



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

Croydon College

SUMMARY

Croydon College provides good training in engineering and business administration, satisfactory training in construction, hair and beauty and foundation for work. The quality of work placements is good and off-the-job training provided in the college is good. The unit which manages work-based training is effectively managed. The college has some effective equal opportunities policies and procedures but trainees and employers have little awareness of equal opportunities issues. There is insufficient use of evidence from the workplace in assessments on some programmes and assessment is carried out late in the programme for some trainees. Retention and achievement rates in some programmes are low, but improving. Training programmes are generally inflexible, most trainees start at particular times in the year and complete the programme at the same time. Quality assurance is good.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	2
Business administration	2
Hair & beauty	3
Foundation for work	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good workplaces
- ◆ good internal communication
- ◆ effective and clearly understood anti-harassment and complaints procedure
- ◆ responsive and supportive work-placement co-ordinators
- ◆ well-planned and -evaluated internal verification
- ◆ comprehensive monitoring of off-the-job training and learning

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of work-based evidence on some programmes
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates on some programmes
- ◆ late assessment of key skills and NVQ portfolios on engineering programmes
- ◆ insufficient information provided to employers
- ◆ poor awareness among trainees of equal opportunities
- ◆ no development of employers' understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data to influence improvements

INTRODUCTION

1. Croydon College is a large college of further and higher education situated in the London borough of Croydon. The college has approximately 13,000 students and employs about 1,000 staff. Ten staff are employed in the business development unit, which co-ordinates work-based training. The appropriate curriculum areas of the college manage the training and assessment, although staff from the business development unit conduct visits to employers and trainees' progress reviews. The college has contracts with South London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide youth training and with the Employment Service to provide training for those on the New Deal. Croydon College has 180 work-based trainees, 47 are on modern apprenticeship programmes, 105 are on national traineeship programmes, 12 are following other work-based training programmes for young people and 16 are on a foundation for work programme. With the exception of foundation for work trainees, all trainees are employed by their placement company. The college also has 12 New Deal clients from the Croydon and Bromley Unit of Delivery. Eight of these clients are in occupational areas not covered by this inspection.

2. Croydon is the most populous London borough, with 330,000 residents. The main employment sectors within the Croydon economy area are public services, distribution, hotel and catering, business services and financial services. The 1991 census identified that 17.6 per cent of the population in the Croydon area were from minority ethnic groups. In March 2000, the unemployment rate was 4.7 per cent compared with a national average of 3.9 per cent. In 1999, 42.4 per cent of school leavers in the Croydon area achieved five or more general certificates of education at grades C or above compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The director of planning and quality compiled the self-assessment report based on information provided from each of the curriculum areas and from Croydon College Managing Agency (CCMA), the unit which manages work-based training contracts. Employers were invited to contribute, but declined.

4. Six inspectors spent 25 days with the college in May 2000. They interviewed 52 trainees, visited 22 employers, interviewed 26 workplace supervisors and carried out 61 interviews with college staff. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' portfolios, internal and external verifier reports and TEC documents. Eight training sessions were observed and graded as described in the table below.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1	1	1			3
Engineering			1			1
Hair & beauty		1	1			2
Foundation for work			2			2
Total	1	2	5	0	0	8

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

5. Croydon College has 75 construction trainees with 62 local employers. Fifty-six of the trainees are on national traineeships, 11 on modern apprenticeships and eight on other work-based training programmes for young people. There are also two on the employment option of the New Deal working towards a level 2 national vocational qualification (NVQ) in plumbing. All trainees are employed. Thirty-one trainees are working towards NVQs in plumbing/domestic heating, 30 in wood occupations, eight in service and maintenance, five in electrical installation and one in heating and ventilation. All off-the-job training is undertaken part time on a day-release basis and taught by the college. All assessments take place in the college's workshops. All tutors are qualified assessors and have a range of occupational qualifications and experience. Tutors have recognised teaching qualifications and most have the internal verifier award. Trainees' progress is monitored in their workplace by work-placement co-ordinators. The co-ordinators are not occupational specialists. Inspectors agreed with all of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They agreed with one of the strengths and

identified a number of additional strengths. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-equipped and -maintained workshops
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ frequent and effective contact between college and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of work-based evidence
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates on some programmes

6. The training workshops for construction are located at the college's main centre. They are well equipped with hand tools, power tools and machinery. Trainees benefit from large areas of floor space containing workbenches, practice areas and assessment areas. The joinery workshop contains a wide range of woodworking machines and has an extensive extraction system that has recently been redesigned to meet high industrial standards. The range of machinery is beyond that required by the awarding body. Plumbing trainees on level 3 NVQs have the opportunity to fit and maintain gas-boiler systems. For this to be done safely the college has, within the last two years, installed a full extraction system. The workshops are designed so that trainees can work safely. These workshops are clean and free of obstacles and are regularly maintained by technicians.

7. Trainees carry out relevant and appropriate tasks during off-job-training. They are enthusiastic about their studies and work in teams or individually to meet the standards set by the awarding body. Project work enables trainees to develop the skills required for them to achieve competence. Learning is managed in such a way as to enable classes to work on a wide range of activities in one session. Clear monitoring systems make it easy for trainees and tutors to identify progress and achievement. Trainees understand the system and are able to plan their activities towards completion of NVQ units.

8. Contact between the college and the employer is provided by the work-placement co-ordinator. The co-ordinator meets with the employer and trainee in the workplace on a frequent and regular basis. These meetings take place at least once every 12 weeks, but often are more frequent. Additional visits take place if the employer or trainee needs additional support or advice. The co-ordinator will carry out a number of contract compliance checks with the employer and assist them through the process of signing up a trainee. The single point of contact clarifies and enhances communication between the employer and college. Issues about trainees' attendance and progress are quickly dealt with and the employer and college tutors are kept well informed. Visits are not limited to normal working

hours, where necessary co-ordinators will visit employers and trainees during lunch times or outside of normal working hours to resolve problems. This is particularly helpful for small employers.

9. Tutors are particularly well qualified. All are qualified teachers, and assessors and many are also qualified internal verifiers. They have a wide range of occupational experience and are well informed on modern practices and current legislation. This ensures that trainees benefit from the latest ideas and techniques in the industry and their knowledge is current and up to date. Many tutors are able to assist employers and supervisors with the latest techniques and legislation.

10. There is little use of work-based evidence for assessment. Assessment does not take place in the workplace, apart from some limited pilot work by tutors. Trainees do not collect any significant evidence from the workplace and are not able to articulate what they should collect or why. There are some exemplary portfolios available to help trainees identify suitable workplace evidence, however most trainees' understanding of workplace evidence is limited to using photographs with a supporting statement. The work-placement co-ordinators are not occupationally qualified and are not able to assist trainees in gathering evidence in the workplace.

11. Achievement on the plumbing programme is generally poor. Of those trainees who started training between 1996 and 1998 only 17 per cent of national trainees and 26 per cent of young people on other work-based training completed their programmes. Achievement for modern apprentices on wood occupation programmes was better at 60 per cent, but poor for young people on other work-based training programmes at only 25 per cent. Data for the other programmes are inconclusive owing to the small number of trainees.

Grade 2

Engineering

12. There are 24 engineering trainees, all are modern apprentices in telecommunications. Fourteen are in their first year, five in their second year, and five in their third year. There are also two New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option who are following an intermediate general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in engineering. Three of the third-year trainees have just completed all components of their modern apprenticeship and are waiting for their certificates. All of the trainees who started in 1996, 62 per cent of those who started in 1997 and 50 per cent of those who started in 1998 left the programme early. All of those who started in 1999 are still on the programme. All of the trainees who left early were employed in small businesses, leaving only those trainees employed by large companies on the programme. All current trainees are employed by one of two major telecommunications organisations. The theoretical element of the programme is taught in the college in the first two years of the apprenticeship. Practical training is mainly provided in the workplace, supported by practical instruction at the college. Trainees work towards a level 3 NVQ in providing a telecommunications service. The key skills required by apprentices have been mapped against the foundation programme and on-the-job training. Assignments have been developed to fill the identified gaps. Inspectors

agreed with many of the strengths and the weakness identified in the self-assessment report and found additional weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured, comprehensive and effectively taught off-the-job training
- ◆ wide range of learning opportunities at work
- ◆ well-planned on-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ late assessment of NVQ portfolios and key skills
- ◆ weak cross-referencing of candidates' portfolio evidence
- ◆ poor retention of trainees in small businesses

13. The college has developed a two-year off-the-job foundation programme to provide the underpinning knowledge required by the modern apprentices. Trainees who successfully complete the foundation programme achieve a national certificate in electronics and telecommunications engineering. The training is provided effectively by well-qualified specialists. Learning is enhanced and reinforced through stimulating practical sessions, which make use of industry-standard telecommunications equipment and information technology. Trainees benefit from access to the college's computer suites and resource library. Trainees start the programme with a two-week bridging course which provides an effective introduction to the telecommunications industry and their training programme.

14. All current trainees are employed by two large telecommunications companies. These two organisations have their own, well-resourced training departments and are committed to the training of their employees. Trainees are able to work with a wide range of the latest telecommunications equipment and work alongside highly qualified and experienced engineers on interesting and relevant projects. Trainees are ensured of a wide range of learning opportunities as they progress through their organisations' departments during their apprenticeships. There are good opportunities for trainees to progress within these companies.

15. The on- and off-the-job training, taken together, result in a particularly effective and comprehensive training package. The two placement companies have well-developed in-house training programmes which include practical and theoretical training. On-the-job training is well planned and closely monitored. The requirements of the key skills units have been cross-referenced to the foundation programme and the on-the-job training. One employer is providing some innovative training in key skills. The college maintains close contact with the employers resulting in good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training with one employer, this level of co-ordination however has not yet been achieved with the other employer.

16. Trainees are not assessed for key skills or for their level 3 NVQ until their third year. Opportunities are being missed to gather evidence. Opportunities for trainees to progress more quickly are being missed and trainees are not encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning programmes. The college has identified that late assessment for the NVQ is a weakness and is reviewing this through its quality development plan.

17. The cross-referencing of evidence in trainees' portfolios is poor. For example, four trainees completed level 3 NVQs shortly before the inspection. Their portfolio evidence was cross-referenced to the NVQ standards by their assessor. Although the evidence was sufficient to demonstrate competence to the national standards, the cross-referencing was weak in that it credited evidence where it was not relevant, and failed to adequately identify a number of situations where it was relevant.

18. Although the retention rate over the last three years is 65 per cent, this is primarily owing to the fact that all of the 1999 intake are still on the programme and hides the poor retention rates of trainees who started in earlier years. The overall retention rate has steadily improved. All of the early leavers were employed by small businesses, and only those trainees employed by the two large companies remain on the programme. The college has not been successful in retaining trainees employed by small businesses.

Business administration

Grade 2

19. Croydon College has 18 business administration trainees. Seven are working towards accounting qualifications, 10 are training in business administration and one in information technology. Nine are modern apprentices, seven are national trainees and two are on other work-based training programmes for young people. Accounting and information technology trainees attend off-the-job training one day each week. Business administration trainees attend off-the-job training for half a day each week. All trainees are visited in the workplace by their training co-ordinator, in addition, business administration and information technology trainees are visited each month in the workplace by their assessors to carry out work-based assessments. Assessment for accounting trainees takes place in the college. All trainees are employed. They work for a variety of small, medium and large employers including a large lighting and design company, small accountancy practices, a travel company, and an insurance broker. Over the last three years the retention rates on accounting programmes were 100 per cent of modern apprentices, 100 per cent of national trainees, and 66 per cent of trainees on other work-based training for young people. Over the same period the retention rates on administration programmes were 75 per cent of modern apprentices, 76 per cent of national trainees and 66 per cent of trainees on other work-based training. Over the same period the achievement rates were 55 per cent for accounting trainees on other work-based training, 43 per cent for administration modern apprentices, 50 per cent for administration national trainees and 64 per cent for administration

trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people. Data are not available for the achievement rates of accounting modern apprentices and national trainees. The number of trainees on information technology programmes is too small to produce sensible figures. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but not with others. They awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed assessment process for administration and information technology trainees
- ◆ flexible, individualised programmes for administration and information technology trainees
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no integration of key skills with vocational training for some accounting trainees
- ◆ insufficient information for work-based supervisors
- ◆ weak induction to the college for some trainees

20. Assessments for administration and information technology trainees are well planned and thorough. The monthly visits to the workplace are used for observation, discussion and questioning, the checking of portfolio evidence and forward action planning. Trainees are left with clear action plans which detail their next steps towards achievement of their NVQs. Assessors use a good variety of assessment methods and link the work trainees are doing to the evidence required. Effective use is made of all evidence, cross-referencing it to the requirements of all relevant units in the NVQ. Key skills are taught and assessed from the outset and trainees are given relevant and interesting tasks to supplement naturally occurring key skills evidence. Internal verification is conducted on a continuous basis to ensure that the assessment process is rigorous and thorough.

21. Business administration and information technology trainees can start their programmes throughout the year. They progress at different rates, as appropriate to their job role and their ability. Their programmes are individually tailored and responsive to their work roles.

22. Off-the-job training is well taught by college tutors across all programmes. Tasks and exercises are tailored to the individual's needs and trainees are given good support with portfolio building and cross-referencing of evidence. Tutors give good support outside of normal training times, which enables trainees to progress at their own pace. The accounting tutors provide extra time for trainees outside scheduled classes to help them prepare for central assessments. Good self-study packs reinforce the training received and further enable candidates to progress at their own pace. Trainees praise the quality of the training, the amount

of time and attention given to them as individuals and the additional learning support offered by their tutors and assessors.

23. All staff working with trainees are highly qualified. Members of the business administration team hold relevant training and assessment qualifications and have extensive vocational experience. They work well together and provide good support to trainees. Staff often provide additional support for trainees outside of normal working time. Trainees who leave the programme early, for whatever reason, are given additional support to complete assessments and achieve qualifications or units towards a qualification.

24. Retention rates for all programmes have steadily improved over the last three years and are now good. The retention rate of 100 per cent for accounting modern apprentices is excellent, but represents a very small number of trainees. Achievement rates are satisfactory.

25. The teaching and assessment of key skills are not integrated into the accounting programme for trainees starting prior to 1999-2000. This has meant that two trainees coming to the end of their programmes have needed to do additional work and attend additional training in order to complete their programme.

26. Workplace supervisors are not given enough information about the detail of trainees' programmes. In accounting, workplace supervisors are unable to make good links between the work they are giving trainees to do and the work trainees are doing at college. They are given the titles of the NVQ units trainees are working towards but are not given any information about the content of off-the-job training sessions. Two accountancy practices have their own in-house training. They have insufficient information to link this to the college's off-the-job training. Some workplace supervisors for administration trainees have little active involvement in the programme. They see the college's role as providing the training and have little understanding of what the programme is about. Assessors rarely talk to work-based supervisors about the training programme and trainees' progress. The work-placement co-ordinators meet work-based supervisors during reviews to discuss progress generally. They do not use this as an opportunity to provide information about the trainee's programme and ensure that the workplace supervisors are actively involved in the training.

27. Modern apprentices and national trainees starting business administration programmes have a limited induction to the college and its facilities. They are advised of fire regulations and health and safety requirements. They are not given a tour of the college and shown the library and the extensive information technology resources that are available there. This means that they do not know how to access or use these facilities until a later stage in their programme when the tutor takes all trainees to the library to use the resources available.

Hair & beauty

Grade 3

28. Croydon College has a total of 47 hairdressing trainees. Forty-two are national trainees, three are modern apprentices and two are on other work-based programmes for young people. Six per cent of the trainees are men. All trainees are employed and work in salons in Croydon and the surrounding areas. Trainees attend off-the-job training at Croydon College one-day each week for practical hairdressing, theory, tutorials and key skills training. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by college staff. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report and found some additional strengths. They awarded the same grade as the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ innovative and effective staff deployment
- ◆ good workplace assessment process
- ◆ well-resourced and professionally managed training salon
- ◆ trainees quickly demonstrate good skill levels
- ◆ interesting and well-taught theory sessions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-the job training
- ◆ employer not aware of trainees' current levels of achievements
- ◆ late introduction of key skills for some trainees
- ◆ low retention and poor achievement rates
- ◆ poor attendance at off-the-job training

29. The workplace co-ordinator is a qualified hairdresser, assessor and internal verifier. This full-time post is split with half of the time spent in the business development unit of the college recruiting, inducting and monitoring trainees and liaising with employers. The other half of the time is spent working for the hairdressing curriculum area. The co-ordinator takes practical hairdressing sessions with trainees and is able to co-ordinate work-based assessments with trainees, employers and the other assessors. The employers and trainees have welcomed this coherent approach to the assessment of trainees' work.

30. Good use is made of the workplace for assessment by observation and witness testimony. Trainees are assessed in the workplace by a team of staff selected for this role. There has been a well-considered reorganisation of staff roles. The team consists of the work-based co-ordinator and two other members of the hairdressing staff. Trainees are assessed in the workplace throughout their course, with a greater concentration of assessments in years two and three, when trainees have

more experience. Assessments are well planned, and make good use of the opportunities available, for example, one modern apprentice was observed carrying out straightening, perming and finishing treatments on clients in one visit. Trainees are also able to request assessments at short notice when an opportunity for assessment arises at the salon, and assessors are available four days a week to carry out assessments. These assessments were carried out in a busy and highly commercial salon environment.

31. The college's training salon is a good representation of a commercial salon. The resources in the salon are of a high standard and there is a wide range of products for both European and Afro-Caribbean hair. Staff expertise also covers both types of hairdressing. Trainees are able to select the type of hairdressing relevant to their chosen career and employment opportunity. The salon and the reception are professionally managed. Trainees look smart and enthusiastic and are always engaged in meaningful activities. Trainees who started on national traineeships in January 2000 are already demonstrating good skills levels. Trainees carry out cuts in a professional and confident manner and are able, where appropriate, to work without supervision. They also set hair with confidence and show a good understanding of roller direction and positioning. There are computer facilities around the salon with guidance on how to access appropriate websites. Trainees use this facility to assist them in their research for project and assignment work.

32. Hairdressing theory sessions are interesting and well taught. For example, during a session on fashion colouring techniques, the tutor started the session by recapping on basic colouring techniques. Trainees easily identified basic colouring techniques and then went on to identify fashion techniques. The tutor encouraged the trainees to refer to techniques used in the workplace and to compare similarities and differences between various methods. A video was used showing several new ways of colouring. Before the video, the tutor gave out a well-constructed questionnaire and gave a clear explanation of how it would be used. The video was stopped after each individual technique and trainees answered the relevant question. The tutor checked for understanding at regular intervals. On completion of the video a good discussion took place about the suitability of the techniques. Comparisons were made to salon practices. Trainees showed a good understanding of the timings and cost implications of each technique.

33. On- and off-the-job assessments are well co-ordinated but little co-ordination takes place between other aspects of on- and off-the-job training. Employers are given a programme of the training undertaken at college, but this is not reinforced by workplace co-ordinators and little attempt is made to link the training received at the salon with the training at college. Employers are not aware of trainees' progress at college. Achievement is discussed with employers during trainees' reviews but on a rather broad basis, but reviews lack the detail of what has, and has not, been covered. Employers do, however, value the support given to them and trainees and regard the training at the college to be of a high standard. Employers are becoming more involved with trainees' assessments through the work-based assessments and staff have plans to build on this. At the time of the

inspection it was too early to see any effect.

34. Until recently key skills were not introduced until the final year of training. For trainees who started before 1999, key skills have not been taught or assessed as part of their main programme. For trainees who started last year key skills have been taught from the beginning of the programme and teaching and assessment of key skills is now integrated into the main programme. Trainees who have been introduced to key skills have a thorough understanding of them. They understand where key skills apply and where there are opportunities for key skills assessments within their hairdressing assessments. For example, trainees easily recognised key skills within the skills needed in the planning, organising and delivery of a recent hair show. Trainees know which training programme they are on and which key skill units they are working towards.

35. Between 1997 and 1999, 54 per cent of national trainees left the programme early. In the same period, only four trainees completed the whole programme. Between 1996 and 1999, 57 per cent of trainees on other youth training programmes left early and only 24 per cent achieved a NVQ. To date, 74 per cent of the trainees who started in 1999 are still on the programme. Trainees' achievement rates currently stand at 45 NVQs per 100 leavers. This is better than the previous year's figure of 33 NVQs per 100 leavers.

36. Trainees' attendance at off-the-job training sessions is poor. All trainees have a tutorial session where individual review sheets are completed. Targets are now set for completing written and practical tasks. Attendance and punctuality are also recorded with targets for improvement. To further support this letters have been sent to employers asking for their support. These have been recent developments and, at the time of inspection, it was too soon to evaluate their effectiveness. In the two sessions observed punctuality was not a problem but attendance levels were poor in the theory session and satisfactory in the practical session. It was recognised in the self-assessment report that attendance is poor and the hairdressing section has set overall improvement targets for time-keeping and attendance of 80 per cent by June this year.

Foundation for work

Grade 3

37. Croydon College started providing foundation training for young people in January 1999, under contract to a south London consortium. The consortium is a company established by five organisations to provide prevocational training to young people in south London. Croydon College is an equal partner in the consortium. The consortium developed the training materials and course content. Courses are known as 'Skills for Life' and last up to 16 weeks. They are designed to encourage progression to mainstream training, full-time education or employment, and include four weeks' work placement. Qualifications offered include wordpower and numberpower at foundation level. The current course is the fourth to be offered by the college, and the content has changed since the first courses. The third course included additional awards in communication and

interpersonal skills and awareness of the demands of employers. The advent of the *Learning Gateway* has prompted the consortium and the TEC to review the content and duration of the provision. The first two young people started *Learning Gateway* during the inspection week. Fourteen other trainees are currently registered with Croydon College. Of the 52 trainees who started the previous three courses, 36 attained wordpower, and 32 also gained numberpower qualifications. Twenty-three of the young people progressed to full-time education, vocational work-based learning or employment. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, and identified a further strength and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded lower grade than in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high rate of achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications
- ◆ good improvement of trainees' self-esteem
- ◆ good links with other organisations
- ◆ patient and dedicated staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low completion of work-experience placements
- ◆ insufficient tailoring of coursework to individual aspirations and needs
- ◆ poorly managed arrangements to promote good attendance and punctuality

38. Trainees gain in self-confidence and self-esteem during the programme. Most start the programme with low self-esteem. Nearly all trainees have been identified by the local careers service as having a literacy or numeracy needs, or both. Some have severe literacy needs. Some have not lived long in England, and English is not their first language. Few have any qualifications. Those who persevere with the course recognise the difference in themselves, and find the course interesting, informative and helpful. Attainment of wordpower and numberpower qualifications is high. About 70 per cent of all trainees who start the course achieve at least one of these qualifications. Most gain both. This is a higher rate than most other consortium providers achieve.

39. The college has developed good links with other organisations providing services to similar client groups. They share good practice, and learn from other organisations with more experience of preparing socially excluded young people for the world of work. They have identified which organisations have a high success rate in terms of work placements, and are working closely with some of them as partners in the development of the *Learning Gateway*.

40. Staff are patient, and give praise appropriately. Trainees feel comfortable asking staff to help with personal difficulties. Many trainees face problematic and complex issues in their personal lives that interfere with their learning. Some are in the care of a local authority; many have housing difficulties; some have social

workers to help resolve difficulties. Staff help the trainees to make good use of the college's counselling team. The pastoral support is generally effective in helping trainees resolve practical difficulties in their personal lives, for example, homelessness.

41. Of the 52 trainees who started the training in the first three courses, 31 started work placements. Of these, only one completed the planned four weeks' duration. A further nine completed at least two weeks. This is the lowest rate of successful placements of all the consortium providers. The course is insufficiently focused on helping trainees to complete placements. There is not enough discussion with trainees about the type of work which is readily available, and which type of work would be most suited to their particular mix of skills and personal qualities as well as their aspirations. Little attempt has been made to set more achievable milestones within the four-week work-placement period despite the low success rate.

42. Attendance during the first part of the course is poor. Some trainees on the register have been absent at least three times as much as they have attended over the past few weeks. There is no strategy to improve attendance, or to develop a work culture. The handbook does not specify what trainees should do in the event of needing time off, whether pre-planned or unexpected. Lateness, or arrival following unauthorised absence, is not always challenged, reference to employers' expectations regarding attendance and punctuality are infrequent.

43. The coursework relies heavily on worksheets, many of which are imaginatively presented. They are not always used as a stimulus for group discussion or to focus on trainees' own particular circumstances or ambitions. Most trainees use identical learning materials, and use these as evidence of competence. There is little attempt to make any literacy or numeracy work relevant to trainees' interests or employment aspirations. Some trainees find the standard of literacy required insufficiently challenging. Advice on progression includes helping trainees to complete application forms for courses, and arranging appointments with the careers service.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

44. The college has a range of policies and procedures covering equal opportunities which apply to staff, students and trainees. The equal opportunities policy reflects all recent legislation and is regularly reviewed. Providing equality of opportunity is one of the college's corporate objectives. The college's equal opportunities statement is included in all literature and course materials and the college charter has a section detailing its equal opportunities requirements. The students' code of conduct requires students and trainees to uphold the equal opportunities policy. The college has an equal opportunities committee chaired by one of the vice principals and includes representatives from across the college, students and external organisations. The college has a community liaison and

outreach worker who works with local communities to promote its equal opportunities policies. The equal opportunities policy is explained to trainees at the start of their programmes. Equal opportunities requirements are included in contracts with employers and work-placement providers. Equal opportunities data on trainees and staff are collected and analysed. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths identified by the college and found further strengths. They agreed with two of the weaknesses identified by the college and identified two further weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as the college in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff recruitment and selection procedures
- ◆ effective and particularly well-understood anti-harassment policy and complaints procedure
- ◆ active monitoring and development of equal opportunities in the college
- ◆ good accessibility and equipment for staff and trainees with disabilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor trainees' awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ no development of employers' understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ little success in recruiting from under-represented groups to construction programmes
- ◆ lack of use of equal opportunities data on trainees

45. The college works hard to ensure equality of opportunity throughout the staff recruitment process. All members of the college's staff involved in recruitment and selection receive appropriate training and development. Recruiters are required to take account of legislation covering equality of opportunity. Interviews for all posts, at all levels, include a question for candidates which checks their understanding of, and commitment to, equality of opportunity. Staff consistently commented that their own interviews had contained such a question. Any trainee who believes that they may not have been afforded equality of opportunity in line with the recruitment and selection policy may write in confidence to the principal who will arrange for an enquiry into the selection process and will reply in detail. Staff equal opportunities monitoring has been in place since 1994. The monitoring covers the college's entire workforce and reports in detail on academic, staff and support staff and other services. Reports use the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) ethnic origin classifications and categorise the statistics by gender. These monitoring reports are produced for the college's governors every six months. They include commentaries, comparisons with previous periods and recommendations for future practice.

46. Trainees clearly understand the anti-harassment policy and complaints procedure. They talked confidently and accurately about what they would do if they felt they were being harassed or if they needed to complain. One trainee used the complaints procedure to tell the college that she was being bullied and racially abused at work. She was immediately removed from the placement while an investigation took place. Staff found her an alternative work placement and ensured that she remained on the programme. Eventually, the employer was removed from the college's list of work-placement providers. On the foundation for work programme the issue of harassment and the college's policy are openly discussed. An example was given of a situation where one trainee was using racist language with other trainees. The trainee was warned and the issue discussed with him. He was suspended and finally expelled from the college.

47. The equal opportunities committee drives the college's approach to ensuring equality of opportunity. A working group was established in 1998 to review the equal opportunities policy and statement and make recommendations to the academic board regarding a revised committee structure and agenda. The new committee meets regularly and is supported by a series of working groups looking at specific areas. The committee oversees the equal opportunities implementation plan. This is a comprehensive plan with clear targets for the achievement, implementation and monitoring of every action. Action ranges from staff training to the monitoring of programmes and services to ensure equal opportunities practices are being implemented and are regularly evaluated and reviewed.

48. The college has invested considerable financial resources in improving access to its facilities for staff, students and trainees with disabilities. A passenger lift has recently been introduced at the Barclay Road site. Facilities at the Fairfield site have been improved. The library has extensive resources and equipment to support participation by staff, students and trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities.

49. Trainees have a poor understanding of equal opportunities generally. Some recall references to the equal opportunities policy during induction, many do not. The exception is the foundation for work programme where most trainees showed a sound understanding of equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity is not discussed as part of trainees' reviews. It is not monitored or discussed with trainees as normal procedure.

50. The college will not contract with employers that do not have an equal opportunities policy. They give a copy of the college's own policy to employers as part of the contracting process so that employers are aware of how trainees are treated in college. The approach taken with employers after the contract stage is passive. The employer's edition of the college charter refers to what the college will do in relation to equality of opportunity. The contract does not make it clear how equality of opportunity will be monitored during the course of each trainee's programme. Equal opportunities issues are not discussed with work-based supervisors during reviews. Discussion only takes place when a problem is identified.

51. The analysis of gender, ethnic origin and disability data for trainees is detailed. Progress has been made on most programmes to attract trainees from non-traditional groups and people with disabilities. However, women and minority ethnic groups are under-represented on construction programmes. An action plan has been drawn up to address this, but no action has yet been taken.

52. Detailed data exists about the number of trainees on programmes from different groups and this is regularly reviewed. However, there is no comparison with local population data. Data are also available about the achievements and progression of trainees by ethnicity and gender but this is not systematically analysed. Early leavers' information has not been analysed against equal opportunities data. The college has just introduced a requirement for an annual report to the equal opportunities committee on trainees' recruitment and performance by ethnicity and gender.

Trainee support

Grade 3

53. Potential trainees are given impartial careers guidance by the information centre before starting a programme with the college. The business development unit also provides careers guidance during the recruitment process. Tutors give specialist advice about the occupation that the trainee has selected. Trainees undertake a basic skills assessment before starting their training. This is used to identify additional numeracy and literacy needs. Trainees are given an induction to the college and their training programme when they start and, where appropriate, receive an induction to their workplace. Most of a trainee's support is the responsibility of the work-placement co-ordinator. Work-placement co-ordinators visit trainees in the workplace to review progress at least once every 12 weeks. The college has a students' learning-support team which provides counselling, guidance and welfare. A new library was built in September 1998 and includes a flexible learning area, access to computers, learning support services, careers service, and counselling and support services. All trainees have employed status. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ responsive and supportive work-placement co-ordinators
- ◆ effective college counselling service

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ reviews lack challenging targets for some trainees
- ◆ lack of individual training plans

54. Overall, the college provides a satisfactory range of support services to trainees. The inspectors found initial advice and guidance, induction, initial assessment and the subsequent support to have no significant strengths or weaknesses.

55. Work-placement co-ordinators provide good support to trainees in the workplace. They provide independent advice and pastoral support. Trainees are able to openly discuss work-related issues and concerns they may have about their work placement. Issues discussed include health and safety, pay and conditions, additional support requirements and counselling needs. The co-ordinators arrange additional support for trainees, where required, and provide a good link between the college services and trainees. Trainees value the support they get and have confidence in the training co-ordinators.

56. Counselling services at the college are good and work-based trainees have full access to the services available. Trainees in many occupational areas make use of the counselling service provided by the college. The service is effective in dealing with a range of issues that affect trainees. For example, one trainee who became homeless during her training programme was given help and advice to find suitable accommodation. A number of trainees with personal problems have been given good support, enabling them to continue with their training.

57. Work-placement co-ordinators carry out regular reviews with trainees. The result of the review is recorded on a monitoring report. Attendance and time-keeping are recorded along with comments from the trainee, employer (or tutor when reviewed during off-the-job training) and work-placement co-ordinator. The reviews are not always used as an opportunity to link the off-the-job training to what is happening in the workplace or to help the workplace supervisor understand their role in helping trainees to gather evidence. Targets are not demanding and do not sufficiently focus on the requirements of the NVQ. The tutors in curriculum areas have systems to identify what trainees have completed and what they still need to complete. Opportunities are missed to use this information during monitoring visits to the workplace. Business administration and hairdressing trainees benefit from the additional visits made by assessors. In these cases, target-setting for the NVQ is part of the assessment-planning process and links between the workplace and off-the-job training are better.

58. Trainees' individual training plans are, in most cases, completed in a standard manner based on the programme of study rather than the identified needs of the individual. Achievement targets for a range of units of an NVQ often have the same anticipated achievement date. The training plans are rarely updated other than changes to trainees personal details. Plans are not updated according to trainees' progress. Unit achievement dates are, in most cases, identical across the full NVQ.

Management of training

Grade 2

59. Croydon College manages its work-based learning contracts through its business development unit. The part of the unit which manages the work-based learning contracts from the TEC is known as the Croydon College Managing Agency (CCMA). Eight staff work in this section, including workplace co-ordinators whose role includes visiting the trainees on employers' premises, reviewing the trainees' progress, and liaising with the relevant curriculum areas. The college's contracts with the TEC for work-based learning for young people have grown steadily over the past four years. The college also has contracts with the Employment Service for the full-time education and training, and employment options of New Deal. One member of staff is responsible for New Deal clients, liaising with the Croydon and Bromley district Employment Service, employers and the college's curriculum areas. The college was accredited as an Investor in People for the first time in March 2000. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good communication arrangements between CCMA and curriculum areas
- ◆ effective system to monitor trainees' progress
- ◆ clear and comprehensive policies for recruitment, induction, appraisal and staff development
- ◆ open and clear management style
- ◆ good links with external organisations

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow rate of achievement or many trainees
- ◆ some inflexible learning programmes

60. The work-placement co-ordinators are linked to particular curriculum areas. Although many are not experts in that particular discipline, most have good knowledge of the NVQ and occupational area. In many curriculum areas, the staff who provide off-the-job training do not visit the trainees' workplaces. The co-ordinators report to the off-the-job trainers any issues affecting trainees at work. They know the teaching staff well and know their working style and approach. They are skilled communicators and liaise well with their academic colleagues, who provide the off-the-job training. They hold regular meetings with the teaching staff, usually fortnightly. Action points from these meetings are noted and distributed to relevant parties. Other, less formal communication is also frequent, either face-to-face, or by telephone, or by e-mail. The work-placement co-ordinators report to their manager any difficulty they encounter, for example, non-compliance with a TEC contractual requirement, and help the curriculum area to resolve the issue. If necessary, the head of the business development unit speaks to

the relevant assistant principal with responsibility for all staff within that curriculum area. The head of the unit has good working relationships with the assistant principals.

61. The managing agency keeps a tight control on progress towards the achievement of its TEC contract. The manager checks trainees' overall progress each month, and has clear systems to identify whether or not the targeted NVQs are being achieved as planned. Curriculum areas have systems to monitor individual trainees' progress towards their NVQ. Trainees' progress is discussed between tutors and workplace co-ordinators during their regular meetings. When trainees leave the programme the manager investigates why the trainee has left. Contractual targets have been consistently achieved, and exceeded, leading to contract amendments enabling the college to provide more training for more young people.

62. Personnel policies for the recruitment and development of staff are clearly set out, applied and widely understood. The recruitment policy has the flexibility to allow unexpected vacancies to be filled quickly through the appointment of staff on a temporary and part-time basis, while ensuring that all posts are advertised. The recruitment policy is designed to select the most appropriate candidate on a fair basis. Most staff are either currently receiving some training or development, or have recently updated or improved their skills or knowledge. Staff training needs are identified by employees' managers, and by employees themselves. Staff development needs are formally considered at staff appraisals. These include self-appraisal, and take place annually. Staff may request additional appraisal review meetings if desired.

63. There is an open and clear management style within CCMA and the college. Staff know their responsibilities and are given authority to carry them out. They are able to seek help from more senior colleagues without fear or embarrassment. This allows staff to carry out their duties quickly and efficiently and to work effectively with colleagues in the curriculum areas. The head of the business development unit is able to seek help and support from her immediate line manager, the vice principal, or the principal, depending on the issue. The principal is well informed about the work-based learning provision.

64. The college has good, productive links and working relationships with the TEC are good, and productive. It meets the TEC's contract manager at least monthly. It worked closely with the TEC in the development of the consortium and built up good contacts with other providers. It is working closely with one of these in a newly established initiative supported by funds from the Single Regeneration Budget channelled through the local authority. The college has taken an instrumental role in the formation of a group to share information and help inform the development of the local Learning Skills Council, to be launched in April 2001. It works particularly closely with the local careers service, which has a permanent presence in the open learning centre to provide advice and guidance to trainees. The college works closely with Employment Service staff in the local job centres, in the district office, and at the regional office.

65. In most occupational areas, workplaces provide a wide range of learning opportunities, and some trainees quickly acquire new skills. This often has little effect on the date when trainees achieve their NVQs. Nearly all target achievement dates for trainees are calculated at a certain time from their start date, such as two years or three years. Even when trainees make rapid progress, their competence and knowledge are not always assessed or accredited more quickly.

66. Some programmes only allow one start date each year, others only three. The administration programmes are an exception to this model, although in this case, new trainees receive a rather less thorough induction to the programmes than those who start with the majority of trainees.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

67. The college has a comprehensive quality assurance policy and a set of underpinning procedures for the business development unit's work. The business development manager is a member of the college's academic standards committee and academic board. The mission statement specifically refers to the quality of the learning experience for individuals and the academic board has responsibility for advising the principal and chief executive on any matters related to the planning, development, maintenance and improvement of quality across the college. There are policies and procedures covering validation of programmes, service/quality reviews, internal verification, observation of teaching and learning, self-assessment, and professional development and appraisal. The overall quality assurance system is clearly defined in the quality assurance handbook. The quality assurance arrangements also cover the college charter and a complaints and feedback process. The director of planning and quality is responsible for overseeing the quality assurance arrangements and reports annually on them to the academic policy and standards committee and the academic board. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. They agreed with most of the weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear, comprehensive and effective policy and procedures
- ◆ effective self-assessment process in most areas
- ◆ development plans integrated into quality assurance and corporate planning arrangements
- ◆ well-planned and evaluated internal verification system
- ◆ comprehensive monitoring of off-the-job training and learning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little feedback sought from employers
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data to inform improvements

68. The quality assurance policy and procedures are comprehensive and cover trainees' learning experiences and the training process. A quality assurance handbook, available to all staff, clearly explains the policies and procedures for quality assurance in the college. There is an internal quality audit system to ensure that the procedures are being complied with and are bringing about continual improvement. A peer review process, carried out by trained auditors, produces reports for those audited and the appropriate committees. All programmes or services within the college have an annual programme or service quality review. These reviews provide the opportunity for programme and service teams to contribute to the development of operational plans, and in turn, the corporate plan for the college. These reviews were the basis for the self-assessment report and make a significant contribution to evaluation and continual improvement. Quality assurance files are maintained for each course, programme or service. They are a good source of evidence for the annual programme or service review and for self-assessment. Every five years there is a review to critically appraise the effectiveness of the programmes in meeting clients' needs.

69. All trainees receive a copy of the student charter at induction. The charter contains a clear process for trainees to lodge any complaints. Feedback forms are openly displayed around the college and any negative feedback or complaints are registered with the college ombudsman. Complaints are monitored and dealt with promptly.

70. The self-assessment process is rigorous and builds on existing processes in the college. The process begins with the annual monitoring of performance by the schools and services. This involves all staff at all levels. The results of the annual peer observation of teaching and learning also inform the self-assessment report and grades. Each programme area identifies its strengths and weaknesses, and the director of planning and quality puts the report together. Moderation of grades occurs at school, service and steering group level. The internal audit system verifies that self-assessment judgements are supported by reliable evidence. Auditors produce a critical report with comments that staff find helpful. The college sees the self-assessment process as a tool for continuous improvement. The development plans are clear: responsibility is identified and performance measures are monitored in April, June, and November by line managers and appropriate committees. The director of planning and quality has an overall view of progress. The initial development plans had been written in February and updated in April and were available for the inspection. They clearly showed progress made against the targets. To increase the rigour of this quality assurance process the internal audit team carries out a sampling of evidence of the activities and performance measures achieved throughout the college. The self-assessment report was generally accurate: inspectors graded two occupational areas one grade lower than the college. The self-assessment process is integrated into the college's corporate planning and review cycle throughout the college. Staff are fully aware of the process and work diligently toward achieving the improvements.

71. The internal verification process is well co-ordinated and is subject to internal audit. Each school has one or more internal verification co-ordinators who oversee the verification of externally accredited programmes and support the development of internal verifiers. The self-assessment report identified a lack of sharing of good practice in assessment and internal verification. This has now been rectified and it is a standard item on the termly meeting agenda. Documents have been designed to ensure that work-based assessors are brought into the quality assurance arrangements for internal verification. The internal verification arrangements are well planned and thorough resulting in clearly targeted action. Issues arising are taken to school boards of study and the academic board. External verifiers' reports are taken seriously: the principal reads them all as does the director for quality and planning to identify any action required.

72. Since September 1998 there has been an annual observation of learning and teaching for all staff including sessional and part-time staff. This system is subject to review and evaluation and changes are being implemented from the start of the period 1999-2000. The model is based on peer assessment. Staff are trained to observe and given clear guidance on the process. Grades are used to assess the quality of teaching and learning observed. The focus is on achieving improvement and there are several examples of staff performance improving as a result of this process. Good constructive feedback is given to staff and where improvement is needed an action plan is devised. The college has analysed the results of peer observation and compared them to the Further Education Funding Council's national averages.

73. Four thematic surveys take place each year covering student registration, induction, teaching and learning. The business development unit also survey trainees who leave. Work-based trainees are included in the college's surveys but they are not designed for work-based learning programmes and do not evaluate on-the-job training or the relevance of the off-the-job training to the workplace. An analysis of the results is given to management groups and appropriate committees. The business development unit produces an annual summary of leaver questionnaires for work-based trainees. There were only eight responses to the 1998-99 survey.

74. The college recognised in its self-assessment report that it did not systematically seek views on work-based training from employers. There were isolated incidents of curriculum areas having employer-liaison meetings. An example of this was in hairdressing where employers were invited to discuss provision for modern apprentices and national trainees. This resulted in the hairdressing staff going out to the workplace to carry out trainees' assessments. The quality development plan contains action to incorporate a specific questionnaire for employers. No action had been taken at the time of the inspection.

75. Data are collected to meet both the TEC's and FEFC's requirements. At inspection the college was unable to provide accurate, consistent and reliable data for inspectors. It took some time to agree on trainees' numbers in some



occupational areas. There is no systematic benchmarking of performance across occupational area programmes. Achievement rates are available for each occupational area but are not systematically analysed by gender and ethnicity. The major analysis is on NVQs per 100 leavers rather than on individual achievement. There are now targets in the quality development plan to improve achievement rates.