



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

# Reaseheath College

## SUMMARY

Reaseheath College provides training in a wide range of land-based subjects. There are good resources for off-the-job training, which is well taught. There is careful monitoring of the training programmes. The college is well supported by employers. There are good facilities for trainee support. At the time of the first inspection, some training programmes were not arranged flexibly to be available outside the terms of the college's academic year. There was little assessment in the workplace and there were too few workplace assessors. Internal verification procedures were weak. Arrangements for assuring the quality of work-based training were underdeveloped. The college was reinspected 14 months after the original inspection. It has made significant changes to improve the quality of its provision. Some changes are still in their early stages of implementation. Training programmes are no longer rigidly timetabled to fit in with the college's academic year. There is more assessment in the workplace. Across the programmes, however, there is some inconsistency in the standards assessors expect from trainees. Modern apprentices make slow progress towards reaching their milestones. Equality of opportunity is now promoted more effectively in the workplace. The college has not, however, taken specific action to recruit from groups under-represented on training programmes.

**As a result of the reinspection of Reaseheath College, the original published report text for agriculture and equal opportunities has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which are not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in the original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Agriculture	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3



### **KEY STRENGTHS**

- ◆ high academic standards in the college
- ◆ stable group of highly committed employers
- ◆ strong concern for the welfare of trainees
- ◆ excellent resources for learning at college
- ◆ enterprise and initiative of staff in devising effective work-based training

### **KEY WEAKNESS**

- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment

## INTRODUCTION

1. Reaseheath College is a further education college offering land-based programmes. It is based at Nantwich, in south Cheshire. It was founded as a school of dairying in 1920. The college has an attractive 180-hectare estate, with some fine Victorian buildings. The estate includes a commercial farm, a horticulture unit and shop, a nine-hole golf course, equine yards, a small-animal collection, farm machinery workshops and extensive resources for independent learning and information technology. The college serves a large rural area for work-based training in Cheshire and the adjacent counties. The catchment area for full-time students includes countries overseas. The college is close to the town of Crewe and the industrial conurbations of Manchester, Merseyside and the Potteries. The college's curriculum includes traditional agriculture and a wide variety of other activities, which reflect the amenities and entertainment required in a predominately urban society. The college has diverse sources of income. About 45 per cent of its annual earnings comes from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Some 40 per cent is from tuition fees, the farm, student residences and other commercial activities. Six per cent is derived from higher education courses and 8 per cent from contracts with South and East Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), North and Mid Cheshire TEC and Chester, Ellesmere and the Wirral TEC (CEWTEC). The co-ordinating TEC for quality assurance purposes is South and East Cheshire TEC.

2. At the time of the first inspection the college had 122 trainees on work-based programmes: all of them were youth trainees but the college also offers work-based training for adults. These trainees were either employed or in work placements, in an area about 50 miles from west to east and 35 miles from north to south. At the time of reinspection, there were 123 trainees of whom 59 were modern apprentices, 42 were on national traineeships and 22 were on youth training. There were nine clients on the full-time training education option of New Deal. Levels of employment vary widely among the areas served by the three TECs. In the area of CEWTEC, unemployment stands at 7.4 per cent; in the North and Mid Cheshire TEC area at 5.1 per cent; and in the South and East Cheshire TEC area at 3.3 per cent. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers who gained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) in Cheshire was 54.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The proportion of school leavers who stay on in full-time education and training ranges from 66 per cent to 78 per cent. There is a shortage of young people taking up work-based training, even though employment opportunities in industries such as intensive horticulture are buoyant. The number of trainees in programmes managed by the college has declined steadily from 192 in 1996-97. Since 1999, the numbers of trainees have remained the same, at 122. The college's training schemes administration employs eight people, including five placement visitors and assessors, some of whom work part time.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Reaseheath College prepared a self-assessment report before an inspection by the FEFC in 1997. The college has also undertaken self-assessment of its higher education provision and has been evaluated as part of an inspection of its partner institution. The college has since carried out a further self-assessment report for the FEFC. The work done to prepare for these other inspections was incorporated in the self-assessment report for the Training Standards Council. The college received help with self-assessment from South and East Cheshire TEC. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses, some of which were no more than normal practice. The self-assessment report was accurate in its assessment of quality assurance. Further weaknesses identified by inspectors resulted in lower grades being awarded for agriculture, equal opportunities, trainee support and management of training. An action plan was drawn up following the first inspection which addressed the weaknesses identified through both the first self-assessment and inspection. Prior to the reinspection, a special report was produced outlining the progress made in implementing the action plan. The majority of the actions specified in the plan have been implemented. Following the implementation of the action plan, members of the senior management team determined the strengths and weaknesses in the college's provision.

4. At the time of the first inspection a team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at Reaseheath College. They met 75 trainees, visited 14 employers and work-placement providers and interviewed 18 members of their staff; they also held discussions with members of college staff. They observed seven formal sessions of training or assessment. The college provided a comprehensive range of documentation, including trainees' records of assessment, portfolios and internal and external verification reports. The inspection team examined these documents closely.

5. Reinspection was carried out by team of three inspectors over a total of nine days in May 2000. Inspectors interviewed 32 trainees, and 24 members of college staff. They visited 14 employers and interviewed 11 workplace supervisors. They looked at a comprehensive range of documents, including trainees' portfolios, course managers' files and reports and other material from the awarding bodies. They observed three training sessions and all were awarded a grade 3.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Agriculture

#### Grade 3

6. In the occupational area of agriculture, training managed by the college is provided in agriculture, commercial and amenity horticulture, animal care, floristry, and horse care. Of the college's trainees, 59 are modern apprentices, 42 are national trainees, and 22 are on other training. Twenty trainees have been

transferred from another training provider in the area which has ceased operation. These trainees are all in the process of becoming either modern apprentices or national trainees. Their individual training plans are being updated as appropriate. Nine adults are on the New Deal full-time education and training option. The distribution of trainees across the different programmes areas is shown in the table below.

Programme area	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other training
Caring for animals		6	
Horse care		4	1
Floristry	3	4	
Amenity horticulture (old qualifications)	2		6
Amenity horticulture (hard landscape)	7	3	9
Amenity horticulture (decorative)	4	6	
Amenity horticulture (sports turf)		5	6
Commercial horticulture	4	2	
Agriculture livestock production	38	12	
Agriculture mixed farming	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>22</b>

7. The college offers training programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3. In providing training, the college currently works with 101 employers and work-placement supervisors. The college has obtained work placements for trainees at 46 farms and other agricultural businesses, 15 golf courses, 26 horticultural firms, some of which are particularly large, five animal care businesses, four equine enterprises, and five florists.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ very slow achievement of awards
- ◆ weak assessment process
- ◆ incomplete individual training plans
- ◆ low awareness of key skills among trainees and employers
- ◆ lack of workplace assessment in most areas
- ◆ ineffective progress reviews

8. Following the first inspection, an action plan was produced to address the

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*This is an example of learning support for trainees in the workplace. The college has identified innovative forms of funding for additional learning support. A horticulture trainee is receiving a twelve sessions of basic skills training in the workplace. Training takes place on a one-to-one basis and in a relaxed environment. The training is effective and vocationally relevant and the trainee is making good progress.*

weaknesses and build on the strengths identified by inspectors. A review was undertaken of all aspects of work-based provision. The college recognised the need for more flexibly arranged training within the various vocational areas. A new model for the implementation of work-based training and assessment was devised. This formed the basis of a rationale for further change. The work-based training centre was moved to a more central location on the campus in order that it might have closer liaison with student services. Staff duties within the work-based training team have been reallocated. Four additional members of staff have been recruited to provide work-based training. A college steering group was formed to lead the implementation of change. A timetable for implementing changes and reviewing their effectiveness was drawn up. This also specified who was responsible for carrying out the requisite actions, the timescales within which action must be completed, and the sources of evidence to indicate whether the action had been successful. The college had awarded training in this occupational area a grade 2. Inspectors considered that the college had made some progress in improving training in this occupational area, but they awarded a lower grade.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ well-developed and flexibly arranged training programmes
- ◆ enterprise and initiative of staff in devising on-the-job training
- ◆ good training resources for on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ highly effective reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ good progress in developing key skills training

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*A greenkeeping trainee works for a golf club, which belongs to a large international leisure group. The trainee's NVQ level 3 training is regarded as part of the company's normal personnel practice, which includes appraisal and continuous professional development for all staff. The head greenkeeper is a qualified assessor. Immediately after each off-the-job training day at the college, he asks the trainee what has been learnt. The trainee's work schedule is adapted to allow the trainee to apply his newly acquired knowledge.*

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ modern apprentices' slow progress towards achieving NVQ level 2
- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment
- ◆ no verification of witness testimonies
- ◆ poor presentation of evidence in portfolios

9. Following a full review of the work-based training provision within the college, a new model of work-based training has been implemented. All NVQ programmes have been modularised thereby enabling a more flexible delivery of training. Trainees can enter the programme throughout the year. The extent to which trainees receive off-the-job training at the college depends upon their individual need. New and more effective, clearly written procedures have been developed. Staff have been briefed on all aspects of change and on how to implement the new training model. The new work-based training model aims to ensure that training, assessment and evidence gathering all take place in the work environment. It is new and has not yet had enough time to prove its effectiveness.

10. Reviews of trainees' progress reviews and action planning are carried out

effectively in the workplace. These reviews take place at six- to eight-week intervals and are conducted by the workplace assessors. Copies of the records of reviews are circulated to the employer, workplace assessor, trainee and they are placed in the trainees' files. Trainees are kept well informed of their progress. During their reviews, trainees are set appropriate targets.

11. Through many years of providing training to the local land-based industries, the college has established good work placements in all subject areas. Some of these placements are with companies, which are among the leaders in their occupational field. They have access to resources that the college would not be able to provide. The resources available for off-the-job training are of good quality and are well maintained. Where new provision has been established, especially in animal care and equine studies, the quality of physical resources is very high. The college has encouraged the establishment of commercial enterprises on its premises. They include an equine veterinary practice. The elite MOET (Multiple Ovulation Embryo Transfer) dairy herd has been transferred to the college's farm.

12. Reaseheath College has staff who are well qualified in their subject. There is good teaching in off-the-job training sessions. Lessons are well planned and they follow the good procedures laid down by the college's academic standards committee. Staff have made good progress in making key skills training an integral part of some NVQ programmes and in identifying how trainees can develop and demonstrate key skills through their occupational tasks. All trainees are required to have key skills training but they receive no assessment of their key skills when they start their programmes.

13. The new work-based training model has been developed in consultation with all programme teams. Staff have shown enterprise and initiative in implementing the new model for work-based training rapidly. The model allows for off-the-job-training to focus on each unit of the NVQ. By no longer timetabling training programmes rigidly to fit within its academic year, the college has been able to offer more flexibly arranged training and be more responsive to the needs of trainees and employers.

14. Trainees' progress towards achievement of qualifications is slow. The new work-based training model has not yet fully replaced its more rigid predecessor. In 1998/1999, no modern apprentice achieved an NVQ level 2 qualification. Some of the trainees who began after September 1999 are due to complete work for their NVQ level 2 in the next few months. In the current year of 1999-2000, the retention rates for modern apprentices and national trainees, respectively are 100 per cent and 88 per cent.

15. Few employers are trained as assessors in the workplace. Some employers do not understand the NVQ process and are unaware of the content of the trainees' programme. Members of the work-based training team now visit employers more frequently to raise their awareness, and increase their understanding of the NVQ process and the trainees' priorities. Many employers now appreciate how important



it is for trainees to receive good training and rigorous assessment in the workplace. There is better co-ordination between on-the-job and off-the-job training.

16. Work placement providers now provide more witness testimony to trainees' competence. Checks on the authenticity of the witness testimonies are not carried out. Internal verification of assessment is insufficiently rigorous, is not carried out in full and does not cover all NVQ units and elements. Records of internal verification are not always kept. Verifiers do not give assessors written feedback on their assessments. Records are not always made and feedback to assessors is verbal. It does not cover all units and elements.

17. Assessment lacks rigour. In agriculture, where there is the largest number of trainees, assessment is not planned adequately and, in some cases, it is not properly recorded. Most portfolios are poorly organised. Evidence is not referenced to the performance criteria for each unit and element. There is little use of diverse evidence apart from tests and written assignments. It is exceedingly difficult for trainees to gather all the requisite evidence for their portfolios. Individual and dispersed members of staff hold the evidence and there are no systematic arrangements whereby trainees can obtain this from them. Furthermore, trainees on the agriculture programmes do not retain and look after their own portfolios. The portfolios of floristry trainees, however, contain clear records of assessment and indicate when assessment is due to take place.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

18. Since the first inspection, Reaseheath College has reviewed its equal opportunities arrangements. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the first inspection were scrutinised by the equal opportunities review committee. An action plan to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses was drawn up. A new chair of the equal opportunities review committee has been appointed and a sub-committee to focus on work based training has been formed.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ passive approach to extending equal opportunities
- ◆ no policy on harassment or bullying
- ◆ no monitoring of trainees' experience in relation to equal opportunities
- ◆ little promotion of equality of opportunity to employers

19. The college has made good progress in carrying out its post-inspection action plan. It has reviewed its progress, changed the targets in the action plan where necessary, and clearly identified those that still have to be achieved. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the revised self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ effective measures to increase understanding of equal opportunities across the college
- ◆ systematic analysis of equal opportunities data

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient staff development related to equal opportunities
- ◆ little action to recruit from under-represented groups

20. The equal opportunities committee has established a work-based training focus group as a sub-committee. This group has explored ways of ensuring that equality of opportunity is upheld in the workplace. A leaflet providing essential information and guidance for employers on equal opportunities has been produced. This has been well received by most employers. It clearly exemplifies ways of promoting equality of opportunity. These include methods of countering entrenched and discriminatory attitudes towards race, gender and disability, valuing and respecting others, encouraging skills of working with others, and taking account of trainees' individual learning styles when allocating trainees work. Staff are encouraged, when carrying out reviews of trainees' progress, to ask the trainees sensitively whether they have encountered any problems in the workplace relating to equal opportunities. The college has implemented a policy for dealing with harassment and bullying. A copy is included in the student handbook and this is given to all trainees. Staff responsible for students who are residential at the college have found this policy both helpful and effective. The college has a programme of observation of training. Since February 2000, staff carrying out the observation have to report on the extent to which the training meets the needs of every trainee in the group, irrespective of his or her ability. The college has implemented a policy for dealing with harassment and bullying. The group now focuses in particular on the extent to which equality of opportunity is upheld through work-based training. Members of the group have a broad understanding of issues related to equal opportunities. The training manager of work-based training has taken over the chairmanship of the equal opportunities review group.

21. Four questions have been added to the questionnaires for trainees that relate specifically to equal opportunities. Responses to these have been analysed. Where responses have been negative or have highlighted weaknesses, evidence to substantiate the trainees' criticism has been sought and appropriate action has been taken. The questions have been re-worded to ensure that they are clear and understandable. An analysis is made of trainees' responses and this is broken down in terms of the respondents' gender and age.

22. The college's strategic plan acknowledges the need for all persons in the college to increase their awareness and understanding of equal opportunities issues. The college has implemented a new learning policy of which the key objective is

inclusive learning for all. Staff development has taken place on an informal basis for the work-based training team on how to promote equal opportunities successfully in the workplace. In staff development sessions, consideration has been given to ways of promoting equal opportunities through methods of teaching and learning, and implementation of the learning policy. Staff have not received any training to help them increase their understanding of equal opportunities issues and legislation. There are no trainees with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups. The college has not launched any initiatives to counter gender stereotyping in this occupational area and attract, for instance, male trainees to equine and animal care programmes, and female trainees to agriculture programmes.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

23. Most trainees are referred to Reaseheath College by the school careers service, or through recruitment at careers conventions. Course information and marketing materials are widely available. Most trainees have an interview. Trainees are given an induction. All trainees undertake an initial basic skills assessment. The college has a well-established learning support service which caters for all of the college's courses and work-based programmes. All trainees are provided with an individual training plan. Pre-placement health and safety checks are made in employers' premises. Trainees are visited at their work placements by college staff. A trainee charter is available. Inspectors identified weaknesses additional to those in the college's self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that proposed.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good learning support facilities at college
- ◆ good pastoral care
- ◆ clear career goals

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of individualised training
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning or achievements
- ◆ poorly supported late starters
- ◆ restricted initial assessment

24. Most trainees are recruited to programmes which begin in the autumn term. Most of them are formally interviewed. There is good initial support for these trainees. All trainees undertake a basic skills assessment regardless of the level of their previous academic attainments. There are well-qualified learning support staff and good facilities for independent learning. There are well-documented support

procedures about which trainees are informed. All trainees undertake a well-structured induction, delivered at the college. It lasts for three to four days. Trainees who start their programmes at times of the year, other than the beginning of the autumn term do not receive an adequate level of support. Interviews and initial assessments are standard for most trainees. They do not allow for individualised training plans to be developed. Most trainees are clear about their career goals, the opportunities for future employment and further education opportunities. Placement visitors are allocated in a specialist area. The placement officers have established a good working relationship with employers. Placement visitors visit each trainee in placement, at least once every 12 weeks.

25. Key skills are not assessed on entry. Little use is made of accreditation of prior learning or prior achievement. The programme does not cater effectively for late entrants. There is no roll-on and roll-off provision. The college marketing information does not clearly describe NVQs and work-based routes to qualification. Monitoring and progression review visits are largely ineffective, but they do offer good pastoral support. Health and safety monitoring does not always take place effectively during monitoring visits. Risk assessments are only now being developed in an occupational area which has many dangers.

### **Management of training**

**Grade 3**

26. Management of work-based training is closely integrated with the rest of the organisational structure of the college. There is no separate training agency. The manager of the training schemes reports to the director of curriculum and then to the principal. Off-the-job training is delivered according to the five vocational sectors of the college and employers. The college became an Investor in People in 1995 and was re-validated for the award in 1998. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses which were norms. Inspectors found further weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than had been proposed.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ training well integrated with other college systems
- ◆ college strongly supported by employers
- ◆ culture of open debate and teamwork
- ◆ good staff review and development scheme

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some inappropriate policies in regard to work-based training and NVQ
- ◆ poorly administered documentation
- ◆ slow progress in training assessors among staff and employers

27. The senior management team is well informed about the operational aspects of the training scheme. The training scheme manager makes regular and comprehensive reports to the college academic board and curriculum committee. College managers actively promote the college's specialist approach. Staff are proud of the college and they work together effectively. The college has high standards in staff recruitment, enrolment, development and appraisal. There are strong links with the local community. Work-based training is well supported by employers, many of whom have themselves attended the college.

28. The college has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures, which have been written to cover both full-time courses and work-based training alike. In some cases, this attempt to secure parity of approach has resulted in inappropriate organisation of work-based training. For example, agricultural modern apprenticeships are informally marketed as being the equivalent to full-time national certificate in agriculture courses. Many employers are unaware of the training programme which trainees are on and they have a limited understanding of their own roles in the training process. In some cases the college has been slow to train staff as assessors and verifiers. For example, despite requests by the external verifier for an equine workplace visitor to be qualified by last autumn, the necessary awards had not been obtained by the time of inspection.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

29. The quality assurance procedures are designed to apply across the college regardless of the funding source. There are charters defining the rights of trainees. The process of self-assessment is used across all aspects of the college. Many of the strengths identified by the college were no more than normal practice; however the inspectors agreed with the grade that had been proposed.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-documented procedures
- ◆ staff follow procedures carefully
- ◆ careful monitoring of programmes of study
- ◆ systematic collation of data

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ quality systems not well adapted to work-based training
- ◆ appeals procedure for assessments inappropriate to work-based training
- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification

30. The college has well-documented quality assurance procedures. These procedures are distributed in the college quality manual. The academic standards committee reviews the manual continuously throughout the academic year. There is a good programme of internal audit and assessment carried out by the work-based training scheme manager. The outcome produces clear and comprehensive plans for improvement which are submitted to the academic standards committee. Staff follow procedures with a high degree of accuracy. Course files allow staff to track progress in delivering each programme. An end-of-course report includes self-assessment. There is weak understanding of what constitutes a strength among staff. Data about trainee starts, completions and destinations are carefully collated. There are no clear guidelines on how to identify and assure the quality of assessment in the workplace. Appeal against assessment is based only on grades and marks.

31. There is wide variance amongst the internal verification procedures which are used in work-based training. An internal audit in February 1999 identified that only 50 per cent of work-based programmes have an active internal verifier. There are weak formal arrangements for internal verification. Record-keeping for internal verification is sporadic. Half the work-based programmes perform badly against college and awarding body assessment standards, but there are no routine procedures which would ensure that this weakness is dealt with. Examples of good practice are now being collated and used in a staff development programme which will be completed by July 1999, whose aim is to learn from the college's successes in order to raise standards and improve consistency.