



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1999

Michael John of Liverpool

SUMMARY

Michael John of Liverpool offers good training in hairdressing and beauty therapy for trainees in Liverpool. Trainees make fast progress with their NVQs and demonstrate good skills in both hairdressing and beauty therapy. Equal opportunities is outstanding, is effectively promoted and all staff and trainees demonstrate a good understanding of relevant issues. Trainee support, management of training and quality assurance are good. There is good support for trainees who have additional learning needs. Trainees' successes are highly valued. There is a strong management team which benefits from effective leadership and a commitment to training. Managers take responsibility for both on- and off-the-job training and there is good communication with employers. Long established, good quality assurance arrangements have led to a number of improvements in training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	1
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ outstanding quality of training facilities
- ◆ good NVQ achievement in hairdressing and beauty therapy
- ◆ outstandingly good relationships between staff, trainees and employers
- ◆ fully established culture of promoting equality of opportunity
- ◆ good initial assessment of trainees' occupational skills
- ◆ comprehensive, effective induction
- ◆ high level of pastoral and practical support
- ◆ clear and regularly reviewed policies and procedures
- ◆ diverse systems to evaluate training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient written feedback to trainees on assignments
- ◆ little key skills initial assessment
- ◆ reviews and tutorials focus on overall progress rather than unit achievement
- ◆ overly complex management-information system
- ◆ lack of rigorous internal verification

INTRODUCTION

1. Michael John of Liverpool (Michael John) was established in 1978 as a small training centre in the Seaforth area of Liverpool, with seven hairdressing trainees. Expansion in the number of trainees led to the opening of a further centre in Moorfields, Liverpool. In July 1999, all training was relocated to a purpose-built centre in Duke Street, on the edge of Chinatown and close to the commercial centre of Liverpool. This is a run-down area of Liverpool, which is about to receive a substantial amount of money through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB).

2. Michael John offers training in hairdressing and beauty therapy covering national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 to 3. Additional qualifications offered include customer service NVQs at levels 2 and 3, key skills, numberpower and wordpower. There are generally between 90 to 120 trainees placed in approximately 80 salons across Merseyside. Trainees attend the training centre for one-day each week for off-the-job training. Michael John contracts exclusively with Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There are several colleges of further education and other TEC-funded training providers offering training in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

3. The city of Liverpool has a population of approximately half a million people, with a metropolitan area population of one and a half million. It is a large commercial and manufacturing city, which lies at the mouth of the river Mersey. It has been an important seaport for almost 300 years, but the port has been in decline since the late 1960s. There are sugar and grain refineries and a large car manufacturing plant. The decline as a port, heavy damage from bombing in the second world war and the relocation out of Liverpool of several major companies has contributed to high rates of unemployment. Liverpool is recognised by Europe as a designated area in need of regeneration, owing to the high levels of social and economic deprivation. Liverpool has the oldest established black community in England, having been used as a transit point by slave traders. Just over 2 per cent of the working population of Liverpool are from minority ethnic groups. The unemployment rate in the area of Liverpool surrounding the provider is high at 17 per cent, over three times the national average of 5.2 per cent. Many of the parents of trainees are long-term unemployed. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 30.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Michael John of Liverpool produced its first self-assessment report in May 1999. Self-assessment involved all staff and views of trainees and employers were included. The training manager led the process of self-assessment. A clear action plan was produced to address weaknesses on which good progress was made by the time of inspection. An updated action plan was produced for inspectors detailing what progress had been made. Two of the five grades awarded by inspectors remained the same as those presented in the self-assessment report, while three were graded higher.

5. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days with Michael John of Liverpool during August 1999. Inspectors examined the company's and awarding body's documents. They met staff from Michael John and observed off-the-job training sessions at the training school. Ten employers were visited and during these visits eight employers were interviewed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work, and 25 portfolios. They observed 16 monitoring visits and instruction sessions and interviewed 66 trainees. The following table shows the grades awarded to the on- and off-the-job training observed by inspectors.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Hair & beauty	2	9	5	0	0	16
Total	2	9	5	0	0	16

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hair & beauty

Grade 2

6. Michael John of Liverpool has 118 hairdressing and beauty therapy trainees; 109 are hairdressers and nine are beauty therapists. In hairdressing, there are 65 national trainees, 19 modern apprentices, 17 trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people and eight New Deal clients. In beauty therapy, there are three trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people, four modern apprentices and two New Deal clients. Trainees are on NVQ levels 2 or 3 hairdressing programmes, with appropriate key skills integrated into their programmes. NVQ level 3 in customer service is also offered as an option to trainees on modern apprenticeship programmes. The training school has recently been purpose built, converted from the premises of a former car showroom. All training rooms and offices are at ground floor level. The training school operates from Monday to Thursday. On Fridays, the school premises operate as a commercial hairdressing salon, with training staff working as stylists. Trainees are employed or placed in 86 different hair and beauty salons. The self-assessment report did not identify the strengths of the hairdressing provision adequately, partly

because it was written before the move to new premises. A higher grade was awarded by inspectors than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ outstanding quality of training facilities
- ◆ good achievement of NVQs
- ◆ good on-the-job training in hairdressing and beauty therapy
- ◆ confident and motivated trainees
- ◆ outstanding theoretical training in beauty therapy
- ◆ professional standards maintained in beauty therapy
- ◆ outstandingly good working relationships among staff, trainees and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient written feedback to trainees on assignments
- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

Good practice in the promotion of safe working with hairdressing chemicals is exemplified by the production and use of cards which list safety information. Each card lists chemical ingredients of products, safety points for their use and the actions to be taken in the case of a number of possible accidents with the chemicals.

7. The training facilities at Michael John are of an extremely high quality. The company is housed in a new building, which has been purpose-built as a hairdressing and beauty-therapy training centre. The practical salon for beauty therapy is well equipped and offers fully screened cubicles. It is connected to a room which trainees use, in their time between working with clients, to write up their practical work. The hairdressing-training salon occupies the front of the building and attracts local people as clients. The client list includes a good number of men and children, as well as women, giving trainees a wide range of work experience. Trainees usually work with clients every week. There are two rooms dedicated to theory training for hairdressing, which have a range of teaching facilities available. Trainees like the new centre, not only for the quality of the training facilities, but also because of the increased emphasis on discipline since the move. All staff are well qualified, display good practical skills and demonstrate care for the quality of training being offered. There is a wide range of hair and beauty products available in the salons. Staff collect a range of products from other salons, as well as home products, to use as resources when teaching. In one theory lesson on shampoos, the range of shampoos available enabled trainees to learn sufficient information to be able to advise their clients on the variety available when working in their employers' salons. Key skills are fully integrated into the vocational programme from the start of training. Trainees are fully aware of them.

8. Both hairdressing and beauty therapy trainees have good rates of achievement. Consistently, over 60 per cent of trainees gain their NVQ level 2 qualifications. Level 3 trainees are on target to achieve to a similar degree and trainees are gaining full national traineeships and modern apprenticeships. The time taken to achieve the NVQ level 2 in hairdressing is good at an average of 18 months. Twelve per cent of trainees have learning difficulties. Currently, the retention rate is 95 per cent, which is a significant improvement from the previous rate of 87 per

cent of a year ago. Both hairdressing and beauty therapy trainees display good practical skills and adapt basic skills to meet the needs of their clients. For example, some trainees were observed cutting very specific styles, requested by clients which would be seen in few salons. Beauty trainees also treat clients regularly. Trainees have developed confident working methods and recognise their limits, asking for help whenever they are unsure, or having their work checked before proceeding. Many trainees have advanced to having their own clients at work, and even new trainees are given tasks such as putting on colours as well as the more usual shampooing.

9. Hairdressing teaching is good at Michael John. Practical hairdressing sessions have twice as many staff so that trainees get extra attention and the ratio of staff to trainees does not exceed one to eight. Staff demonstrate small steps to trainees and great emphasis is placed on developing good professional working habits. All staff show good awareness and regard for health and safety. In one level 3 hairdressing theory class, in which assessors' training is given, the finer points of conducting assessments were clearly illustrated by the tutor carrying out a carefully structured role-play. At the end of theory sessions, staff summarise and relate one lesson to the next.

10. Beauty therapy training is well organised and taught. The tutor for this area has many good ideas for training. Theory teaching, in particular, is outstanding. Different activities are made available to trainees to do at their own pace, with thorough written and oral guidance. Regular checks are made on learning and trainees work well, either individually or in small groups. Role-play is used effectively to illustrate possible real-life scenarios with clients. Beauty therapy places a high level of emphasis on professional standards. The staff and trainees at Michael John are exemplary in promoting this in the way they dress, carry out practical tasks and care for their clients. The beauty salon has fully screened couches, which afford clients privacy when treatments are being carried out.

11. There are outstandingly good working relationships among staff, trainees and employers. Trainees with problems at work are dealt with sensitively and are moved to more appropriate salons which suit their development. Employers know staff well and there is regular telephone contact both ways. If trainees miss their training day, the salons where they work are contacted. Trainees attend extra training events such as competitions or manufacturers' demonstrations. A trainee with a broken arm was able to continue her training. She was able to work on reception while attending her off-the-job training. Trainees' reviews are carried out satisfactorily; they meet contractual requirements. Assessment is mostly carried out when trainees are in the training centre. Because there is a working salon, trainees are assessed as if in the workplace. Trainees advise their trainers when they feel ready to be assessed on each unit.

12. Insufficient written feedback is given to trainees on their assignments. Comments are restricted to one or two words such as 'good work'. Although verbal feedback is given, there is no guarantee that trainees will retain all of it particularly that relating to improving future assignments. There are missed opportunities for assessments in salons. Most trainees have regular training where

they work, but there are only a few assessors available. Despite this, some trainees do not use witness testimonies or take photographs of the work that they do in the salon to provide evidence for their portfolios.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 1

13. Michael John has an equal opportunities policy which reflects current legislation and practice. It is shared with employers who do not have their own policy. There is good access and facilities for visitors with disabilities to the provider's premises. A significant number of trainees who join the programme have learning difficulties. In the past, there have been very few trainees with learning difficulties or disabilities although there are examples of good support and open access for trainees with these particular needs. Historically, there have been few trainees from minority ethnic groups, which is a fair reflection of the population within the geographical catchment area. The provider has recently relocated to new premises, which border areas of the city with a greater ethnic mix. There have been few male trainees, especially on the youth programme. The self-assessment report understated the strengths in equal opportunities. The provider had already addressed the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report by the time of the inspection. The inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and regularly reviewed equal opportunities policy
- ◆ fully established culture of promoting equality
- ◆ good marketing initiatives aimed at widening participation
- ◆ extensive and positive promotion of equal opportunities in company literature
- ◆ widespread liaison with and support to minority groups
- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities at induction
- ◆ good understanding of rights and responsibilities by trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor representation of minority ethnic and male trainees
- ◆ no systematic analysis of data

14. The equal opportunities policy is formally reviewed each year. Previous copies show how this has developed into a document that is comprehensive and written in language that is easy to understand. It has a no-nonsense style, which gives a strong message about respect for each other and the action the provider will take if

rights and privileges are abused. It covers all the relevant legislation and includes a section on harassment and bullying. One of the partners has direct responsibility for implementing the policy and is clearly named in the document as the point of contact for any concerns.

15. Michael John has a long history of trying to promote equality through its marketing activities. Equal opportunities is a serious issue for all the staff and it is given a high priority that is reflected in the organisation's policies, attitudes and business planning. It is a permanent agenda item at staff meetings. Many links have been established and nurtured with local minority groups. Equality is a standard feature of staff's induction and the provider has a genuine 'open door' policy which welcomes all trainees who wish to train with Michael John. A member of Michael John's staff makes specific visits two-to-three times a year to monitor equal opportunities in the workplace. Discussions are held with owners and managers to identify and address issues.

16. A number of new ideas have been introduced to try to remove various barriers to gaining access to the training programme. All hairdressing trainees are given a hairdressing kit at the expense of Michael John. Many trainees come from low income families, but no discrimination is made in who receives kits. A barbering course is being launched later this year and the publicity is already starting to attract interest among prospective male trainees in particular. There are plans to provide training in the specialist field of Afro-Caribbean hair as the new training centre is close to a predominantly black area of Liverpool. The first Chinese-owned salon has just joined the programme as a placement for trainees. One of Michael John's partners is in discussion with a local Chinese community centre to explore ways of attracting interest from this sector. Negotiations are at an early stage with various other community organisations that represent women, young people and local black communities. The marketing executive has identified a particular region of Liverpool which does not have easy access to hairdressing training. The nearest provider is a considerable distance away but, by crossing the River Mersey, trainees could more quickly and easily reach Michael John. A promotional campaign has now been organised to offer people living in this area opportunities which were not previously available. A sponsorship deal is under discussion with a football team from a local boy's school. This promotional activity has been carefully considered and is featured in the provider's marketing plan for the year. This plan sets numerous targets and is closely monitored on an ongoing basis.

17. A new high-quality brochure has recently been launched that has excellent images of Michael John's current trainees representing a broad range of ethnic groups and both genders. It carries an original logo that states the provider's intention to advance equality of opportunity for all. Some of the key messages appear in one of the Chinese dialects to attract trainees from the adjacent Chinese community. Headed paper and business cards are being reprinted to show the new promotional slogan. Newspaper advertisements promote equality of opportunity. Application forms have highlighted messages that clearly explain the provider's 'open door' policy. A newsletter, which is regularly issued to trainees and employers, promotes equality. One recent prominent article appealed for salons to

donate their surplus equipment to a local school for the deaf which was offering hairdressing training.

18. Michael John has extensive connections with the local community, which have been established over many years of working in the region. There have been many presentations to local schools, including exclusively boys' schools in the area. Work experience placements are provided to local school children every year. The provider attends careers guidance exhibitions for young people.

19. New trainees attend a two-day induction programme. They are taught about their rights and responsibilities during the first day. On the second day trainees work on equal opportunities exercises in small groups. They are encouraged to explore the issues and discuss their findings with their peers. The concept of having respect for each other is high on the agenda. Their understanding of equality is tested at the end of induction with a formal assessment paper. A recent analysis of trainees' understanding of induction showed that over 80 per cent had understood equal opportunities, grievance procedures and their own rights and responsibilities. Trainees who have been on programme for over a year have a clear memory of induction. They are clear about equal opportunities and are certain about who to approach with complaints and appeals. Trainees are keen to talk about equal opportunities.

20. There are currently no trainees from minority ethnic groups on the programme. Records for the past three years show that there is an average of 1 per cent of minority ethnic trainees. There are presently two men and 116 women on the programme. Over the past three years, nearly 6 per cent of new trainees have been men. Not all equal opportunities data collected are systematically analysed. Achievements and early leavers figures are not broken down to analyse any trends regarding gender and ethnicity.

Trainee support

Grade 2

21. Michael John has a large number of trainees who have additional learning needs. Currently, 12 per cent of national trainees and 12 out of 95 of those on other work-based training programmes for young people require additional support to complete their training programmes. Applicants to Michael John undergo a formal initial assessment of their basic literacy and numeracy abilities, as well as a one-to-one interview and occupational skills test. These are used to determine the most suitable route for the individual trainee and the level of support required. A two-day induction is carried out at the off-the-job training centre with a further induction into the workplace. Another induction takes place between NVQ levels 2 and 3. A member of staff visits trainees at 12-weekly intervals in the workplace to carry out reviews, with off-the-job tutorials provided in between. Managers review all components of trainee support at least annually. The management and staff take responsibility for providing a supportive environment in which trainees can flourish. Michael John failed to recognise a number of its significant strengths in

this area and the grade awarded by inspectors was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ active recruitment programme
- ◆ good occupational initial assessment
- ◆ comprehensive, effective induction
- ◆ good support for trainees with additional learning needs
- ◆ trainees' successes highly valued
- ◆ high level of pastoral and practical support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ overemphasis on overall achievement of qualifications in reviews and tutorials

GOOD PRACTICE

Good practice in induction was observed which made health and safety both true to life and memorable to trainees. During induction, two tutors staged a mock accident involving tripping over an electrical lead, with one tutor playing the role of victim and one an onlooker who panicked. Trainees were then asked what the onlooker should have done and how the accident could have been avoided. This real life situation brought home strongly the health and safety theory that had been covered earlier, and trainees understanding was greatly improved as a consequence.

22. The provider actively promotes hairdressing as a career, and its own training programme, through widespread marketing and promotional events. These include participation in careers exhibitions across the city, individual school careers conventions, industry days and mock interview sessions with fifth-year pupils. In 1998-99, 14 of these events were undertaken, reaching as many potential trainees as possible. Pre-course marketing literature is well presented and informative, regarding both a hairdressing career and the content of the training programmes available, enabling trainees to make informed choices. The initial assessment is structured to include a half-day trial within the training centre, where trainees practice shampooing and blow-drying on models, as well as working as a junior. This experience is discussed and evaluated and suitable trainees are matched to salons where they undergo a further taster day or days to determine whether the salon is suitable for them. The emphasis during work experience is on the trainee finding out if they would like to work in this profession. This careful and considered assessment gives trainees a real chance to see what the world of work is all about and ensures that tutors can identify trainees' strengths and weaknesses before they start. The comprehensive induction programme covers the rights and responsibilities of a trainee and what is expected of them, as well as programme content, health and safety, equal opportunities, complaints and appeals procedures, assessment and progression opportunities. Good use is made of a full range of teaching methods and resources, including group work, brainstorming exercises, role-play, recap sessions and written testing. These lively and participative sessions have a long-lasting impact on trainees. Both first- and second-year trainees have good recall and understanding of their induction. Induction is also carried out when trainees progress to NVQ level 3, to include career progression and an explanation of all of the units (including the optional ones) of the qualification. A detailed handbook is issued to all trainees to re-enforce this.

23. Michael John has built up strong links with a number of schools for trainees with additional learning needs. One day a week, work experience sessions are offered to these students, with eight of them successfully moving to the main programme this year. A trainee with mild Downs Syndrome was fully supported and achieved her NVQ level 1 in 12 months. The provider also works with disaffected young people under the Merseyside School Project offering work experience, with six of the original 30 young people involved becoming national trainees. To further improve the support offered, both wordpower and numberpower assignments have been re-written to give them an occupational bias, making them relevant, interesting and informative to trainees. Members of staff have completed training in alcohol- and drug-related issues to further their knowledge and provide support for trainees with problems in these areas. A counselling help-line set up by the local TEC is widely promoted, both within the centre and through the newsletter. Outside agencies, such as the Young Persons Advisory Service, have talked to trainees in the centre, covering personal areas such as contraception and gay and lesbian issues. Each trainee's individual success is highly valued and celebrated. This is re-enforced through initiatives such as the 'trainee of the month' award for which all trainees who attend regularly and work well are eligible to be put forward, to 'trainee of the season' for trainees who have overcome particular barriers or worked particularly hard. Trainees' successes are promoted in the company's newsletter for trainees, published every two months and which is distributed to all salons. Trainees have sufficient opportunities to discuss progression and employment opportunities.

24. Photographs of trainees who have gone on to open their own salons are featured prominently within the training centre as role models for existing trainees. Trainees feel that they can also succeed in operating their own businesses. As well as helping in securing employment for trainees at the end of their training, this commitment to success continues after trainees have left. There are several examples of past-trainees being helpful in filling their salon vacancies with Michael John's trainees in the past year.

25. Although there is no formal accreditation of prior learning, trainees undergo an occupational skills assessment which does take into account trainees' previous experience. Trainees who quickly demonstrate competence are then put on a fast track. Trainees have individual training plans, which include the results of initial assessment. They are updated throughout the training programme. Although basic skills in literacy and numeracy are tested during initial assessment, there are few key skills assessments. Notes are made of trainees' school achievements in information technology, mathematics and English. However, detailed assessment to determine current attainment does not take place and all trainees complete the same assignments and projects irrespective of their current key skills level on joining. Whether or not trainees become modern apprentices has more to do with their salons' wishes than actual accomplishment of trainees. Reviews and tutorials are not utilised fully to set targets for trainees in the early completion of elements or units. Progress is discussed and overall targets set, but this is not broken down sufficiently into elements or range to enable trainees to channel their energies to complete individual units. This has led to several examples of second-year trainees

having begun several units but not having fully completed even one. The individual training plans do detail target completion dates for units, but these dates are not reviewed.

Management of training

Grade 2

26. Michael John has a business plan and a five-year strategic plan which clearly details the objectives of the organisation. The staff training and development programme supports these objectives. A recent move to new purpose-built premises is the realisation of one of the provider's principal long-term aims. All training and assessment are now managed from this single building. Two partners own the company and take an active, everyday management role in the business. There is a managing director and a team of trainer/assessors. Contractual targets are closely monitored and reviewed with the appropriate personnel. Staff meetings are held regularly and most are formally recorded. Policies and procedures are well established. Company documents are currently in the process of being updated and reissued. Staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Lines of internal communication are effective and understood by all staff. Michael John was awarded the Investors in People Standard in 1993 and has been re-accredited every three years since then. The workforce is stable, and currently there are nine employees working for the two partners. Numbers of trainees have been fairly static, with no significant growth or decline over the past four years. The strengths stated in the self-assessment report were not concise but were overall accurate. Inspectors identified an additional strength. The self-assessment report identified one weakness but this had already been addressed at the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent and effective staff appraisal
- ◆ annual analysis and comparison of company performance
- ◆ significant investment in training
- ◆ open and responsive management style
- ◆ effective management

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor-quality documents
- ◆ overly complex management-information system

27. Each member of staff is set personal targets at the beginning of the year. These are reviewed every three months by the chief executive. Employees' performance during the interim period is measured using the quality assurance and internal verification systems. New objectives are set for staff for the following quarter, if appropriate. Training needs are identified and transferred to the staff development

programme. A report summarising their performance that year, is prepared and agreed with each employee. This is a well-established process which has been in operation for several years. Occupational experience of trainers is maintained through working in the provider's own commercial salon once a week, or in other commercial salons.

28. The company measures its own performance by the number of trainees who start on the programmes, those who leave early and those who successfully achieve the qualification. The number of trainees on each programme at any one time is also closely monitored. These statistics are used to make year-on-year comparisons of the company's performance. An annual report is prepared which summarises the company's overall performance. This is a regular and formal process which has been conducted for the past several years. A recent analysis showed that there was an adverse trend in trainees leaving early. Managers responded to this by improving the quality of initial assessment and offering work experience to school leavers, and there has been a significant improvement in recent months.

29. The purpose-built training centre is a significant step in the development of the organisation and represents a major investment in training. This has been possible following the sale of several commercial salons after a decision was made to concentrate on training. The partners have a clear vision and business plan which reflects their long-term confidence and commitment to the future of hairdressing training in Liverpool. The trainees benefit from a high-quality teaching environment, which is specifically designed to enhance the learning experience.

30. The partners are easily accessible to trainees, staff and employers. There is a high degree of mutual respect between everyone involved in the training process that promotes an open and friendly working atmosphere. Staff feel able to express their views and are kept well informed of developments. Senior staff are excellent role models for trainees. They work to high professional standards and have many years' experience. They convey great enthusiasm about the industry and the training programme. They share the burden of maintaining salon hygiene and are happy to use a mop and bucket, working alongside trainees. The partners and managers know all the trainees by their first names. Discipline is firm but fair, and prepares trainees well for the working environment. Staff and trainees' concerns are taken seriously and are dealt with promptly. Teamwork is paramount and is promoted in much of the provider's marketing material and visual imagery.

31. The provider is currently updating and reissuing all of the documents used in the training and assessment process. The older documents have become faded from repeated copying and some are hardly legible. Margins and text have disappeared in some handouts. Staff, trainees and employers' booklets have been collated using a variety of house styles and a mix of old and newly designed sheets. Some of the old and new materials contain spelling, punctuation and spacing errors. Significant progress has been made to address this problem but there is still some way to go before all materials have been updated.

32. Performance data is analysed to meet TEC requirements. Although these have been successful in identifying some issues and in producing annual comparisons,

the process lacks sophistication and does not support good analysis of trainees' achievements over the year. The provider does not trace a specific group of trainees from the start to completion of their time on the programme. Starters and leavers are not analysed by different NVQ and level. The average length of time to achieve the qualifications is not accurately calculated. Statistics do not determine achievement by gender, ethnicity or disability. There has been some good analysis of information about early leavers, but not all the useful means of measuring performance are being exploited.

33. There have been significant developments in recent months to improve co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training. Michael John realised that not all salons were aware of their trainees' progress and some learning and assessment opportunities were being missed. It responded by creating and filling a new post which has expanded its expertise in marketing and promotional activity. New employers' handbooks have been developed to explain the role of salon owners and supervisors. Communication between Michael John and employers has improved and salons are now visited every two-to-three month, which is more frequently than before. This has gone some way to addressing a previously identified weakness but has not yet made a full impact on the way work-based training is managed.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

34. Michael John has well-established quality assurance procedures. One member of staff has specific responsibility for implementing and monitoring quality assurance. There have been recent efforts to train additional staff to become qualified internal verifiers within the organisation. This initiative has been delayed, largely owing to the pressures of moving premises recently. Some other minor aspects of the quality assurance system have likewise been disrupted by the move. Recent visits from external verifiers have reported good quality assurance procedures which comply with the awarding body's requirements. Contract requirements for training have been met. Systems are in place to measure the organisation's own performance. Trainees' achievements and destinations are effectively monitored. The self-assessment report overstated the strengths of quality assurance. Action had already been taken to address the stated weaknesses by the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-established programme of continuous improvement
- ◆ clear and regularly reviewed policies and procedures
- ◆ wide range of systems to evaluate training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ quality assurance system not fully extended to salons
- ◆ lack of rigorous internal verification

GOOD PRACTICE

The provider has established good practice in obtaining feedback from trainees and employers on training. The results of trainees' feedback and the programme review meeting for last year were published in the provider's newsletter. This was distributed to all trainees and employers and feedback, including action to be taken on comments, was given in a concise and open style. The provider expressed its gratitude to all trainees and salon owners for their help in compiling the survey. This feedback was commented on positively by both trainees and employers.

35. Michael John has a long history of introducing ideas which aim to enhance the learning experience for trainees and to improve the assessment practice and general standards of the organisation. Employees and customers' feedback is highly encouraged. Company policies are well written and easy to understand. Quality assurance procedures are regularly reviewed and reissued when improvements have been suggested and tested. Trainees and salon owners have frequent opportunities to express their views. Feedback is gained through formal questionnaires at various stages of progression; through quality-circle meetings attended only by trainees as a forum for discussing improvements; through visits to and discussions with employers; through programme review meetings attended by assessors and employers; and through personal interviews with trainees and salon supervisors. Self-assessment has been embraced and written into the quality assurance procedures. The internal verifier does spot checks on training sessions and grades trainers according to their performance. Areas of improvement are included in a company action plan which is frequently reviewed and updated. Recent examples of new initiatives to improve training include new handbooks for salons explaining work-based training and assessment; enhanced newsletters issued to trainees and employers; the introduction of trial and taster days for prospective trainees. It also includes revised key skills materials; recruitment of a sales and marketing specialist; and the opening of the new centre. The organisation's vision statement is to exceed customers' expectations. Quality assurance is widely discussed and understood by all staff who see it as a vital component of successful training.

36. Trainees attend off-the-job training one day each week. There is little work-based assessment and the provider has already recognised the need to address this. Staff visit salons to review trainees' progress and carry out risk assessments. The quality assurance system does not include observations of the work-based trainers. No records are kept of the resources available in salons where trainees are placed or the competencies of the salon's training staff. The internal verifier is experienced and has well-established systems and sampling plans. However, records of internal verification lack detail and tend to summarise a group of trainees rather than provide useful feedback on assessment practice relating to individual trainees. The internal verifier has many other management responsibilities and has recognised the need to train other members of staff to take on some of the internal verification work. The emphasis is on sampling every trainee and this places a burden on the time available for internal verification. There are noticeable inconsistencies in the standard of trainees' portfolios. The way they are organised, the style and content, and the breadth of evidence, varies. The internal verification process has not identified and moderated these differences. Similarly, assessment decisions are not always accurately and fully transferred to the trainees' logbooks. Progress-tracking charts show that trainees



have achieved units but logbooks still require to be completed. Again, the internal verification process has not identified this.