees' needs
- ◆ provision of key skills training as an integral part of programmes
- ◆ highly effective training sessions
- ◆ exceptionally well-qualified and highly experienced staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some delays in the assessment of work-based trainees
- ◆ insufficiency of some training resources

8. Trainees are either employed or on placement in 41 workplaces which cater for childcare and education and care for the elderly, in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Placements include 26 residential and nursing homes, three hospitals, three community homes, seven nurseries and two children's centres. All trainees have a mentor, an assessor, an internal verifier and a practice-based supervisor. The latter visits trainees on all shifts, including night duty and weekends. Trainees over the age of 18 years sometimes undertake night duty. Trainees work the same hours as full-time staff and these vary between 30 and 37.5 hours a week, depending on shift patterns. The majority of employed trainees earn either the stipulated amounts for national trainees and modern apprentices, or the minimum wage hourly rate.

9. There are flexible arrangements for off-the-job training. All trainees attend an initial briefing day, which incorporates initial assessment. Trainees who are new to care attend 16-day block training in skills for work, followed by an initial four-week practice placement. During this initial four-week practice placement, a workbook approach is followed. Some trainees meet the criteria and enrol on their NVQ programme after four weeks, others require a period of 12 weeks before meeting the criteria and enrolling on their NVQ programme. Most trainees then attend study days once a fortnight. In order to meet the needs of some groups, such as childminders, who cannot attend training during the day, there are evening and weekend sessions. In addition, some training takes place in workplaces where this is more convenient for trainees and employers. The majority of trainees attend training sessions in their employer's time, but some trainees are sometimes required to attend in their own time.

10. Work-based assessors assess most of the trainees and practice-based supervisors give them support. ITC requires employers to have a qualified assessor, or one undertaking assessor training when they take on a new trainee in their workplace. Trainee assessors are responsible for no more than two trainees; qualified assessors are responsible for no more than three. The assessor and trainee

work together at least two shifts per week in most workplaces. The trainee assessor works with the care trainees to help them gain their qualifications. If there is no work-based assessor available, the practice-based supervisor steps in temporarily and carries out the assessments. Experienced or qualified staff supervise the trainees at all times. In nursing homes, at least one qualified nurse is on duty at all times. In homes with more than 25 residents, two qualified nurses are on duty.

11. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report but found some the company had not identified. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

12. The ITC staff organise the training programmes flexibly. Training sessions take place in the evening and at weekends for trainees who are unable to attend during the day. Some training is also provided in the workplace, particularly where there are large numbers of trainees. Training for childminders was started recently. Their induction session took place on a Sunday because that was the day they requested. Company staff known as practice-based supervisors aim to visit trainees every two weeks, spending several hours with each trainee and arranging visits to fit in with trainees' shifts and work patterns. Some visits take place less frequently. Normally, practice-based supervisors respond effectively to queries or problems raised by the trainees and the employers. Working relationships between practice-based supervisors, employers, assessors and trainees are very good.

13. All work placement providers sign an agreement with ITC, which commits them to observe relevant legislative and other requirements, such as one to make time available for training and assessment and to provide a qualified or trainee assessor for trainees. A health and safety officer carries out an initial check that work placement providers comply with health and safety regulations. ITC staff who have a health and safety qualification carry out further monitoring of health and safety procedures in work placements. Health and safety induction is carried out at ITC and in the workplace, along with fire training and regular fire practices. All electrical equipment is regularly tested and the effectiveness of accident procedures is monitored.

14. Trainees are introduced to key skills during their induction. They are encouraged to gather evidence of their acquisition of key skills through their everyday tasks at work and their work for the NVQ. Trainees said that by making key skills training an integral part of their programme, they were able to appreciate the relevance of key skills to their work for the qualification, and to the world of work. For some candidates who need to develop confidence to go back into training, sometimes after a long period of unemployment, key skills training is used as a bridge into work for an NVQ.

15. There is a well-structured programme of study days to help trainees to acquire theoretical knowledge. This is a rolling programme of seven taught sessions for each NVQ level, with two portfolio building sessions every three or four weeks. Most trainees attend once a fortnight, but if they have to miss a session they can

attend the next one. Sessions are very well taught by highly qualified staff, most of whom have achieved the assessor and internal verifier awards. There is a good mix of mature and young trainees, who report that the opportunity to share their experiences in the study sessions is very helpful.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of one of the excellent placements in childcare, providing trainees with a rich and diverse experience. One, run by a charity, has several local sites and caters for children from disadvantaged backgrounds both in England and from abroad. There are children and staff who have been rescued from difficult situations. The organisation works as a co-operative, and all staff, including trainees, are treated as equals. The staff are from a range of cultural and professional backgrounds; 50 per cent are male.

16. Trainees receive a thorough grounding in how to organise their portfolios, gather evidence of their acquisition of NVQ competencies and key skills and present it in a logical way. ITC provides a template to assist in the compilation of portfolios and trainees are able to attend as many portfolio-building sessions as they wish. Most portfolios are well organised, and candidates are able to reference their evidence to the standards with minimal help from their assessor. Trainees are fully involved in planning their own assessments. The work-based assessors are encouraged to assess the trainees by observing them carrying out task which occur naturally in the workplace, rather than through set assignments. Trainees are not usually credited with NVQ units and those who leave the programme early have no record of any achievement.

17. New initial assessment documentation has been introduced recently. It has not yet been used with all trainees. Trainees are asked to provide details of their prior learning and experience on this documentation. Some have received guidance on how to do this, but others have not. Some assessors do not have an understanding of how to accredit trainees' prior learning.

18. All employers sign a contract to say that they will provide time for assessment for their trainees. There is a continuous programme of training for work-based assessors which is closely linked to the NVQ training and assessment. Assessors are all occupationally competent and most ITC assessors also have teaching qualifications. All trainee assessors attend a two-day induction, followed by two further half-days of induction. Each trainee assessor has a minimum of two trainees to assess and is required to attend the bi-monthly meetings of assessors. Any assessor who fails to attend a minimum of two meetings per year is relieved of his or her assessor responsibilities by ITC. Most trainee assessors are well supported by their work placement supervisor who acts as their assessor, but a few are not. Also, some workplace supervisors have not been given sufficient time off from their regular duties to assess the trainee assessors regularly. Some trainee assessors are not making satisfactory progress. The assessor trainees' achievement rate is low, at 45 per cent. Where a problem has been identified with assessment, the practice-based supervisors take over until a suitable replacement has been found. This can lead to delays in assessment.

19. Information on trainees' retention rates and destinations is not fully available. Some retention rates are low. They reflect, in part, the high turnover of staff in the care sector. In addition, a number of trainees move onto nurse training or progress to higher education. In 1998/99, 24 trainees moved onto other types of training and education; 12 trainees progressed to management positions.

20. In general, training resources are insufficient. There are not enough books, particularly in childcare and there are too few computers, televisions and video

machines. One classroom has very poor ventilation, and no natural light. Trainees have not had enough access to the necessary equipment to enable them to cover the information technology component of their key skills programme. Arrangements are now in hand to purchase this training for them from a specialist provider.

21. Internal verifiers are all ITC staff and are allocated up to 10 placements each. They visit workplaces regularly to verify portfolios and monitor assessors' practice. They give written feedback to trainees and assessors. However, the internal verifiers do not usually keep a copy of the feedback because it is not always possible to photocopy it, and they do not have a tracking system to keep a check on which units they have sampled. The company receives satisfactory reports from the external verifiers, and takes any required action on them promptly.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

22. ITC has a clear commitment to equal opportunities. It meets the legal, TEC and awarding bodies' requirements in respect of equal opportunities. ITC has an equal opportunities policy, which is available to staff, trainees and employers. Information is collected about trainees' gender, ethnic origin, learning difficulties and disabilities. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths listed in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found strengths and weaknesses the company had not identified and agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ positive action to attract persons from under-represented groups
- ◆ good use of relevant data to plan measures for improving the promotion of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no continuous monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ inaccessibility of some accommodation to people with physical disabilities

23. Recruitment and selection procedures for trainees are fair and promote equality of opportunity. All staff understand the organisation's policy which is comprehensive and includes procedures designed to protect trainees from harassment and discrimination. Most trainees are aware of the existence of the policy. Some staff development has taken place to promote awareness of different aspects of equal opportunities. There is a grievance procedure for staff and

trainees. This specifies who is responsible for dealing with grievances and the timescales for responding to them.

24. Employers are aware of the ITC equal opportunities policy. ITC staff visit work placements before trainees go to them, to check that employers uphold and promote equality of opportunity. Once trainees begin attending their placements, however, ITC carries out no further monitoring of work placement providers' promotion of equality of opportunity. Some trainees have little awareness of the importance of respecting equality of opportunity through working practices. Data are collected on trainees' gender, ethnicity, learning difficulties and disabilities. The data have been taken into account when planning measures to improve the promotion of equal opportunities and increase the recruitment of male trainees. The manually collected data is currently being transferred to a database with the aim of improving the quality of information available.

GOOD PRACTICE

In Touch Care has established an innovative programme to attract nurses and child carers from other countries. They are provided with good-quality training, which incorporates theoretical knowledge and the opportunity to develop competency. Subsequently, the trainees obtain jobs with local employers.

25. Measures to attract members of minority ethnic groups and males on care programmes have included briefing events and successful adult programmes. ITC has sought information and support from local community groups to make measures to increase recruitment from them more effective. These measures have included working in partnership to attract funds for innovative programmes aimed at local areas with a high proportion of minority ethnic communities.

26. An innovative programme for people from other countries who are seeking employment in the UK, has been established with local employers. Cultural briefings are provided as part of the preparation for the programme. ITC has implemented a range of successful measures for making training more accessible to persons from groups normally under-represented on training programmes. These include flexibly arranged training programmes, financial support for trainees, sponsorship and taster sessions.

27. The centre is not easily accessible to people with disabilities. The majority of classrooms and the trainees' rest room are situated on the first floor, with access by a steep staircase. There is one classroom on the ground floor and toilet facilities for people with disabilities. In the past, some training has been relocated to the ground floor if the group has trainees who are physically disabled.

Trainee support

Grade 2

28. Prior to embarking on their training programmes, trainees spend a day at the company when they are briefed and undergo a thorough initial assessment of their basic skills. Their occupational skills, knowledge, prior achievements and needs are identified at interview. If new to the care sector, trainees undertake a 16-day skills for work programme at ITC, followed by at least four weeks of practice. At the end of this period, their suitability for a career in care is assessed. There is a two-day induction programme and both assessor and NVQ care trainees are given a trainee handbook. Placements are chosen to suit the individual needs of care

trainees. The assessor trainees then work with the care trainees in their workplace with a shared understanding of the standards and the assessment process. Practice-based supervisors support the trainees in their placements. Both the care and the assessor trainees have a two-day induction, followed by fortnightly study days for the care trainees and two further half-day study days for the assessor trainees. These study days are offered to the trainees in the workplace if this is more convenient for them and their employers. Trainees receive formal progress reviews every 12 weeks. A new review procedure, involving the employer, assessor, trainee assessor and care trainee, has been introduced. Up-to-date information on additional opportunities is offered to care trainees and they are encouraged to take higher qualifications where appropriate. Trainees with learning difficulties and additional support needs are offered basic skills training sessions and, in some instances, they are referred to a basic skills assessment centre. Personal counselling advice for trainees is available from practice-based supervisors, assessors and employers.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective support for individual trainees
- ◆ effective skills for work programme for trainees new to the care sector
- ◆ good support in placements for trainees with additional needs
- ◆ events to celebrate trainees' success

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention rate for assessor trainees
- ◆ no systematic procedures for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good practice in rewarding achievement: One adult trainee who regularly truanted from school has returned to learning and was awarded the Adult Learner of the Year Award, 1999. The practice-based supervisor and the executive director joined her and her friends to celebrate this achievement at an awards ceremony.

29. The company has recently introduced useful procedures for identifying trainees' additional learning support needs. All trainees receive a comprehensive and systematic initial assessment. Those who require them are provided with additional sessions on basic skills. These procedures have yet to become a full and integral part of the trainee support system. Trainees also follow a skills-for-work programme on which they carry out certain activities designed to test their suitability for a career in care. The programme also helps the trainees to develop key skills and it provides them with some careers advice. Some trainees are given placements where they receive additional help and support. The tutor is also able to establish whether care is an appropriate career choice for the trainee. Additionally, the programme develops trainees' key skills and offers careers advice. Supported placements are provided for some trainees, which are well matched to their needs. NVQ trainees receive a well-structured two-day induction programme. They are also given a well-presented handbook, which outlines the content of the training programme and contains useful information about policies, procedures and contracts.

30. The practice-based supervisor visits the placements regularly and acts as a mentor to the trainees on programme, as well as providing them with individual support and reviewing their progress regularly. More frequent visits are made when necessary. Practice-based supervisors discuss progression opportunities with trainees and trainees have an opportunity to give feedback on their training. One practice-based supervisor has received training on dyslexia, which has been cascaded to other staff. Trainees' success is celebrated regularly and there is an awards ceremony for trainees who have completed their qualifications. This has been held in a local hotel, where awards are presented by a visiting professor.

31. The retention rate on the trainee assessor programme is poor. Before accepting care trainees, each workplace is required to have an assessor, or a trainee assessor, to assess them. Some care trainees, however, are placed at a severe disadvantage if their trainee assessor leaves, and their progress can be adversely affected. Some trainees have been left without an assessor for a year. The practice-based supervisors are qualified assessors and are able to help these trainees gather evidence of their competencies for assessment purposes. There have been examples, however, of trainees who were not assessed for a considerable length of time.

32. Some trainee assessors do not recall guidance given on how to organise and present their portfolios. In some instances, the portfolios of trainee assessors have not been internally verified for periods of up to three months. In a few instances, assessors give feedback to internal verifiers that is insufficiently constructive and they fail to indicate the extent of trainees' progress towards meeting the NVQ standards.

33. Some trainees have their prior learning and experience accredited. Some staff are trained to carry out this accreditation and have obtained the training and development lead body unit D36. The company has not established procedures for identifying and accrediting the prior learning and experience of all trainees. In some instances, opportunities to carry out this accreditation were missed.

Management of training

Grade 2

34. The owner of ITC is the executive director, who is responsible for management of the organisation. She has a deputy, who is responsible for the teaching staff and for the development training and an operations manager, who has responsibility for administrative and financial matters. ITC's premises are situated in a small, modern business park with staff and training accommodation over three floors. In addition to the managers, there are nine members of teaching staff, a health and safety officer and six administrative and clerical staff. All trainers are occupationally competent and the majority have teaching and internal verification qualifications. The company provides significant additional training for staff. Training staff act as practice-based supervisors, linking theoretical teaching to the trainees' experience

in the workplace. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths listed in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice and that some of the weaknesses were more relevant to other generic areas. They found strengths the company had not identified and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ well-resourced staff training and development programme
- ◆ well-developed links with external organisations
- ◆ positive open culture

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ management information systems not fully developed
- ◆ trainees' low NVQ achievement rates on some programmes

35. The role of the practice-based supervisor is central to the effective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Staff are highly qualified with substantial nursing or other health and social care experience. The practice-based supervisor visits trainees frequently in the workplace, spending time with the trainee, the work-based supervisor or assessor and the employer, if available. Trainees are given written information about the content of teaching sessions and are expected to discuss this with their work-based supervisor. Trainees are also made aware that they should discuss any training provided in the workplace with their practice-based supervisor during visits. They also discuss their training during their progress reviews which involve the work-based supervisor, the practice-based supervisor and the employer. Through such discussion, the trainees are able to make clear links between their on- and off-the-job training. ITC holds information sessions for work-based supervisors to ensure that they are aware of the content of training programmes and of any new developments.

36. Each member of staff undergoes a six-monthly individual performance review. At this meeting, the member of staff's training and development needs are discussed and recorded. Each year, a staff training budget and an extensive staff development plan are drawn up. For 1998/99, training activities covered health and safety, assessor units and training to help those with dyslexia. Training is also available to administrative staff and additional support and training are made available to staff returning after absence. Staff changing job roles within the company are mentored and given additional support until they are comfortable with their new position. All training is evaluated in terms of its value to the individual and the organisation, and its cost effectiveness.

37. The executive director has developed extensive links at local, regional and national levels with external organisations. These include involvement with the local

TEC supplier partnership and training network, board membership of national organisations, and liaison with groups within training and the care sector. Information gained through these links on local and national developments is passed on to staff through staff meetings and workshops. In turn, this information helps the company in its planning of training. ITC has also forged partnerships with local voluntary groups, particularly those which represent and provide services for minority ethnic communities. These partnerships have led to the extension of training opportunities to the wider community and to positive and beneficial placements for ITC trainees. In addition, the executive director periodically attends the meeting for matrons of local nursing homes to give information about national developments and new requirements in work-based training.

38. Staff at ITC feel valued and respected. All staff are aware of the company's business plan and new employees are now given a copy. Staff meetings are held regularly and used to inform staff of new developments in care and training. They are also used as a means of dealing with concerns staff may have, and to introduce new arrangements and procedures. Staff feel confident in raising agenda items and they know their views will be listened to. The meetings are minuted, with minutes kept in a central file in the main administrative office. Staff also feel that they can raise issues or concerns privately with the executive director, who adopts an 'open door' management style.

39. Management-information systems are not fully developed. ITC has used paper-based systems in the past, which have not been fully effective. It has proved difficult to obtain accurate information on trainees' achievement and retention rates. The company is nearing the end of a nine-month project to transfer data to a computer database, with the aim of making management information more accurate and more accessible.

40. The achievement rates of young trainees are low. There is a significant early leaver rate, and to some extent, this is attributable to the high turnover in the care sector. Some trainees make slow progress. Trainees are not credited with the NVQ units they have completed and those who leave early have nothing to show for their achievements. Many modern apprentices and national trainees leave their programmes early with no recognition of any achievement. In 1998/99, the trainees' NVQ achievement rate was approximately 20 per cent.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

41. ITC has a comprehensive quality assurance system, originally based on BS - EN ISO 9001. The system includes policy statements, procedures relating to trainees, training provision and completion of paperwork. The system is reviewed annually and changes are made to it where necessary. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with the executive director. The company pays close attention to the quality of teaching provided through periodic meetings of all teaching staff. The quality of teaching is the responsibility of the deputy to the executive director. The

self-assessment report identified three strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths. They found other strengths and weaknesses the company had not identified and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ the company's strong commitment to quality assurance
- ◆ highly effective use of assessor meetings
- ◆ exemplary systems for assessment processes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ monitoring and evaluation systems not fully established
- ◆ under-developed internal verification systems and procedures

42. There is a strong commitment in the company to ensuring that provision is of a high quality. Quality assurance systems have been in place since the company was established; these have included evaluative feedback from trainees from the outset of their programmes. Evaluations are scrutinised to identify any trends or patterns, which are discussed at the six-monthly management review meetings. Complaints are also monitored and corrective action is taken on them as appropriate. All new members of staff are introduced to the quality assurance systems and given a clear responsibility to identify those procedures most relevant to their job role. Information about the system and the importance of quality is given in the staff handbook. Some quality assurance procedures aim to ensure compliance with contractual requirements rather than the improvement of working practice. Quality assurance has, however, led to improvements and these have been made in line with the guidance in *Raising the Standard*. One example of this is the company's new system for initial assessment of trainees which staff say other local providers regard as a model to follow. The development manager holds meetings with teaching staff on the quality of teaching. These aim to develop the skills of staff and to enable staff to identify good practice, share concerns and discuss national developments. Such meetings have not, however, taken place regularly during 1999.

43. Meetings of assessors take place every two months. All assessors are invited to attend these, whether they are ITC employees or those employed by workplace providers. Any assessor who fails to attend at least two meetings per year is relieved of his or her assessor responsibilities. The meetings are used to share good practice, examine current problems and any new developments nationally. Examples of past agenda items have included consideration of the documents 'Common Accord' and *Raising the Standard*. From time to time, those attending are asked to check the quality of each other's work, in a simulated internal verification exercise. Minutes of the meetings are circulated to all assessors, including those who are unable to attend, and copies are sent to every workplace.

44. Assessment plans are extremely detailed and are drawn up jointly between trainee and assessor. The assessor works alongside the trainee and gives him or her good feedback on the quality of his or her work. Assessment is carefully recorded. In some areas, however, a shortage of assessors has led to delays in the assessment process.

45. Systems for tracking trainees' progress have now been developed but the information they produce has not yet been taken into account in programme planning. The company has been collecting feedback from trainees for some years. Managers analyse and discuss the feedback and act on it to make improvements to training programmes. ITC staff gather the views and comments of employers during their visits to the workplace. Where appropriate, employers' concerns are discussed in management meetings. More systematic methods of gathering feedback from employers are now being introduced.

46. Internal verification of NVQ assessment is recorded on sheets in the trainees' portfolios. However, there is no overall internal verification sampling plan or record of sampling showing the range of trainees' assessment and NVQ units internally verified. There is no clear record of the progress of assessor trainees from registration to certification or of how many trainees are on programme at any one time. Concerns have been expressed in the verification meetings about some trainee assessors' lack of progress and the lack of continuity of assessment for care trainees if a trainee assessor leaves the programme