



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

South & East Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council

SUMMARY

South & East Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council provides a very high standard of training and assessment in manufacturing, management and professional and hair and beauty. Trainees are supported by well-motivated, occupationally competent staff and are offered a wide range of training opportunities. Provision is good in the areas of construction, engineering, retailing & customer service and foundation for work. There are excellent opportunities for trainees to gain experience in high-quality working environments. In the areas of care, business administration, hospitality and media & design, training and assessment are satisfactory, but the links between on- and off-the-job training are weak and some assessment practices are inconsistent. The organisation has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy that is regularly reviewed and up-dated. Trainees receive a high level of individual support and reviews are well structured. There is, however, an inconsistent approach to initial assessment across the occupational sectors. The management of training is good. There is a comprehensive staff support process and excellent internal communication. There is a lack of management control over the activities of some subcontractors, particularly in relation to internal verification and the delivery of key skills. There is a strong self-critical culture within the organisation and quality assurance is effective across most sectors.

GRADES

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

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong self-critical culture within the organisation
- ◆ high level of occupational competence among provider's staff
- ◆ effective and innovative recruitment arrangements
- ◆ excellent employment opportunities
- ◆ very supportive workplace managers



- ◆ good progression by trainees
- ◆ flexibility in choice of training arrangements
- ◆ some high-quality workplace training
- ◆ excellent additional support available to trainees

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poorly planned on-the-job training
- ◆ some inadequate assessment practices
- ◆ lack of control of some subcontractors
- ◆ inconsistent implementation of strategy to develop trainees' key skills
- ◆ lack of systematic control of internal verification
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment in some occupational areas

INTRODUCTION

1. South and East Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council (SECTEC) covers the three local authority districts of Congleton and Crewe, Nantwich and Macclesfield. The area has a population of 351,000. SECTEC has been responsible for the management and delivery of most government-funded training within its area since 1991. It works in partnership with local colleges of further and higher education, universities and private training companies to deliver training across all occupational sectors. At the time of the inspection, SECTEC's own training team managed the training of over 85 per cent of the youth and adult trainees within SECTEC's area. Over 90 per cent of these trainees are in full-time employment.

2. Within SECTEC, responsibility for youth and adult training rests with the senior operations manager who reports directly to the deputy chief executive. The senior operations manager works with a team of 7 programme managers who are responsible for teams of trainers, assessors and human resource advisers (HRAs) who support trainees in their placements. Each team of staff is based around an occupational area.

3. SECTEC has accredited centres for training and assessment in nine of the 11 inspected occupational areas. Training is carried out in the workplace and in SECTEC's dedicated training centres in Macclesfield, Crewe, Middlewich and Congleton. Some work in these nine occupational areas is also subcontracted to colleges and private training providers. In the remaining occupational areas, all training and assessment is subcontracted. SECTEC has subcontracting arrangements with 28 colleges of further education, 26 private training companies and seven universities. SECTEC retains pastoral responsibility for trainees and overall responsibility for the management and quality assurance of all subcontracted training. Two other training and enterprise councils (TECs) have contracts with SECTEC, whereby SECTEC delivers training and assessment on their behalf.

4. Trainees are taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the following areas: construction, engineering, manufacturing, management and professional, business administration, retailing and customer services, hospitality, hair and beauty, health, care and public services, media and design, foundation for work, agriculture, transportation, and leisure, sport and travel. The latter three areas were not included in this inspection, mainly owing to lower numbers of trainees, which totalled 41 for the three areas. The numbers of trainees on various training schemes in the areas that were inspected are included in the table below.

5. For youth training, SECTEC works in partnership with the careers service, education welfare departments and local high schools to provide activity programmes for approximately 120 school pupils over a 12-month period. This work is funded through the European Social Fund. SECTEC has a contract for the

delivery of New Deal training under the voluntary option and for the gateway guidance programme. Almost 3 per cent of trainees across all programme areas have been identified as having additional learning support needs.

6. Within the northwest of England, South and East Cheshire is an area of relative prosperity. The area has low unemployment rates. In March 1999 they were as follows: Congleton 3.0 per cent, Crewe and Nantwich 4.9 per cent and Macclesfield 1.9 per cent. The comparative figure for the northwest as a whole was 5.2 per cent. The 1997 labour force survey shows that employment rates for those of working age are also relatively high: Congleton 78 per cent, Crewe and Nantwich 67.7 per cent, Macclesfield 75.5 per cent against the north west figure of 69.7 per cent. Manufacturing is particularly important in the area, and accounts for 34 per cent of employment in Congleton and 28 per cent in Crewe and Nantwich. Financial and business services are significant in Macclesfield where they account for 23 per cent of employment. The area is, however, a net exporter of labour, especially to Manchester, to the north of the county and to the Potteries further south.

7. Labour market research undertaken by SECTEC indicates that the number of jobs in South and East Cheshire will rise by 1.9 per cent from 152,000 in 1997 to 155,000 by 2001. New jobs will be predominantly in the service industries, with strongest growth in business services, followed by hotel and catering. There is an increasing use of temporary staff within the service industries. It is forecast that nearly all manufacturing industries will shed jobs as a result of labour productivity gains following the introduction of new manufacturing technologies. Jobs most at risk in the area include those in skilled engineering trades and in agriculture.

8. The workforce of South and East Cheshire has a relatively high level of skills. In 1998, 56 per cent of employees had achieved a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3 or its equivalent, while 40 per cent were qualified to NVQ level 4. Comparative national figures were 43 and 25 per cent. National learning target data also indicate above average levels of achievement. For example 87 per cent of 19 year olds are qualified to NVQ level 2. This compares with the government target figure of 85 per cent and the nationally achieved figure of 72 per cent. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 58.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. Of the 16 year old school leavers within Cheshire, 71 per cent continued into further education, 4 per cent entered training programmes and 8 per cent took up employment with linked training programmes. Figures produced by the Cheshire guidance partnership indicate that just over 20 per cent of all male school leavers choose employment and training options, compared with 11.9 per cent of female school leavers.

9. The 1991 census of population shows that 11.9 per cent of the population within the South and East Cheshire area have some form of disability. This compares with the national figure of 13.1 per cent. Just over 5 per cent of those who are economically active have a health condition that affects the type of work that they

can undertake. The 1991 census also indicates that one per cent of the population within the area are from minority ethnic groups.

PROGRAMME	MA	NT	YOUTH	ADULT/ ND	TOTAL
Construction	181	15	53		249
Engineering	347	30	89		466
Manufacturing	9		119		128
Business Admin	140	18	65		223
Retailing & CS	66	37	104		207
Hospitality	27	13	10		51
Hair	115	38	12		165
Health	122	27	42		191
Media	2		17		19
Management				16	16
Foundation			96	56	152
Total	1009	178	607	72	1866

INSPECTION FINDINGS

10. SECTEC began the self-assessment process in April 1998, with the appointment of quality assurance co-ordinators in each occupational sector. The quality assurance co-ordinators worked with programme managers to prepare the report and to develop an action plan to address issues raised. A programme of training events was run to ensure that all staff involved in supporting trainees were aware of the inspection framework. In October 1998, a team of six staff was drawn together from within SECTEC to undertake an internal assessment based on the guidance in *Raising the Standard*. They looked at all generic areas and two occupational areas. This report was used to provide information for the final self-assessment report, which was submitted in July 1999. Further detail was added to the report following further consultation with staff. SECTEC developed an action plan to address weaknesses identified during the self-assessment process. Significant progress had been made in implementing the plan by the time of inspection. Inspectors agreed with most grades given by the provider, but awarded higher grades for construction, manufacturing, management and professional, hair and beauty, equal opportunities and trainees support. A lower grade was awarded for business administration.

11. A team of 25 inspectors spent a total of 107 days at SECTEC in September 1999. All occupational areas offered by SECTEC were inspected except leisure, transport and agriculture, which had only a few trainees. Inspectors examined paperwork from the company, awarding bodies and training subcontractors. They met staff from SECTEC and training subcontractors. Local colleges and training organisations that have subcontracting arrangements with SECTEC were visited and training sessions were observed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios and observed assessment, monitoring and review sessions carried out by SECTEC's staff. The table below shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed by inspectors.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2			1	3
Engineering		1	3			4
Business administration		2		1		3
Hospitality	1	2				3
Hair & beauty	1	4	1			6
Health, care & public services	2	1				3
Foundation for work		8	2			10
Total	4	20	6	1	1	32

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

12. There are 249 trainees on construction programmes, consisting of 129 in NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 in building crafts, 71 electrical installation, 38 construction technicians and 11 in plumbing. There were 181 modern apprentices, 15 national trainees, and 53 on other work-based training programmes. The disciplines offered include: trowel trades (57 trainees), wood occupations (61 trainees), painting and decorating (seven trainees), plumbing (eight trainees), electrical installation (46 trainees), scaffolding (28 trainees), roof slating and tiling (12 trainees), and four trainees involved in installing insulation, computer-aided design and floor coverings. There are also 22 trainees studying higher national certificate and building studies programmes and four trainees on higher education programmes in construction management or civil engineering. Work placements are arranged for trainees with a range of local and national construction companies. Off-the-job training and assessment is contracted to 16 further and higher education institutions, both in the region and further afield. For building craft trainees, all assessment takes place at the off-the-job training locations. Fifty per cent of trainees successfully complete their NVQs, which reflects the national average for the industry. Reliable figures on retention were not available. The company's self-assessment report identified some strengths, which were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified during the inspection. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than was given in the self-assessment.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ high levels of occupational competence shown by trainees
- ◆ occupationally competent and experienced human resource advisors
- ◆ additional qualifications available to trainees
- ◆ valuable support provided by SECTEC's staff for employers and trainees
- ◆ all trainees on prevocational programme found employment
- ◆ good off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poorly planned on-the-job training
- ◆ no work-based assessment
- ◆ relevant information on trainees not sought from subcontractors

13. All trainees in this sector are in full-time employment. Employers are supportive of training and provide their trainees with ample opportunity to gain a high level of

GOOD PRACTICE

With the support of SECTEC, a small subcontractor runs an intensive 8-week programme during August and September, aimed at school leavers and young people interested in brickwork or carpentry and joinery. On completion, trainees achieve a level 1 NVQ. Local building employers are contacted advising them of the scheme. Employers use this opportunity to interview trainees with a view to employment and further NVQ training. The scheme has now run for 3 years with all trainees gaining employment.

occupational experience through job rotation schemes. Trainees are encouraged to produce work of a high standard and are able to link the skills developed in the workplace with those covered in their off-the-job training programmes. The off-the-job training is also of a high standard. It is mainly traditional classroom-based group work with one-to-one support available if necessary. Theory and practical work are interlaced. Trainees are able to gain additional qualifications through SECTEC, which open up wider career opportunities. For example, a furniture production trainee has gained a fork-truck qualification. Trainees are encouraged to progress to higher qualifications, such as higher national certificates and diplomas or degree programmes, through the use of individual learning accounts. The HRAs have established effective working relationships with trainees and employers. All parties respect the occupational competence of the HRAs. Trainees and employers value the regular review visits by HRAs, which provide trainees with a high degree of individual support.

14. When trainees who are not already employed apply to join a training programme, SECTEC provides a prevocational programme which enables trainees to develop broad construction skills, either in carpentry and joinery or in brickwork. All trainees who have completed this programme have gained employment and many have progressed to NVQs at levels 2 and 3.

15. Well-documented and clear tracking systems are used to record each trainee's progress during off-the-job training. However, this is not consistently used by HRAs to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Opportunities to follow-up areas covered during off-the-job training with practical experience in the work environment are frequently missed. There are no training plans for on-the-job training and opportunities to link on- and off-the-job training through the review process are also missed. This lack of co-ordination slows trainees' rate of progress. Short-term targets are agreed between the employer, the trainee and the HRAs. However, these do not specifically cover the trainee's progress towards the qualification. No assessment takes place in the workplace, and although employers receive information about NVQs, some still lack awareness of the requirements and structure of the NVQ system and have little knowledge of key skills. External verifiers' reports, internal self-assessments and information on trainees' progress are not sought from subcontracting organisations.

Engineering**Grade 2**

16. SECTEC has 466 trainees, of which 125 are on motor-vehicle NVQ programmes. Within motor vehicle there are 86 modern apprentices, 12 national trainees and 27 on other youth training programmes. There are 341 mechanical engineering trainees following general engineering, aeronautical engineering, electrical and electronic, maintenance or welding and fabrication programmes, of which 261 are modern apprentices, 18 are national trainees and 62 on other youth training programmes. All modern apprentices and other trainees are in full-time

employment. In mechanical engineering, 96 trainees are pursuing level 2 engineering foundation NVQs, 229 are pursuing level 3 NVQs and 16 are pursuing level 4 NVQs. In motor vehicle, 68 trainees are pursuing level 2 NVQs, 56 are pursuing level 3 NVQs and one is pursuing a level 4 NVQ. Local colleges and a private training provider provide day- and block-release off-the-job training. Motor-vehicle trainees attend off-the-job training one day each week. Trainees, including motor vehicle trainees, also pursue higher level courses. SECTEC is a registered assessment centre to deliver engineering awards, and qualified staff are responsible for assessing trainees in the workplace. Qualified work-based assessors or the subcontracted training provider's staff assess other trainees at work. All NVQ level 3 assessment is carried out in the workplace. SECTEC's HRAs carry out frequent reviews with trainees. The provider's statistics for NVQs for every 100 trainees leaving their programmes show an increase from 76 NVQs in 1997-98 to 138 NVQs in 1998-99. Reliable figures on retention were not available. Inspectors found that some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than standard practice. They agreed with other strengths and found further strengths and weaknesses. The same grade was awarded as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ effective links with employers and subcontractors
- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications
- ◆ strong commitment to training by employers and trainees
- ◆ good tracking and cross-referencing systems in motor vehicle

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor assessment processes
- ◆ no NVQ tracking systems in some areas
- ◆ lack of work-based assessors in motor vehicle
- ◆ lack of detail in some reviews

GOOD PRACTICE

In aeronautical engineering, the subcontracted college's trainer visits the employer to deliver off-the-job training sessions if modern apprentices have had difficulty attending college. The employer's training officer is used to deliver some aspects of the course.

17. All trainees receive good on- and off-the-job training. In aeronautical engineering and motor-vehicle work, the training is excellent. The NVQ level 2 engineering foundation training is good. It is valued by trainees and by employers who appreciate the broad range of basic engineering skills that trainees develop. Employers ensure that trainees achieve specialist skills quickly at work and become valued members of the workforce. SECTEC maintains regular contact with local employers and subcontractors. Both employers and subcontracted college staff appreciate this. The close co-operation helps to motivate trainees who have a high regard for their training programmes. Subcontracted colleges are visited informally every one or two weeks by the HRAs and a formal programme review is held

quarterly. Some links, particularly in aeronautical engineering, are exceptionally strong between SECTEC, the employer and the colleges. Meetings are held regularly to review the overall training programme, the relevance of the subcontractor's course and the progress of the trainees. High occupational standards are achieved, helped by these close monitoring processes. The programme has been extended beyond the requirements of the NVQ to enable trainees to become licensed aircraft engineers when they have achieved the required amount of work-based experience. Relationships are enhanced through the high level of occupational expertise of SECTEC's staff, who are all well qualified.

18. Trainees begin their training on various level 2 NVQ programmes. Progression from this point is good. Trainees have the opportunity to achieve higher-level qualifications alongside their level 3 NVQs. Some trainees progress to level 4 NVQs. Many trainees progress to higher national certificate courses, and some companies sponsor trainees after the completion of their planned training through higher national diplomas and degree courses. Employers have a high level of commitment to the training of their trainees who are highly motivated and value their training experience both on- and off-the-job. They recognise and value the benefits of work-based experience supported by a further education qualification. Employers offer good opportunities for trainees to achieve specialist skills and knowledge in good working environments. Much on-the-job training is well planned. Trainees follow a structured training programme that is focused primarily on the business objectives of their employers. In several cases, the company's training plan has been modified to meet the requirements of the NVQ.

19. Trainees are well supported in the workplace by their employers and by the HRAs. Employers regularly review trainees, and in one company, the fabrication manager has developed a checklist of work-based standards to review not only the trainee but also all members of the department on a weekly basis. HRAs visit trainees every eight weeks, but when assessments are being carried out visits are more frequent. Some reviews set specific NVQ achievement targets for trainees to achieve by the next review, but others do not. Some review reports are too brief and lack references to work-based progress.

20. All trainees on level 3 NVQ programmes produce good work-based evidence which is assessed by qualified assessors. In general engineering, evidence is gathered from a variety of sources, including observation of activities. On motor-vehicle programmes, there are very few work-based assessors and most evidence consists of job cards, the validity of which is authorised by acceptable witnesses. This evidence is well recorded and there are well-designed systems for recording and tracking trainees' achievements. Individual NVQ units for motor-vehicle programmes are assessed and recorded and unit accreditation is possible if required. Trainees have a workbook which includes an achievement record. This system is cross-referenced with the assessors' records, and comprehensive planning charts are displayed in the motor-vehicle workshops. Tracking systems in engineering are not so advanced. Systems used by most of the subcontractors are well established, but SECTEC's system is very new and not yet established. There

is no effective NVQ tracking system, and formal assessment usually takes place at the end of the NVQ. Inspectors found no evidence of unit accreditation for general engineering NVQs. Trainees and employers are aware of the progress that each trainee has made and what needs to be done to complete the programme. Little assessment planning is carried out and achievement is not recorded until the portfolio has been completed. There is no record of achievement for elements or individual units. This applies to the NVQ and to key skills.

21. Trainees in years three and four of their modern apprenticeships are facing difficulties with the achievement of the required key skills. Insufficient work has been done prior to their final year on the programme. Their understanding of key skills is limited, and some employers have little knowledge of the key skills requirements. Apprentices following year two higher national certificates say they do not understand what is required of them regarding the achievement of key skills. Assessment of key skills takes place, but some evidence, particularly application of numbers, is not related to their work or to the NVQ. SECTEC is aware of this situation and is working to address it.

Manufacturing

Grade 1

22. The manufacturing occupational area includes NVQs at levels 1 to 3 and a wide range of academic qualifications through to degree level. There are 128 trainees in this area, working in performing manufacturing operations, science, food and technology, and textiles. The largest group is 52 trainees working towards performing manufacturing operations qualifications, one at NVQ level 1 and 51 at level 2. Forty-six trainees are working towards science qualifications. These include two trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in laboratory operations; 37 trainees working towards national certificates in science (chemistry, pharmacy and biology options); three trainees on higher national certificates in chemistry; and four trainees studying for degrees on day-release basis at university. There are 24 trainees working towards food and drink NVQs, 14 at level 2 and 10 at level 3; a further three trainees are working towards higher national certificates in food technology, and three trainees working towards textile operations NVQs at level 2. All of the performing manufacturing operations and food and drink programmes are delivered in the workplace with assessment carried out by SECTEC. Trainees in the other areas receive off-the-job training by attending day-release training at local colleges. In 1997-98, 152 manufacturing trainees started NVQ programmes, 39 left early and out of the 113 who completed the programme, all achieved a full qualification. The percentage of trainees in full-time employment stood at 94 per cent for 1997-98 and 95 per cent for 1998-99. There are nine modern apprentices working towards qualifications in food and drink, the remaining trainees are on other work-based training programmes. There are 23 trainees for whom SECTEC is subcontracted to deliver training. These trainees are on other government-funded training programmes and most are in full-time employment. SECTEC's staff have made great improvements in the manufacturing sector since compiling their original

self-assessment report. Realistic action planning was used effectively to rectify the weaknesses which had been identified. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than was given in the self-assessment report

STRENGTHS

- ◆ employers actively involved in, and committed to, training
- ◆ effective teamwork between SECTEC, employers and trainees
- ◆ tailored programmes to meet the needs of trainees and employers
- ◆ additional qualifications encouraged
- ◆ rigorous and fair assessments
- ◆ flexible assessment practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

GOOD PRACTICE

There are 10 trainees in this area who are working on permanent night shifts. SECTEC's staff have made arrangements to review and assess them during their shifts. This is seen as part of the normal workload of an HRA.

23. All employers are committed to training, and encourage trainees to attend relevant off-the-job courses or on-the-job training at the companies' premises. Training is delivered in a variety of ways across the manufacturing sector. In the science area, for example, two companies have produced comprehensive laboratory training manuals and there are excellent examples of company training programmes to augment the off-the-job training. Two companies deliver week-long induction programmes as a very effective method of introducing the trainees to the company and emphasising, for example, health and safety regulations. Trainees display an excellent awareness of the potential hazards of the strictly controlled environments in which they work. Trainees at three companies demonstrate evidence of good laboratory practice in the use of standard operating procedures. Employers are supportive. For example, trainees working in a textiles colouring laboratory and a polymer laboratory are allowed study leave from work to revise for examinations. Other assistance includes directed time on the computer during regular working hours to complete college work and use of the specialist scientific library. Trainees in four different companies are trained on a mixture of work-based statistical and graphics packages and networked computer facilities, including the internet.

24. In the other manufacturing areas, some training is entirely on the job, while some includes a mixture of on- and off-the-job training. For example, trainees working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in food and drink manufacturing operations at work, also work towards level 3 general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in business studies and food hygiene at SECTEC's training centre at Middlewich. Other trainees working towards performing manufacturing operations qualifications complete their award totally at the workplace but may take part in other training, for example, health and safety or fork-truck operation, at the workplace or at a designated centre. Assignments given to those trainees following the performing manufacturing operations route are designed to be relevant to the

trainees' experience at work and to encourage trainees to extend their knowledge of the companies in which they work. Many employers allow trainees to change departments within the company to ensure that all aspects of their awards can be achieved and that trainees can experience a wider view of the companies' operations and their role within it.

25. The SECTEC's HRAs, work-based supervisors and trainees work together as a team. Manufacturing HRAs meet weekly to share experiences and to promote commonality of approach to all aspects of the training experience. There are regular, effective reviews of trainees' progress by the HRAs. Supervisors take an active part in this process, subject to work demands, and are always kept up-to-date with trainees' progress, both on and off the job. Reviews are signed as confirmation of progress by workplace supervisors and copies are left with both the trainee and employer. Reviews are of excellent quality, charting progress made at work and towards the trainees' qualification. Realistic targets for future progress are set and agreed, together with dates of the next review or assessment. On-the-job assessments are also of high quality. HRAs encourage and support trainees in the task of gathering evidence for their portfolios. During assessment, HRAs ensure trainees' understanding of evidence gathered, or assignments completed, by relevant questioning. Both trainees' portfolios and HRAs' documents are of good quality and are up to date. Trainees are able to contact HRAs to arrange additional visits, if required. Facilities are available for reviews and assessments for those trainees working night shifts. Employers and trainees appreciate the involvement of the HRAs and the assistance and level of support given.

26. The range of scientific disciplines required by employers is very wide in this area of Cheshire, and includes chemistry, biology, molecular biology and pharmaceutical disciplines. The companies operate research laboratories, testing laboratories and/or quality control laboratories. SECTEC has carefully arranged a different and appropriate course for each employer and each trainee from the wide range of courses and programmes on offer. For example, one employer has three trainees on three different courses. All of the three trainees are working to individually tailored NVQ programmes, specific to the needs of their departments. SECTEC will provide assessors and verifiers in the workplace for these trainees. SECTEC has arranged for one trainee from a small quality control laboratory to study for a higher national certificate in polymer chemistry, even though there are only six colleges in the United Kingdom, which can provide this course. Manufacturing trainees benefit from the ability to gain additional, relevant qualifications in a wide range of disciplines. Trainees are also encouraged to continue training on completion of their programmes and are given advice on the options available and financial assistance, if appropriate.

27. Individual trainees' needs are addressed fully as they arise, but there is no systematic initial assessment of trainees as part of the induction or initial interview process. HRAs discuss trainees' qualifications and prior experience but this general discussion does not systematically lead to the early identification of specific additional training needs.

Management & professional

Grade 1

28. There are 16 trainees working towards qualifications in management and other professional areas. A local college undertakes the off-the-job training, assessment and verification for all programmes. SECTEC's staff are responsible for the induction, review and pastoral support of all trainees. Six trainees are working towards NVQs in management at level 3, a further two are working towards NVQs in selling at level 2, one trainee is working towards level 3 in procurement and four are undertaking NVQs in personnel support at level 3. One trainee is working towards training and development NVQ level 4, one is undertaking a qualification in international trade at level 3 and a further trainee is working towards a health and safety NVQ at level 3. Seven of the trainees are modern apprentices. The remaining trainees have no mandatory key skill requirements within their programmes. All trainees are supervisors, managers or other paid employees working in environments which are suitable for the collection of NVQ evidence to match their programme requirements. Examples of workplaces are an insurance company, an aircraft engine specialist, a chemical research company, a borough council, a golf club and a logistics organisation. Reliable data on retention were not available. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by SECTEC in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive analysis of trainees' ability and previous experience
- ◆ meticulous initial assessment
- ◆ well-delivered training
- ◆ high-quality portfolios
- ◆ high level of trainee satisfaction
- ◆ highly qualified HRAs, trainers and assessors
- ◆ perceptive monitoring of trainees' needs
- ◆ wide range of qualification options

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

29. All trainees working towards the NVQs in this occupational area are well motivated, hard working and ambitious. They are keen to progress and become qualified. SECTEC has evolved a well-thought-out system for funding a series of qualifications to meet the needs of professional people. The HRA, who matches trainees with appropriate training programmes, has a very high level of professional knowledge and a positive, encouraging attitude when working with trainees.

30. All trainees receive an exacting evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses, and previous experiences. These are carefully recorded and used to make action plans for routes to NVQ success at NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4. Trainees on other programmes who wish to develop their career potential have access to the management and professional programmes. Job roles are analysed to ensure that they can provide the evidence needed for the completion of the NVQ. Trainees are trained to assess themselves objectively.

31. Some assessors are based at the subcontracted college, while others are subcontracted from local training providers. They all have relevant backgrounds in their respective fields. They give high-quality feedback on difficult areas of management, personnel support, training and development and international trade matters. They tell trainees clearly in written and verbal feedback what is right and what is wrong when they evaluate the complex evidence. The detailed recording of oral questions and trainees' replies fully meets the internal verification requirements of the relevant awarding bodies. The HRA and the subcontracted assessors are fully aware of the need to ensure high-quality assessment and verification for qualifications which can lead to letters after the name and membership of professional bodies

32. SECTEC's management school provides a series of lecture programmes on knowledge and understanding, covering all aspects of management. Trainees attend workshops on, for example, change management, analytical financial techniques, budgeting, management competence, legal requirements, communication, team and group evaluation and customer relations. These sessions are held at SECTEC's premises and are well attended. Notes are issued. Trainees unable to attend owing to work pressures are sent note sets by post and are subsequently visited at work and given one-to-one teaching or assessment.

33. Portfolio-development sessions are held. SECTEC provides national standard evidence checklists. The portfolios are well organised and full of excellent evidence. Signed and dated witness testimonies from workplace managers are frequently included. Trainees work on large, complex projects. Examples include: the training of secretaries who operate media information computer systems; export licence processes; call-centres dealing with orders for electronic funds at the point of sale; and the management of care homes.

34. All trainees speak highly of SECTEC's support mechanisms, training and assessment and aftercare processes. They become familiar with new areas of management and professional processes as a result of their attendance on the lecture programme. Trainees who reach the age of 25 are given 18 months further support to complete their chosen qualification. Reviews are carried out on a regular basis every eight to 10 weeks. HRAs and personal advisors give their mobile telephone numbers to trainees so that 24-hour support is available. Trainees enjoy the training and assessment experience. SECTEC's staff are understanding when changes to visit arrangements are required at short notice. They are sensitive to

workload pressures during reviews and on-site assessments.

35. SECTEC's programme manager and HRA, the head of the SECTEC management school and the subcontracted assessors and tutors are all professionally qualified and experienced. They work hard to provide an imaginative, modern training programme which professional bodies respect. Trainees work in high-pressure environments and have many responsibilities. The SECTEC's staff are aware of the importance of a supportive and understanding attitude. They respect confidentiality and have appropriate systems to ensure that private matters, which may affect NVQ progress, are not inadvertently revealed by routine document checks. The HRA for this programme is a trained counsellor.

36. Trainees on programmes in this occupational area move from unemployment to employment with SECTEC's help. One trainee gained a 'trainee of the year' award for moving out of unemployment, attaining NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in administration, a level 3 in customer service, and a level 3 in training and development. She is now working towards her level 4 in training and development. Her managers now have confidence in her abilities and she has been promoted. Another trainee gained NVQs in care, gained a post as manager of a care facility, and began a management NVQ. A trainee on an NVQ programme was also trained and qualified to deliver specialist information-technology product training to other staff in a wide range of professional office software. Careful thought, planning and imagination has produced outstanding vocational training for trainees wishing to realise their full potential in many professional fields.

Business administration

Grade 3

37. SECTEC has 223 trainees in this occupational area. There are 209 trainees working towards national vocational qualifications at levels 1 to 4 and 14 trainees working towards a range of other business and professional awards from national certificate to degree level. There are 126 trainees working towards NVQs in administration, 69 on accounting programmes, and 14 on information technology. There are 140 modern apprentices, 18 national trainees and 65 on other government-funded training programmes. Only one of the trainees is not in employment. Trainees are employed in a variety of occupations for a range of companies from small firms to large multinational organisations. Trainees working towards accountancy NVQs are also working towards professional qualifications and some administration trainees are working towards a national diploma as an additional award. Since 1996, 1,355 trainees have started training and 616 NVQs have been achieved: two at level one, 284 at level two, 227 at level three and 103 at level four. The average number of NVQs for every 100 trainees leaving is 58. However, as all accounting trainees have achieved, this does indicate that there is lower achievement within the other disciplines. Inspectors agreed with most of the

strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Additional weaknesses were identified during the inspection and a lower grade was awarded than that given by SECTEC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality workplaces
- ◆ extra qualifications available to, and achieved by, trainees
- ◆ high levels of commitment to training by employers
- ◆ good achievement rates on accountancy programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some employers unaware of the requirements of NVQs
- ◆ poor links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ lack of formal training in the workplace
- ◆ no work-based assessors

38. SECTEC's trainees are working for companies that provide a good range of occupationally relevant training opportunities. The HRAs identify suitable job vacancies within companies and employers then recruit a trainee to the post. Within a couple of weeks of starting, trainees undergo a skills assessment carried out by the HRA, with the employer present if possible. The assessment covers areas of work that the trainee is, or will shortly be, involved in and includes a discussion on previous experience and qualifications. The results are used to determine the subject and level of qualification to be pursued. All the trainees are visited in the workplace by their HRA who conducts reviews at six-to eight-week intervals. An NVQ assessor visits trainees monthly to give advice and carry out assessments. In some cases, the HRA fulfils this function. All the HRAs have a high level of occupational competence. This enables them to give good practical advice to trainees on how and where to collect evidence. The process is particularly effective when the HRA is also the trainer/assessor. Three of the team of seven currently has this dual role and the others are undergoing staff development to the same end. Feedback to trainees is positive, and clear targets are set for completion before the next visit. The trainees decide how their portfolios will be completed and how they will file evidence.

39. Employers are very supportive of the training process. Most agree to the trainees attending off-the-job training on a day-release basis and allow time in the workplace when the HRA visits. Whenever possible, employers are fully involved in the review process, but if they cannot be present they are given feedback later. The off-the-job tuition provided for accountancy trainees is of a very good standard. One subcontracted college achieved a 100 per cent pass rate in the summer of 1999 for the foundation level of the externally set accountancy assessments. The

standard of training in the accredited training centre, which is run by SECTEC, is also good. New trainees attend SECTEC's training centre one half day each week for three weeks to cover induction and then attend when they feel they need to do so. The training centre also provides open learning support for administration trainees who are unable to attend for off-the-job training sessions. Administration trainees can work towards national qualifications in business studies alongside their NVQs. Several trainees who have taken this qualification have gone on to higher level qualifications and business studies degrees. All administration modern apprentices take an extra unit tailored to the trainee's or the employer's needs. Additional qualifications in areas such as information technology are also available to trainees.

40. There is often no link between on- and off-the-job training, particularly for the 20 per cent of administration trainees who are attending the subcontracted college on a day-release basis. Trainees are not happy with the organisation of training at the college, and complain of gaps of up to three hours between lessons. The college timetable is organised to deliver units for the NVQ in a predetermined order, even if this does not meet the needs of trainees or employers. The introduction to the optional units of the NVQs is not completed until the May following the September start. Trainees who gather evidence for units in advance of the taught session are unable to have it checked against the standards. Dissatisfaction with college's training has led one large multi national company to stop using it and to switch to open learning with support from SECTEC's staff and manuals.

41. There are no work-based assessors in this occupational area. A number of the employers have no knowledge of the NVQ process and are, therefore, unable to recognise how the company's in-house training can provide evidence towards the NVQ. There is no formal training in the workplace that is designed to support the trainees' NVQ programmes.

42. The internal verification of awards delivered through SECTEC's own training centre is carried out effectively by SECTEC's staff. SECTEC's staff do not have copies of the internal verification carried out by the colleges. Internal verification at the colleges lacks the rigour of that undertaken by SECTEC. It consists of checking trainees' portfolios and carrying out a few visits to observe assessors working with trainees in the workplace. New trainees are introduced to key skills at the beginning of their training, and the achievement of key skills is included in their initial action plans. However, some national trainees have completed the NVQ at level two, but have done little towards identifying evidence for key skills and do not understand the key skills qualification.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

43. There are 207 trainees working towards NVQs in retail, customer service, distribution and warehousing, procurement and estate agency. Fifty-eight of these trainees are working towards NVQs in retailing. All but two are employed. They work in a variety of small- to medium-sized shops within the Cheshire area. Forty-one of them are on the modern apprenticeship scheme, 16 are national trainees and one trainee, requiring additional learning support, is on another work-based programme working towards NVQ level 1 in distributive operations. Trainees attend six key skills training sessions, over a twelve-week period, at a local training provider. Two full-time staff and two part-time staff support retail trainees.

44. There are 52 trainees undertaking NVQs in distribution and warehousing operations, and related programmes. Fifty are working towards the NVQ level 2 on work-based training programmes and two are on the modern apprenticeship programme. Twenty-eight trainees are working towards NVQs in motor-vehicle parts distribution and supply. Eleven of these trainees are on other work-based training programmes, 15 are national trainees and 2 are modern apprentices. There are 10 other trainees working towards NVQ level 2 in fork-truck operations. Fork-truck trainees also undertake the basic fork-truck operator's three-day or five-day course, prior to commencing their NVQ. SECTEC employs an additional four full-time staff to support these trainees and one part-time assessor. They subcontract with two local training providers to train and assess the fork-truck NVQ.

45. There are 42 customer service trainees who are all employed. Twenty-one are on the modern apprenticeship scheme, six are national trainees and 15 are on other work-based training programmes. They work in roles involving direct customer contact, either face to face or over the telephone. Trainees attend a series of workshops held in SECTEC's offices in Middleswich. Additional workshops are arranged, as required, in other centres. SECTEC employs four staff to support the trainees, and there are five work-based assessors working towards their assessor awards in one major local company which has trainees. SECTEC has recently introduced NVQs in estate agency and procurement. There are 17 trainees on other work-based training programmes in estate agency.

46. All assessment is carried out in the workplace. Achievement rates are improving, and have risen across all programmes in this sector, from 28 per cent to 60 per cent over the past 3 years. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report although two of the strengths were seen as generic rather than occupational and others were seen as no more than normal practice. Several additional strengths and weaknesses were found which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by the inspectors is the same as that given by SECTEC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ rigorous, well-documented assessment
- ◆ realistic and challenging targets achieved by trainees
- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ comprehensive, high-quality portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unplanned on-the-job training
- ◆ lack of involvement by some employers in training and assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an excellent assessment practice on retail NVQs. There are retail work-based assessors in three shops which have trainees on the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship schemes. These assessors have made a great effort to prepare themselves for their assessment role. They plan training relevant to the NVQ and link this to a schedule of assessments. They have devised a bank of questions that are specific to their shops, and identified a range of evidence-gathering opportunities. Assessment is planned to coincide with the trading cycle and is continual.

47. Trainees have a good understanding of the NVQ requirements and are fully involved in the assessment process. Assessments are conducted by qualified and occupationally experienced staff, who use a variety of assessment methods to confirm trainees' competence. Workplace observations are well recorded and assessors record activities which can be cross-referenced and used as evidence for further units. Assessors use written questions and ask trainees additional questions to check their understanding. The questions and trainees' responses are recorded and given to the trainees for inclusion in their portfolios of evidence.

48. Trainees discuss, agree and record short-term targets with their assessors during assessment planning. Targets are reviewed in discussions between trainees and HRAs during review meetings, and further targets are set. Trainees understand the importance of achieving targets and have a clear picture of their progression towards the qualification. Trainees are highly motivated and retention and achievement rates are good. Over 60 per cent of trainees achieved their NVQ within this sector during 1998-99. Less than 12 per cent of trainees leave their training programme without completing an award. Trainees present evidence of their competence through case studies which relate directly to an aspect of their current job. The evidence is both varied and interesting, and projects a clear image of the trainee in their workplace. Good use is made of photographs, working documents, witness statements and direct observation by SECTEC's assessors. Portfolios are well organised, clearly referenced and show the trainees' commitment and enthusiasm.

49. SECTEC offer assessor training to all employers. This is beginning to take effect on the retail programme and, though not widespread, is beginning to work well in a small number of shops. Trainees enjoy being assessed by their managers and make excellent progress. Their managers link on-the-job training to the units of the NVQ, which emphasises the relevance of the work-based qualification. Managers use the NVQ as a way of developing and appraising staff, and some trainees have progressed into supervisory roles as a result. SECTEC's staff regularly observe assessment practices in the workplace for internal verification purposes. The managers attend monthly assessor meetings at SECTEC's offices. At these meetings, they discuss new ideas and suggestions for improving

assessment practice, as well as discussing any problems which may have occurred with individual trainees. Five customer-service managers are currently working towards their assessor award.

50. Trainees' development needs are not clearly identified at the beginning of their NVQ programmes and individual training plans are not used. Initial assessment has recently been introduced in some programmes, but it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness. Many employers do not understand the requirements of NVQs, or the process through which they are achieved. They do not have copies of the NVQ standards and are not involved in assessment planning. Most on-the-job training is unplanned and employers are unaware of the potential links between their own job-related training and the units in the NVQ. There is no off-the-job training for retailing and warehousing trainees, other than key skills training. Customer-service trainees are invited to attend a series of workshops linked to the NVQ and most of those who attend appreciate the benefits. Some employers fail to understand the benefits of off-the-job training. Key skills are not introduced at the beginning of NVQ programmes. Opportunities for gathering evidence at an early stage are overlooked and assessment of key skills is delayed until after some NVQ units have been assessed. The retail trainees are invited to attend a series of six key skills workshops at a local training provider. The training provider has recently introduced inappropriate initial assessment of key skills, which fails to accurately assess trainees' current level of knowledge. All trainees follow the same programme, which does not meet the needs of them all.

Hospitality

Grade 3

51. SECTEC currently has 50 trainees on catering and hospitality programmes. There are 27 modern apprentices, 13 national trainees, and 10 trainees on other work-based training for young people. NVQs at level 2 and 3 are offered in kitchen, restaurant, bar/pub, reception, housekeeping, quick service and hospitality services. Additional qualifications are offered in food hygiene, health and safety and customer care. SECTEC subcontracts five colleges for training in hospitality and catering. It also has its own accredited centre where there are 28 trainees. Training and assessment is planned to meet the needs of each trainee in conjunction with the requirements of the employer. The different patterns of training include day release to one of the five colleges; work-based training and assessment with a workplace trainer and a qualified workplace assessor; and work-based training and assessment with a workplace trainer and a qualified visiting assessor. There are only three trainees who are not in full-time employment. Trainees are employed in a range of establishments, including restaurants, pubs, hotels, golf clubs and contract catering firms. An HRA employed by SECTEC oversees the hospitality and catering programmes. This HRA visits all trainees in the workplace at least every eight weeks. The HRA also oversees two assessors who carry out work-based assessment and, in some cases, theory training in the workplace. There is one work-based assessor and two employers working towards the assessor awards.

The achievements have improved in the last three years from 28 NVQs for every 100 trainees leaving in 1996-97 to 34 NVQs for every 100 trainees leaving in 1998-99. The number of trainees leaving their programmes early for 1998-99 was 32 per cent and the present target is 26 per cent. The self-assessment report identified some features as strengths that are no more than normal practice. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified through inspection. The grade awarded was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ diverse range of training programme styles
- ◆ well-organised portfolios
- ◆ some high-quality on- and off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently planned on-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment

52. Trainees can choose to attend one of the five colleges for off-the-job training or they can receive all their training at work. There are examples of trainees changing their programmes to meet their changing needs. Employers can also request a preferred programme style. Trainees are encouraged to collect a wide range of appropriate evidence and produce portfolios of a good standard. They understand the NVQ requirements and the assessment process but few are aware of which programme they are on. Trainees receiving all work-based training are supplied with appropriate textbooks and other necessary resources. The HRA is involved in an international project to provide opportunities for trainees to visit European countries and observe the industry in other countries. The HRA has visited Spain and there are plans for a group of trainees to visit this country in the near future.

53. Trainees enjoy their off-the-job training in colleges. Lessons are generally well planned and have clear aims and objectives. There are good facilities and opportunities for trainees to develop their computer skills in well-resourced college learning centres. Trainees work effectively with their tutors who are well qualified and occupationally competent. College training extends the expertise of trainees who work in small establishments. It is well planned but the schemes of work are not shared with employers to encourage links between the college work and the training opportunities that arise in the workplace. Training in the workplace is good for most trainees. In some cases, trainees have the opportunity to observe and work with top chefs and produce high-quality food for the best restaurants and hotels in the area. This training is, however, largely unplanned and links are not made with the college training. The links between theory and practice are clear when all the training is in the workplace and run by employers. However, the poor planning of

much of this training has resulted in some de-motivated trainees who are making slow progress. This problem was identified in the self-assessment report. There is currently only one work-based assessor across all of the workplaces. Opportunities for work-based assessment and the collection of naturally occurring evidence are frequently missed. SECTEC is aware of this weakness.

54. Trainees are well supported by their HRA and are visited at least every eight weeks in their workplace, where a review document is completed with the employer's involvement. When trainees join programmes, they are given a well-designed induction pack, but there is little initial assessment. There is currently no assessment of basic or key skills, although SECTEC is now addressing this weakness. Training in key skills is not fully integrated with the NVQ programmes. There has been some developmental work in key skills and two staff have achieved their key skills practitioner award. In the colleges, trainees are encouraged to identify evidence of key skills achievements. All trainees are aware of key skills and they are discussed during the induction process.

Hair & beauty

Grade 1

55. There are 165 trainees on hairdressing and beauty programmes. One-hundred-and-eleven trainees are working towards NVQs in hairdressing at level 2 and 50 at level 3. Three trainees are working towards an NVQ level 2 in beauty therapy and one trainee is working towards epilation at level 3. There are 116 modern apprentices, 38 national trainees and 12 trainees on other government-funded training programmes. All trainees are employed in local salons. SECTEC subcontracts some of its practical and theory training to five different providers. Trainees have the choice of attending a local college or a training provider for off-the-job training for one day each week, or undertaking all training in the workplace. The programmes are co-ordinated by three of SECTEC's staff who visit trainees in their salons and during off-the-job training, to carry out progress reviews. They also act as work-based trainers and assessors to provide extra support to trainees in the workplace. Some salon placements have qualified work-based assessors who assess their trainees' work. The NVQ achievement rate for 1998-99 is 71 NVQs for every 100 trainees leaving. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and minor weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Additional strengths were found and inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ choice of training arrangements
- ◆ motivated, vocationally experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ extensive work-based assessment in commercial salons
- ◆ high rate of achievement
- ◆ well-planned and -documented assessment and verification systems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee with dyslexia, who was given additional support, completed hairdressing levels 1, 2 and 3 and won an accolade at the 'Modern Apprenticeship of the Year' ceremony. He is now working towards becoming a work-based trainer and assessor in a salon.

56. The programme is co-ordinated by a team of three HRAs who visit trainees in their salons, and during their off-the-job training, to carry out progress reviews. They also act as work-based trainers and assessors and provide extra support to trainees in the workplace. There are 20 qualified work-based assessors in the salon placements and there is an on-going programme of assessor training for salon staff. Over a hundred trainees receive training from SECTEC's HRAs and salon-based trainers and assessors. The remainder attend subcontracted training in one of three colleges and three other commercial training salons. Most trainees take approximately 18 months to achieve NVQ level 2, and those attending colleges take approximately 24 months.

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee working towards hairdressing level 2 is Portuguese. The HRA supporting this trainee has worked extremely hard to find relevant bilingual reference books to enable the trainee to translate occupationally specific words. An interpreter has been offered to support this translation process and to help with written assignments.

57. Training is delivered on a roll-on roll-off basis enabling trainees to join the programme at any time. Some of the salon placements provide both practical and theory training in-house and some are also able to offer work-based assessment. This is often in conjunction with the HRAs who are able to visit the trainees every four weeks to provide practical and theoretical training, assessment and internal verification in the salons. Level 3 trainees receive training in the workplace and some have the opportunity to attend additional off-the-job training, where appropriate. All trainees receive learning packs.

58. Beauty therapy trainees work towards their qualifications in a commercial beauty therapy training centre. Highly qualified and commercially experienced trainers and assessors provide training and assessment. Trainees benefit from individual support in small training groups. Facilities and resources are of good quality and reflect current industry practice. Training, assessment and internal verification procedures and practices are well structured and effectively implemented. There are opportunities for trainees to obtain a variety of additional qualifications in a wide range of holistic therapies taught by therapists with nationally recognised qualifications.

59. The HRAs provide an induction programme for trainees in their salons. Some trainees are unable to recall the detail of the induction process and are unaware of the SECTEC equal opportunities policy. SECTEC has introduced initial assessment of key skills into this occupational area recently, but it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of the arrangements. The teaching of key skills is also being introduced into the programmes, but little assessment has so far taken place.

60. Trainees work well with the HRAs who provide extra support in areas such as literacy and numeracy. This can be provided in the trainees' workplace and more specialist support is available at one of SECTEC's four training centres in the region. The HRAs maintain accurate, up to date, computerised progress records for each of their trainees and use the information effectively to monitor and review progress and achievement. The team of HRAs meets regularly to review trainees'

progress and anticipated NVQ achievement dates. Completion dates are profiled, reviewed and adjusted as necessary to inform the management-information system. The standard of information held on individual trainees' progress varies among the subcontractors.

61. The HRAs review each trainee's progress every eight weeks in their salons. The employer is fully involved in this process, which includes a health and safety update. Reviews are detailed and consistent. They focus on the trainee's NVQ progress, which is shown on a separate action review. This gives each trainee a clear target and action for the following review. However, some trainees with a college subcontractor are unable to state which units they have achieved, and are not fully aware of the NVQ assessment process. The quality of training and the resources available to trainees vary considerably across the subcontracted training. A small number of trainees who attend one of the colleges have insufficient opportunity for practice on models during the first year, and there is also a shortage of suitable models for assessment. Two other hairdressing subcontractors provide off-the-job training in commercial training salons. They provide an ample supply of models, well-fitted and -stocked salons, low staff to trainee ratios and a high standard of practical work. In the commercial training salons and in those salons that are able to provide all training in-house, trainees make excellent progress. SECTEC has recognised the inconsistencies in the quality of the subcontracted training and has added performance conditions to the contract specifications with the subcontractors which should ensure continuity and improvements where necessary. Compliance with the conditions is being monitored on a monthly basis.

62. Working relationships between SECTEC and the commercial salons are good. Some salons are particularly active in their approach to training. They employ work-based trainers and assessors who plan training programmes for the trainees in conjunction with SECTEC. The plans are prominently displayed, together with individual trainee's action plans and progress charts, to help trainees follow their progress. The HRAs visit these salons to monitor and review progress and to internally verify work-based assessments. There are work-based assessor networking meetings at which the HRAs support the assessors. The quality of trainees' portfolio work is high. They are well presented and the assessments are well recorded. The internal verification system is well planned and recorded. Systems are in place to ensure the consistency and quality of work-based assessment practice in the salons. There are examples in trainees' portfolios of the accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience. These include the use of key skills accreditation from other programmes, using previous portfolio evidence when trainees have transferred from another training provider, and the development of individual programmes to enable fast-tracking when trainees have gained hairdressing experience in work situations. Trainees' achievements are celebrated with awards presentation events and a 'Modern Apprentice of the Year' award that receive local publicity. Trainees are advised of local and national hairdressing competitions, and networking among the salons is encouraged.

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

63. SECTEC is an accredited centre with three awarding bodies for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in care, and three for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in early years care and education. One is also the awarding body for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in play work. SECTEC are also accredited to offer the awards in dental nursing. There are 191 trainees in total. There are 101 care trainees of whom 27 are on national traineeships, 58 are on modern apprenticeships and 16 are on other work-based training programmes. There are 71 childcare trainees of whom 64 are on modern apprenticeships and 7 are on other work-based training programmes. They are working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 in early years' care and education. One trainee on a work-based training programme is working towards level 3 in playwork. Eighteen trainees are on dental nursing programmes.

64. All care, dental nursing and playwork trainees are employed. Local social services regulations require employed staff in day nurseries to be over 18 years of age, so childcare trainees under 18 are not in employment. Off-the-job training for unemployed childcare trainees at level 2 takes place weekly on a day-release basis and is delivered by SECTEC's staff. Off-the-job training for employed level 3 childcare trainees is offered in the evenings through a subcontract local college of further education and a local training provider. Off-the-job training for care trainees is offered on a weekly basis in the evenings and is delivered by SECTEC's staff. Trainees on the dental technician training programme also attend off-the-job training on a weekly basis delivered by SECTEC's staff. Playwork off-the-job training is offered during the evenings and is subcontracted to another training provider. The delivery and assessment of the application of number and information technology key skills is subcontracted to two other local training providers. Trainees are required to attend a series of training sessions offered in the evenings. Trainees in all areas receive reviews every eight to 10 weeks.

65. Care trainees work in residential care and nursing homes for the elderly. The provider has links with 107 companies but not all have trainees at present. Childcare trainees work in the 51 nursery schools and day nurseries with which SECTEC has established links. Some care homes and childcare establishments have several trainees. The number of qualified staff outnumbers trainees in the care establishments. In childcare, staff meet the social services requirements for registration which is that a minimum of 50 per cent of staff must have a recognised qualification. Trainees on work placements work 40 hours per week, which includes the one-day off-the-job training. The hours worked by employed childcare trainees vary from 30 to 40 hours per week. Care trainees work shifts patterns, including nights, and hours vary 30 to 48 hours per week plus overtime.

66. There are 15 male care trainees, two male dental nurses and one male childcare trainee. There are 10 full-time staff in the occupational sector, including four co-ordinators for the subdivisions of care, childcare, playwork and dental nursing. In addition, there are 14 part-time staff who provide training and act as visiting assessors. All assessment takes place in the workplace. In care, there are

43 work-based assessors: 37 hold the appropriate assessor qualifications and the rest are working towards them. In childcare, there are 10 work-based assessors and six roving assessors. The ratio of work-based assessors to trainees across the whole area varies from one assessor to between every one to six trainees. Peripatetic assessors in care and childcare are responsible for between 11 and 28 trainees. There are 11 qualified internal verifiers. All assessors and internal verifiers are occupationally qualified and experienced.

67. All dental nursing trainees were successful in passing their examination in 1998. In 1996-97, 63 trainees began NVQ training in care and childcare. Of these 13 have completed level 2 and two have completed level 3 in care. The average length of time taken to complete the awards was 80 weeks for care trainees and 100 weeks for childcare trainees. In 1997-98, 219 trainees began NVQ training in care and childcare. Of this intake, 53 have completed level 2, 16 have completed level 3, 7 have completed both levels 2 and 3, and 23 are still on the training programme. The average time taken to complete the award in 1997-98 was 74 weeks. In 1997-98, 75 per cent of childcare trainees gained employment. Many of the features identified as strengths in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Actions have been proposed to remedy the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but they have not yet been fully implemented. Inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given by SECTEC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and -delivered off-the-job training
- ◆ additional qualifications available to trainees
- ◆ high level of progression into employment by childcare trainees
- ◆ thorough monitoring and evaluation of subcontractors
- ◆ consistently high achievement of dental nursing trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient training for some care trainees
- ◆ inconsistent assessment practices
- ◆ slow progress made by some trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

In one residential care home, the employer had cross-referenced their policies and procedures to NVQ units to assist trainees' gathering evidence

68. Occupationally qualified staff interview trainees prior to acceptance onto the programmes. Managers of potential work placements interview childcare trainees. If the trainee is over 18, SECTEC's advisor arranges job interviews. All trainees are given the opportunity to attend a well-planned programme of off-the-job training. The training sessions have clearly defined learning outcomes, which relate directly to the NVQ units. Sessions are well planned and include appropriate activities and methods of delivery. Trainers relate the content of the sessions to the

workplace and encourage trainees to share and discuss working experiences and practices. SECTEC's staff monitor the quality of training provided by external trainers. Training sessions are observed regularly. Trainees complete weekly 'customer satisfaction' sheets. Action taken to remedy issues of concern is noted in the advisor's report. Meetings are held with subcontractors to discuss issues and ensure that course content is meeting current workplace practice. Trainees and their employers are given details of the additional training sessions and are encouraged to attend. Trainers have devised learning material to support trainees unable to attend evening or day-release classes. Advisors also run 'drop in' sessions where trainees can have one-to-one training and support.

69. Trainees are able to complete additional qualifications and training programmes in basic food hygiene and first aid. All care trainees are offered manual and lifting training in the off-the-job training programme. Employers ensure that childcare trainees receive relevant training in the workplace, which links with the off-the-job training sessions. Not all employers in care provide workplace training, and some trainees receive little training at all. All trainees are given appropriate textbooks. For the past three years, all dental trainees have passed their final examination compared with a national average pass rate of 63 per cent. All trainees receive more workplace visits than is contractually required. The reviews are conducted in a supportive way. Trainees' progress is recorded and short-term targets are agreed. Employers are highly satisfied with the progress that childcare trainees make during their training, and a high number of childcare trainees are offered employment in the nurseries where they have been placed. In 1998-99, the proportion of those employed stood at over 80 per cent.

POOR PRACTICE

Six out of ten employed childcare trainees, who were working towards the level 3 award, were not allocated a visiting assessor until they had been on the programme for between three and eight months. One trainee who had a childcare qualification and several years' experience as a nanny had been on the programme for five months and had not yet met her visiting assessor. Opportunities to assess the trainee in the workplace had been missed.

70. There are some poor practices in assessment. Optional units available for level 3 care trainees are not always identified at the start of their awards. Trainees have had difficulty in ensuring that their workplace and job role can provide sufficient experience to cover all aspects of the NVQ. Some care portfolios have insufficient records of observation of workplace practice. This has been identified in one external verifier's report and action to remedy the weakness is planned but has not been implemented. Some portfolios rely heavily on a narrow range of evidence. SECTEC's staff who act as visiting assessors carry out most assessment in childcare. The trainees are not always informed of who their visiting assessor will be until many months into their programme. There is an over-emphasis on written work. For example one level 3 trainee had completed six large files of written evidence for her award. Opportunities for work-based observation and assessment are missed. These two factors contribute to the slow progress made by trainees, some of whom have been on programme for over a year and have been assessed for only two units. Internal verification practices are inconsistent. The work of some trainees is internally verified on a regular basis: for others it takes place on completion of the award. There is no plan for the systematic sampling of NVQ units. Assessment and verification of units is recorded on the management-information system. There are quarterly meetings for all assessors. SECTEC's staff support work-based assessors who are having difficulties in carrying out assessments owing to other work commitments.

71. The initial assessment of key skills is a recent introduction. The delivery and assessment of key skills during training varies between care and childcare. There are also varying assessment practices within each area. Some trainees who have been in training for some time are unclear how the key skills units will be assessed. Key skills training material has been developed and used with care trainees for almost two years. One of the SECTEC's care team has the key skills practitioner award and is now training other staff. In childcare, materials have been developed only for the application of number element of key skills. Some assessors are not using the assessment observation records for key skills effectively.

Media & design

Grade 3

72. There are 19 trainees working towards qualifications within this area. One local college undertakes off-the-job training, assessment and verification which it shares with a school of printing which is part of another college. The HRAs from SECTEC are responsible for induction, review and pastoral support. There are two trainees who are working towards NVQs in graphic design at level 2, four on design NVQs at level 3 and one at level 4. One trainee is working towards a print origination NVQ at level 2, as are two trainees at level 3. Two trainees are working towards NVQs in screen printing at level 2, one trainee is working towards an NVQ in machine printing at level 2 and a further trainee is working towards an NVQ in commercial printing at level 3. Four trainees are undertaking NVQs in journalism at level 4. Also, at the time of inspection, one further trainee has received an induction but has not been allocated to a programme area yet. All trainees are in full-time employment in workplaces such as a local newspaper's office, a graphic design and print origination department and a media group office. The numbers of trainees completing their NVQs is increasing. In 1996-97, 30 per cent of trainees achieved their awards. A forecast of 67 per cent has been made for the current year. The provider did not separate media and design from the management provision in its original self-assessment report. A short media report was submitted on the first day of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by SECTEC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent on-the-job training
- ◆ very supportive workplace managers
- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training in print origination
- ◆ high standard of design training
- ◆ good opportunities for training in computer-aided design and carton manufacture

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak induction
- ◆ poor links between on- and off-the-job training in printing
- ◆ slow rate of progress for trainees at printing school
- ◆ poor understanding of NVQs at subcontracted colleges
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ insufficient workplace assessment

73. The newly appointed HRA for this sector is using an imaginative and active approach to improve the quality of training. The career options of recently employed trainees are improving and a wide range of high-quality training opportunities are being made available to them. With the aid of a local design centre, the HRA has recently produced helpful documents to use to monitor trainees' progress. The documents explain to workplace managers and trainees the complex NVQ terminology in simple language. Trainees are able to gain experience in the use of a wide range of modern equipment. For example, at one workplace there are four-, five- and six-colour modern printing presses, image setters and raster image processors, wide-bed scanners and ultra-violet plate-making facilities. Digital technology is used in the production of images for advertising. There is a special daylight bay used to match chromalin test prints to cloth and wallpaper samples, to ensure perfect colour balance and accurate reproduction. All trainees are involved in interesting and demanding work in an industry that requires high levels of technical knowledge together with artistic appreciation.

74. Workplace managers take an active interest in trainees' progress. They look to the HRA to help them increase the levels of knowledge and skill in their employees and are pleased with the support offered by SECTEC's staff. In some workplaces, several staff members are working towards NVQs. The school of printing has highly qualified and experienced staff. They ensure that print origination trainees on day release learn basic and advanced techniques in a well-equipped college department. The department has a national reputation and receives many requests for qualified trainees as national skill shortages increase. Trainees learn typesetting and font work, output, paste-up and plate-making techniques. They are given appropriate project work, are closely monitored and receive one-to-one tutorials.

75. Graphic design trainees attend a college design centre on day release. It has been specified and funded by the department for education and employment (DfEE) as a national centre of excellence. It has state-of-the-art equipment and its design lecturers have outstanding knowledge of artistic design. They generate enthusiasm among trainees and encourage them to use their imagination when using a very wide range of design systems and techniques. Compelling artwork and photographic imagery surrounds the training area. The available equipment includes a graphic design computer suite, in which the workstations have high quality, large screen monitors with fine pixel dot pitch to ensure accurate on-screen rendition of

subtle colouring and detail. Trainees are taught to use a range of appropriate software programs. Nationally respected experts, using multimedia design and virtual reality computers, show trainees the very latest web-site design and three-dimensional animation techniques. There is also a television/video digital editing suite and wide-field scanner. Trainees produce high-quality portfolios containing work products and design centre artwork. Lecturers are on hand to give one-to-one advice and group tutorials. Modern apprentices are able to progress from computer-aided design to supermarket food carton design. Those involved learn the entire pathway of carton design: cutting, folding, gluing and full-colour printing and varnishing for long-run carton production work.

76. Many trainees soon forget the information they are given at induction. For example, some did not remember equal opportunities or anti-harassment information. One trainee began work before receiving a health and safety briefing from his employer. Some trainees were not aware of the importance of the accident book. The colleges have not been able to carry out any analysis of on-the-job work routines to ensure that lectures are relevant to trainees' daily work requirements. Little account is taken of existing knowledge at the school of printing, where lessons take precedence over evidence from the workplace. In design, more effort has been made, and the college design centre makes arrangements to accredit prior learning. The print origination NVQ units are assessed in a fixed, termly sequence. As a result, some trainees are making slow progress and are taking three years to achieve the qualification. Despite the high quality of the trainees' workplaces, college staff undertake insufficient workplace assessments. For example, in the school of printing, one trainee received a workplace assessment only once in three years. In the design department of the other college, on-site visits are only just being introduced.

77. Despite the excellence of the college training, the understanding of NVQs by the staff at these colleges is poor. Recording of the assessment process is inadequate. The school of printing's internal verification process has failed to identify assessors' errors. Internal verifiers at both colleges were unsure of their roles. At the design centre, the internal verifier did not have copies of the national standards for assessment and verification produced by the qualifications and curriculum authority (QCA). Neither centre keeps proper records of the feedback to assessors by internal verifiers following observation of assessments. SECTEC's managers place too much reliance on the awarding body's external verifiers to check the overall quality of subcontracted training. They have not developed reliable internal quality assurance arrangements. The school of printing has indicated that its academic professionals need more advice about vocational quality assurance. SECTEC has not provided this. At the design centre, the external verifier has inaccurately recorded that all staff involved in the training process are qualified and also that they understand all aspects of the processes. Although both colleges undertake observations of teaching and learning, the resulting reports are not sent to SECTEC. Similarly, SECTEC does not automatically receive the colleges' external verification reports.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

78. There are 56 adults and 96 young people on foundation for work programmes. Thirty-four unemployed adults attend the basic employability training in Macclesfield and Crewe. They follow a 10-week programme which aims to develop confidence, motivation, timekeeping and job-search skills, as well as providing an opportunity to achieve first aid and health and safety certificates. Sixteen trainees follow an extended individual programme that includes a work placement or vocational training in areas such as welding, fork-truck operation, bricklaying, accounts and business administration. There are currently no trainees in work placements. Twenty-two of the adults are on the New Deal voluntary option. They have placements in a range of charities and voluntary organisations in the area. They follow a six-month programme, which offers a mix of work placement, vocational training and job-search skills.

79. Forty-three young people in Crewe and Macclesfield attend a programme called the 'prospects club'. This programme lasts up to eight weeks and includes testing, self-assessment, vocational awareness, and training in job-search and decision-making skills. Trainees are required to attend for 16 hours each week. Sixteen young people come under a work-based programme called 'youth start', which is run at the Crewe training centre. The programme aims to give intensive support to those who are socially disadvantaged. Hours of attendance on the programme are flexible. The programme includes individual training in a range of occupational areas, and mentoring. The remaining 37 trainees have been identified as having additional learning needs. As with the trainees on the 'youth start' programme, they are working towards an NVQ at levels 1 or 2 in areas such as retail, distributive operations, administration, catering and manufacturing practices. The placements for these trainees are found within a mix of large and small employers. Where an NVQ level 1 is not available, units from a vocational access certificate are used. Some trainees, who have been identified as requiring help with basic skills, are working towards wordpower and/or numberpower awards. These trainees attend in-house training once each week. Additional awards in first aid and health and safety are also offered to youth trainees.

80. Training and assessment for the vocationally specific NVQs is subcontracted to local providers or provided through SECTEC's own accredited centre. Some subcontractors use SECTEC's training rooms for off-the-job training. NVQ assessment and some wordpower and numberpower assessment takes place at the workplace. All staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for their roles. Over the last three years, the proportion of trainees leaving these programmes to take up employment has remained steady in the range 30-36 per cent. Of the trainees who take NVQs, the number leaving with an NVQ level 1 has increased over the last three years from three in 1996-97 to 10 in 1998-99. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified further strengths during the inspection. A higher grade was awarded than had been given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent work placements for young people and New Deal clients
- ◆ effective teamwork by employers, assessors and HRAs
- ◆ flexible approach to individual training
- ◆ high-quality in-house training
- ◆ well-integrated key skills with vocational training programmes
- ◆ effective, in-depth, initial assessment for vocationally undecided trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient uptake of work placements
- ◆ no use of reviews to inform and shape adult programmes
- ◆ lack of systematic procedures to evaluate and improve training

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees complete a questionnaire at the beginning of their programme in which they rate themselves on a scale from 1 to 5. They do the same at the end of their programme. A graph is then produced that clearly illustrates the progress that has been made in, for example, knowing what sort of job they want; their level of confidence at interviews; coping with being told what to do; and working with others.

81. Work placements are chosen with care to suit each trainee's ability and needs. They are checked to ensure that they can provide opportunities to develop the desired employment and personal skills. Some of the work placements are in national companies, which have their own training and development procedures to which the trainee has full access. Where possible, trainees are put in placements where there are genuine opportunities for future employment. New Deal clients on the voluntary option are encouraged to choose their work placement after trying out more than one. When young people are on placements, the workplace supervisors work closely with the HRA to plan and deliver training. The workplace supervisors always take part in monthly reviews and agree to the targets set for the trainee. The trainee's assessor, who may be a subcontractor, also works closely with the employer and agrees the assessment action plan with them and the HRA. The assessor is required to complete a report on the progress made by the trainee every 12 weeks. The monthly visit by the HRA ensures all three parties are aware of how far the trainee has progressed.

82. For young people, there is a pathway approach that allows trainees to dip in and out of programmes to meet their various needs. This applies not only to the different occupational areas and levels, but also to the degree of support they require and the demands on them in terms of hours and days of attendance. Some trainees leave then return to the training centre on more than one occasion, until they have the motivation and confidence to progress. In the centre, all trainees have a planned individual timetable each week. There is a good tracking system, which keeps up with what trainees are doing and where they are in their programme. Adult trainees are also able to structure their training according to their personal development needs. Their period of time in training can be extended. All the adult trainees are offered training leading to nationally recognised awards in first aid and health and safety. For many, this is their first successful learning experience and can be highly motivating. High-quality, short training courses are also available in areas such as fork-truck driving and basic information technology. One extremely enthusiastic

trainee is re-training in welding and gaining a qualification after 30 years in the welding industry.

83. For young people, much of the individual and group training is delivered at SECTEC's centres. The training sessions are well planned, and are delivered with enthusiasm and commitment. Trainees are assigned to one trainer with whom they can build a working relationship but they receive training from a variety of staff. Trainers make creative use of learning materials they have developed themselves, and also commercial packages. Trainees have access to multimedia computers. Trainees on placements may also attend training sessions at work on topics such as portfolio building, and also work towards numberpower and wordpower qualifications. Once a month, trainees are given the opportunity to discuss issues together and feed back any concerns they may have. These occasions are also used to train them in, for example, communication skills.

84. Staff are well qualified and suitably experienced to teach the programmes. All are experienced in working with the long-term unemployed. There is continual development of staff and sharing of experience. Staff are encouraged to be multi-skilled so they can take on different tasks such as placement advice, quality control, or work with external verifiers. This increases job satisfaction for staff and gives greater flexibility of job role. Staff are actively involved in the development of the programmes.

85. Key skills are developed within the context of the trainees' current work experience as much as possible. For example, assessments are conducted at their workplace which draw on evidence from diary sheets, witness testimonies and photographs. Use is also made of basic skills tests, key skills tests, psychometric tests, self-assessment tools and individual interviews. This range of assessment instruments is used to help the trainee choose an occupation which will suit them.

86. Adult trainees do not always take advantage of the work placements on offer. Some have successfully undertaken NVQ training in a simulated work environment, but this does not contribute as much to their employability as experience in a real workplace. The initial assessment and regular reviewing of adult trainees do not contribute towards individual action plans which provide an overview of the trainees' progress. The staff share information about trainees informally, but responsibility for individual trainees is not allocated, unlike the process for adult trainees, and trainees are unclear which team member is responsible for their support and monitoring.

87. Feedback is collected from trainees informally and through the use of questionnaire, and meetings. Focus groups are held by staff to discuss some of the issues arising from feedback and possible ways of addressing them. However, there are no set procedures for ensuring that feedback from trainees, employers and subcontractors is used in a systematic way to improve training. Off-the-job training by subcontractors and their internal verification systems are not monitored.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

88. SECTEC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which is incorporated within the quality-assurance manual and applies to SECTEC's staff, trainees, subcontractors and employers. Policies and procedures comply with current legislative requirements and DfEE guidelines. Detailed information is maintained on gender, ethnicity and disability within the local labour force and gathered for trainees. An equal opportunities group meets quarterly. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and found further strengths. The grade awarded by the inspection team was higher than the grade given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent support for trainees with disabilities and personal problems
- ◆ good gender mix in traditionally single gender occupations
- ◆ well-established programme to widen participation to disaffected, at risk and excluded young people
- ◆ comprehensive research and analysis of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ effective use of clear and comprehensive equal opportunities data
- ◆ regular review and revision of equal opportunities strategies
- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding among some trainees of how equal opportunities applies to them
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of employers' implementation of equal opportunities policies

GOOD PRACTICE

A 'signer' for the hearing impaired signs at all SECTEC's events. Individual 'signers' are available to hearing impaired trainees. Twenty of SECTEC's staff have so far attended signing courses.

89. Staff are encouraged to gain the qualifications and skills which will enable them to help trainees with disabilities. Staff have been trained to administer tests for dyslexia and to learn sign language to support trainees with hearing impairments. Practical help is given to trainees with specific physical disabilities. With support and encouragement from SECTEC, women are working towards construction and engineering qualifications, and men are working towards care and dental nurse awards. A programme which starts with year-11 school pupils, encourages excluded young people to gain vocational qualifications. This programme also covers disaffected 16 year-old youths and those considered 'at risk'. SECTEC has commissioned research on the numbers of men and women employed in local industry and commerce, the issues affecting lone parents, how various disabilities affect the chances of employment and the mix of ethnic groups in the community.

A comprehensive analysis of the results has led to a strategy to redress imbalances and inequalities. Actions have been agreed and targets have been set. Progress is monitored and reviewed by sector managers every month. Clear management information is passed to programme managers and is used as the basis for setting and monitoring targets at programme level. SECTEC's equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and includes sections dealing with harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, bullying and dignity at work. All staff must attend equality of opportunity training. The first of SECTEC's staff to be trained were those whose jobs involved direct contact with trainees. The programme has now been extended to encompass all staff. The publicity and marketing material sent to trainees and employers includes SECTEC's customer charter, which promotes equality of opportunity. The customer charter clearly incorporates SECTEC's commitment to the elimination of discrimination.

90. Equal opportunities issues are raised during the trainees' induction process. Initially, trainees have different and often narrow interpretations of what constitute equal opportunities issues. They range from the belief that equality of opportunity is solely about women being sexually harassed or discriminated against, to the belief that it focuses upon discrimination against people from minority ethnic backgrounds. If employers do not have their own equal opportunities policy they are asked to 'sign up' to SECTEC's own policy. There is, however, little monitoring of employers' compliance with the policy. Marketing and publicity materials sent to trainees show no overt positive images of people with disabilities. Some of the buildings used for the training programmes are difficult to access for people with mobility difficulties. It has been decided to support trainees with mobility difficulties by providing them with alternative training if access proves difficult for them.

Trainee support

Grade 2

91. There are currently 1866 trainees working towards qualifications across 14 occupational areas, 11 of which were covered by this inspection. Most trainees are employed. A small number in the areas of health, care and public services and foundation for work are not employed but are in placements with appropriate employers. Trainees are mainly recruited through partnership arrangements with the careers service, through direct contact with employers and through the work of HRAs. All trainees receive an induction that includes information about specific occupational areas. SECTEC's staff train off the job in some occupational areas. In others, off-the-job training is subcontracted to colleges of further education or private training organisations. SECTEC has recently revised its initial assessment procedure and in some occupational areas this revision had been implemented by the time of the inspection. Some of the subcontractors administer initial assessment tests of basic and key skills. The HRAs review trainees' progress in the workplace approximately once every eight-to-10 weeks. Questionnaires to gather feedback on the quality of training are distributed at predetermined times during the training period. Interviews are carried out with successful trainees completing their

programmes and with trainees leaving without completing, to elicit comments on their training. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified further strengths and awarded a higher grade than that given by SECTEC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and innovative recruitment arrangements
- ◆ informative induction booklet
- ◆ good range of employment opportunities
- ◆ well-structured reviews
- ◆ good progression by trainees
- ◆ excellent additional support for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment in some occupational areas
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans
- ◆ some poor on-the-job NVQ support

GOOD PRACTICE

Human resource advisors do not have a fixed base and are mobile within the area. They are empowered to make decisions and take action to rectify situations, issues or concerns. Information, trainee files and support material is always readily available and enables prompt and immediate resolutions to be made. This ensures more time can be spent with trainees than at the base

92. SECTEC and the careers' service promote employment opportunities in the local area through a joint venture called the 'vacancy line'. The purpose of this service is to inform prospective trainees of all current employment vacancies. The service is co-ordinated from SECTEC's Macclesfield office. Employers and the HRAs contact the 'vacancy line' as new jobs become available. Information is passed to potential trainees through direct mail shots and advertisements in the local job centres. In its partnership with the careers service, SECTEC also operates a 'prospects club'. Young people seeking employment are encouraged by SECTEC's staff and the careers service to attend. Staff at the 'prospects club' provide careers guidance, initial assessment, support and advice to prepare young people for employment and training programmes. SECTEC, in partnership with the education service, also assists excluded and 'at risk' 14-16 year olds in schemes called 'prospects plus' and 'newstart'. They also initiate training-related events open to anyone and visit schools on a regular basis.

93. SECTEC's staff identify groups of trainees suitable for different work placements from which employers can select. Trainees are normally interviewed by employers and occasionally undergo basic skills testing. If the trainee is successful at interview, the HRAs visit the trainee and employer to discuss an individual training plan. There is widespread use of a colourful and easy-to-read induction booklet which is specifically adapted for use in each occupational area. The visual images used are eye-catching and appeal to trainees. The booklet includes a clear explanation of the organisation, the NVQs offered, what to do if things go wrong,

contact numbers, health and safety matters and equal opportunities issues. The material is presented in a durable ring folder that enables additional information to be added.

GOOD PRACTICE

The HRA in administration ensured that any gaps in the trainees' knowledge or errors in their understanding were immediately corrected or explained. This had a positive effect on the trainees. They were not left feeling negative or as if they had let down the provider

94. In all occupational areas, there are a wide range of employment opportunities. The range of employers is diverse and includes multi-national companies and small local operations. An example of this diversity is in the occupational area of business administration. Trainees are employed in a variety of organisations, including car dealerships, electrical engineering units, hospitals, accountancy firms, council offices, manufacturing firms, transport firms and a theatre company. Many trainees have developed their roles within the organisations and progressed to level 3 awards. This progression is encouraged by SECTEC, to the extent that some trainees have been supported through to degree level qualifications. In some occupational areas, trainees are offered the opportunity to gain additional qualifications over and above their main NVQ. Trainees' progress is also assisted by additional support for individual trainees. The type of support arranged by SECTEC includes more frequent visits, qualified support for those with dyslexia, and the purchasing of specialist equipment and resources. Trainees are given the opportunity to register themselves on the SECTEC's 'betterment' database. This provides employed trainees with access to current vacancy lists from which they can apply for better positions in order to improve their skills and experience.

95. Reviews of trainees' progress are well organised and involve employers and trainees. Part of the meeting is spent reviewing previous action points, and discussing problems which may limit the trainee's progress. Trainees participate with enthusiasm and are encouraged to set their own work goals. Detailed records of discussions and agreed action points are made and a copy of the review document is given to the trainee and employer. Friendly and supportive relationships exist between trainees, employers and HRAs. Each trainee has an individual training plan. However, it is not systematically updated as part of the trainee's progress review. Some trainees complete awards or attain unit accreditation without their individual training plans being amended. Additional training opportunities and work experiences were not recorded. There was no summative document to encapsulate the whole training experience.

96. Initial assessment is not effective in many occupational areas. In some sectors, initial assessment is no more than a comparison of the requirements of the NVQ with the prospective job role. Few trainees receive an in-depth and objective assessment of their basic and key skills and prior achievements. Some trainees had key skills accreditation, previous qualifications and prior experiences in the work place which were not identified or used. The initial assessment available in the 'prospects club' is rarely used in mainstream training. This weakness has been recognised by SECTEC through their self-assessment process. As a result, a standard, four-page initial assessment document has recently been introduced. This document is being used in some occupational areas, but not in all. Skills scans are used with new trainees who have little knowledge of the job role or NVQ standards to assess their suitability. This part of the initial assessment is often completed

without the employer being present, which reduces its value.

97. In some cases, the length of time taken for trainees to achieve their qualification is determined by the subcontractor's programme of off-the-job training. In these cases, there is often insufficient emphasis placed on demonstrating competence in the workplace. Too few assessments take place in the workplace and in some occupational areas there are no workplace assessors. Employers are often not able to support trainees effectively as they have little contact with subcontractor's staff or lack knowledge of off-the-job training programmes. Most employers have no understanding of NVQs, have only recently received a copy of the relevant occupational standards, and are unaware of what is required in terms of evidence collection. Some do not know what NVQ their trainee is working towards. The order in which the NVQ units are taught do not always match the employers or trainees' needs, except when the training and assessment is undertaken in SECTEC's accredited centres.

Management of training

Grade 2

98. The training staff, known as the training and delivery group, are organised into seven programme area teams who jointly cover all occupational sectors. The seven programme managers report to the senior operations manager, who reports directly to SECTEC's deputy chief executive. The programme area teams are made up of 48 HRAs and five staff with a specific training role. All trainees have a named HRA whose primary task is to undertake regular reviews of trainees' progress towards a work-based qualification. Training is provided through accredited centres supported by HRAs, SECTEC's trainers and assessors, subcontracted suppliers, and visiting and workplace trainers and assessors. Each of the programme area managers has an additional set of responsibilities relating to a specific activity across the training group. SECTEC achieved the Investor in People Standard in June 1992. They have subsequently been recredited twice. The last reassessment was in August 1998. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements about management of training in the self-assessment report. They found an additional weakness and awarded the same grade as that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive staff support and development
- ◆ clear definition of staff's roles
- ◆ high level of occupational competence among HRAs
- ◆ good internal communications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of control over some subcontractor's activities
- ◆ inconsistent implementation of strategy to develop trainees' key skills

99. The senior managers of the training and delivery group have a clear commitment to support and develop their staff. The structured support commences with a well-documented and thorough induction process. Each new recruit is paired with an existing employee as a 'buddy'. Coaching and mentoring techniques are used effectively. Staff perception surveys carried out by SECTEC indicate a high level of management support. The management acknowledges the efforts of individuals by sending them a 'well done' card when they accomplish a target.

100. The job description of the HRAs clearly defines their responsibilities as they relate to trainees' recruitment, training, review, assessment and exit from the programme. The staff profile identifies the personal competencies required by the HRA at each stage of the trainee's progression. Reviews of staff's performance against these competencies assists in the identification of staff development needs.

101. The data for the annual internal business plan is generated by the programme area teams. The programme area managers co-ordinate the contributions from their HRAs and the head of the training and delivery group works in close co-operation with the deputy chief executive on the final formulation of the plan. The training and delivery group's plan is split into occupational sectors and identifies the prime objectives for each sector. Measures, milestones and targets relating to numbers of trainees recruited, participation by ethnic trainees, retention and achievement are clearly identified. The formal annual appraisal process commences with completion of a self-appraisal by each staff member. The focus of the appraisal meeting is on the identification and review of their training and development needs against the targets in the business plan. Staff are given a further opportunity to consider their development needs at six-monthly reviews and during monthly reviews. Individual development plans are successfully fulfilled through an extensive staff development programme covering all aspects of the work of the HRAs, trainers and assessors.

102. The HRAs have appropriate occupational experience. In most cases this experience is supplemented by formal vocational qualifications. Most staff possess assessor awards or are working towards them as part of their individual development plans. Several staff possess internal verification qualifications. The skills and knowledge of the HRAs reflect the range of competencies required for guiding, monitoring and assessing the trainees undertaking work-based training. Most of the HRAs perform an assessment role in one of SECTEC's accredited centres. Some are also developing a quality monitoring role. The training group managers monitor the individual workloads of HRAs in an attempt to ensure consistent quality of service to the trainees and employers. Nevertheless, some HRAs have a disproportionately high number of trainees in their care.

103. Staff meetings are properly minuted. They occur within programme areas and across the training and delivery group as a whole. Managers use these meetings to monitor and steer the work of the group. The meetings provide opportunities for sharing working practices and build on the good informal communications among the staff. A wide range of information and standard procedures is readily available

to all staff through SECTEC's Intranet. Managers have access to a comprehensive database on their trainees. This data includes a section for tracking trainees' progress in terms of unit achievement. The HRAs are asked to provide updated information monthly to the data input staff. Managers use such information in making decisions.

104. SECTEC has 61 subcontractors, which range from small private training companies to large colleges of further education and universities. SECTEC has been aware for a number of years that the performance of some of the subcontractors is unsatisfactory. In some cases, this is owing to inadequate explanation of SECTEC's requirements. SECTEC attempts to specify its requirements to each subcontractor through a written contract. Recently, the management of the training and delivery group has devised a new, more detailed, contract. This has been discussed with, and issued to, the subcontractors. However, at the time of the inspection, few contracts had been signed and SECTEC still lacked adequate control over the training, assessment and verification undertaken by some of its subcontractors.

105. Staff development in key skills started in June 1998. A pilot group of five HRAs and three staff from small subcontractors began training to achieve the key skills practitioner's award. All received their award in early 1999. In March 1999, six more HRAs started the practitioner's programme and a further seven plan to start in November 1999. There has also been a series of single-day, staff development activities aimed at 'cascading' knowledge and techniques relating to key skills to work-based assessors. These sessions were focussed on assessors in the care sector between October 1998 and March 1999. Despite this, in the care sector the key skills of trainees are being developed in an inconsistent manner. In occupational areas such as retail, hospitality and administration, the development and assessment of key skills have been started too late in the trainees' programmes. Some of the assessment of key skills uses off-the-job activity as the primary source of evidence and neglects evidence from the workplace. The development and integrated assessment of key skills is identified as less than satisfactory in most of SECTEC's occupational areas.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

106. SECTEC has a clearly written quality-assurance policy in which it states its aim to contribute to the development of a world-class workforce. A range of procedures and processes are collected together in a quality assurance manual. SECTEC has a culture of self-appraisal, which is reflected in the formation of an internal inspection team to review training. It has achieved a number of quality assurance awards, such as ISO 9001. Quality assurance features as a standard item on the agendas for management and programme staff meetings. A number of development groups provide staff with the opportunity to contribute to SECTEC's philosophy of continuous improvement. SECTEC operates as an accredited centre

for a number of awarding bodies. In some occupational sectors, the organisation is responsible for assessment and internal verification. In others, these activities are subcontracted to local further education colleges or private training providers. The inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were deemed to be no more than normal practice. Following the preparation of the self-assessment report, an action plan was produced to address the weaknesses that had been identified. At the time of the inspection, some of these had been addressed satisfactorily. Inspectors awarded the same grade for quality assurance as that given by SECTEC

STRENGTHS

- ◆ achievement of a range of quality awards
- ◆ establishment of groups to identify and share good practice
- ◆ targets set and progress towards them monitored
- ◆ strong self-critical culture within SECTEC
- ◆ effective customer complaints process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of systematic control of internal verification
- ◆ formal monitoring of training not fully implemented

GOOD PRACTICE

In one instance within the engineering provision, where assessment is carried out by workplace assessors and internal verification by a college of further education, copies of external verifiers' reports are distributed to the employer and SECTEC so that all parties are able to monitor improvements.

107. Quality assurance arrangements are well established and clearly recorded. SECTEC places emphasis on the self-assessment approach to continuous quality improvement and all staff interviewed showed a good understanding of the process. SECTEC has developed a comprehensive set of procedures based on the criteria of ISO 9001. Staff are aware of the procedures which are rigorously audited to ensure compliance. Many of these procedures relate to contractual matters and apply to the subcontractors. The procedures include some which relate to training, such as the arrangements for internal verification. Procedures and documents are controlled and the Intranet is used effectively to disseminate the contents of the quality assurance manual to all centres used by SECTEC. Quality control procedures are covered during the induction of new staff and reinforced by mentors. SECTEC has a commitment to total quality management and recent developments include the use of the business excellence model to identify areas for improvement. One result of this has been a customer service survey, the results of which inform the business strategy of the organisation.

108. Programme quality-assurance co-ordinators meet regularly with HRAs and other staff to identify and share good practice. Suggestions are encouraged through a 'burning issues' box. When new ideas are adopted, training sessions are arranged to disseminate the information. One recent development was concerned with ensuring consistency of the review process. Specimen review sheets were

produced with a memory aid to assist completion of the review document.

109. All programme staff are involved in the target-setting process. While global targets are set at senior management level, the local knowledge of the HRAs is used to advise on targets for recruitment and achievement. In this way, information about skills shortages, employers' recruitment needs and trend analysis contribute to the organisation's business plan. Targets are monitored on a monthly basis at programme level to ensure they are being met. Staff are clear about their targets and enthusiastic about developing new programmes where needs are identified.

110. SECTEC's managers are thorough in their approach to continuous improvement. In 1998, they prepared a self-assessment report and then instigated a pilot programme of internal inspections using the guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. During 1999, a full programme of internal inspections was implemented to validate the self-assessment report. Staff and subcontractors carrying out assessments were included in the process. The reports identified weaknesses and the organisation has begun to address many of them. Regular feedback is sought from trainees. Four surveys have been carried out over a two-year period. Responses are analysed and reviewed by senior managers. However, in some cases issues are followed up informally without adequate recording of actions or monitoring of results. Although telephone surveys involving employers are carried out by a private organisation, this relates to questions on their satisfaction with the overall service rather than on training specifically. SECTEC relies too heavily on informal feedback from the HRAs.

111. SECTEC has established standards relating to timescales for dealing with customer complaints. The system is effective. Complaints are dealt with quickly and individuals are notified of the outcomes within the given timescales. Complaints are analysed and trends identified where appropriate. Some of SECTEC's staff attend quarterly meetings with college staff in an attempt to ensure that complaints about training are dealt with promptly and effectively. Trainees are encouraged to contact HRAs by mobile telephone if urgent issues arise.

112. SECTEC is an accredited centre for many awarding bodies associated with the range of qualifications offered. Work with the awarding bodies is co-ordinated by a programme manager to ensure that accredited centre status is retained. In many of the occupational sectors, assessment and internal verification by SECTEC and workplace assessors is sound. Some assessment and verification is provided by local colleges of further education and private training providers and some of these activities are also carried out effectively. However, a lack of systematic control by SECTEC has resulted in some instances of poor assessment and internal verification. Problems of this kind have arisen in general engineering, business administration, media and care. The lack of systematic control has contributed to slow or delayed assessments, and poor assessment planning and verification. The organisation has recognised some of these weaknesses and is beginning to address them.

113. Regular meetings between colleges, private training providers, employers and SECTEC's staff provide a wealth of information and feedback about training both on- and off-the-job. Good lines of communication within SECTEC provide opportunities for informal review. Many staff involved in assessment and training have been observed. The outcomes have been recorded and used to inform staff development. However, the internal inspection programme has only recently started and not all programme areas have been involved. In particular, those programmes where off-the-job training is provided by a college of further education have not yet been inspected by this internal programme. SECTEC has a firm commitment to the internal inspection programme and plans are in place to continue the process.

114. The self-assessment report compiled by SECTEC contained a good introduction to the organisation and a comprehensive action plan to build on strengths and address weaknesses. However, the self-assessment of the occupational sectors was descriptive rather than evaluative and some of the features identified as strengths were no more than normal practice. In most areas, the inspection team found strengths and weaknesses that SECTEC's staff had failed to identify.