



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT: MAY 2000

North Birmingham College

SUMMARY

North Birmingham College offers satisfactory training in construction, with good off-the-job training at the college. Trainees can join a programme at any time and have a choice of days to attend. There are good construction work placements offering trainees real experience of industry standards. There is a lack of involvement by employers and work-placement supervisors in the training programme and links between on- and off-the-job training are weak. The foundation for work programme is satisfactory. It is well structured, retention rates are high and progression onto vocational courses is good. However, not all the needs of trainees are systematically identified and there are some dull training sessions and inappropriate learning materials. Accounting training is poor, with insufficient work-placement opportunities and poor standards of portfolios. Equal opportunities arrangements are satisfactory, although there is a lack of understanding of the range of issues relating to equality in work-based training. There is good support for trainees with identified learning needs and frequent visits are made to work placements. Management of training and quality assurance arrangements for work-based training are poor and the appraisal system is not effective in identifying staff training and development needs. Data are not easily available to guide managers' decisions. There is no formal monitoring of on-the-job training and no effective sharing of good practise. There are some unsatisfactory internal verification practices.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Management & professional	5
Foundation for work	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	5
Quality assurance	5

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and varied off-the-job training in construction
- ◆ good work placements in construction
- ◆ good retention and progression rates in foundation for work

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ ineffective quality assurance systems
- ◆ data not easily accessible
- ◆ review processes lack rigour
- ◆ lack of involvement in training programmes by work-placement supervisors and employers
- ◆ no effective sharing of good practice to improve work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. North Birmingham College (NBC) is a medium-sized further education college based in the West Midlands. It has a large main site, situated six miles to the north of the city of Birmingham and operates in 21 centres throughout the city of Birmingham. NBC is one of seven further education colleges in Birmingham and it is the only college in the north of the city offering construction courses. The college serves the north Birmingham area, recruiting 72 per cent of students and trainees from within a six-mile radius.

2. NBC became a training provider in 1992 and now offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and prevocational training, for youth and adult trainees. The college currently holds a contract with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide work-based training for the year 1999-2000. The college also provides New Deal training for those aged 18 to 24 under the full-time education and training option. There are currently 121 trainees, plus 44 New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. Of the trainees, 99 are training in construction, two are taking a first-aid qualification, 11 are on foundation for work, and nine are on an accounting programme. In total, 18 of the trainees are modern apprentices, 48 are on other youth training programmes, 42 are adults, and 13 are young people on programmes provided under the government's Learning Gateway initiative. Of the New Deal clients, 22 are training in construction, and the other 22 are each following one of the 37 courses offered to New Deal clients by the college. The two trainees learning first aid and the 22 New Deal clients not working in construction were not inspected because of the low numbers of trainees in each occupational area. They are included in the inspection sample for the generic areas of the report, however.

3. There are 24,761 companies in Birmingham, spread over all the recognised major economic sectors, and with the number of employees totalling 464,476. Birmingham is forecast to have an extra 24,700 jobs created by 2010. The city has experienced a shift from industrial production to the service sector since the early 1980s. The city's employment base for manufacturing has fallen from 44 per cent in 1978 to 19 per cent in the year 2000. The construction sector is expected to benefit from the urban regeneration projects underway in Birmingham, while forecasts indicate that a major employment boost will occur in professional and computer services. Retailing is also expected to take an upturn in employment. Sixty-eight per cent of employment in Birmingham is in these sectors, where job numbers are predicted to increase over the next 10 years. However, in May 2000, the unemployment rate in Birmingham as a whole was 5.5 per cent, well above both the regional average for the West Midlands of 4.2 per cent, and the national average of 3.8 per cent. Certain wards within the college's recruitment area have significantly higher rates of unemployment. Local wards also figure prominently among the most deprived wards in the whole country.



4. Minority ethnic groups account for over 21 per cent of the population in Birmingham as a whole, although the percentage would vary considerably between individual wards across the city. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers in Birmingham achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 38.1 per cent, well below the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. NBC produced its self-assessment report for inspection in March 2000. College staff had attended training sessions run by Birmingham and Solihull TEC and received support in producing the final report document from a consultant provided by the TEC. The director for curriculum and marketing compiled the final report in conjunction with a small team of colleagues. There is no representation of the views of trainees and employers in the report. The college's staffing structure changed between the production of the report and the inspection. The construction report was written in two sections, giving different grades for the construction crafts and the training in gas services. Those programmes with less than 10 trainees were not separately reported upon in occupational areas or given a self-assessment grade. The New Deal was reported upon and graded separately in the self-assessment report, but it was integrated into the occupational areas during inspection, because of the low numbers of trainees. For three of the eight areas in the self-assessment report, inspectors awarded the same grades as those given by NBC. Three of the other areas were awarded significantly lower grades by inspectors than were given in the self-assessment report.

6. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 23 days at NBC in May 2000. The team worked jointly with a team of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectors, sharing their information and findings. The occupational areas jointly inspected are: construction, accounting and foundation for work, along with the generic areas. Inspectors examined college and awarding body documentation. They interviewed a range of college staff. Nine work placements were visited and during these visits seven workplace supervisors were interviewed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work, records of trainees' progress reviews, and portfolios. They observed monitoring or assessment visits and instruction sessions and interviewed 39. The following table shows the grades awarded to the off-the-job training sessions at the college:

Grades awarded to training sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		4	2			6
Management & professional			2			2
Foundation for work			4			4
Total	0	4	8	0	0	12

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. There are 99 trainees in this occupational area, plus 22 clients following a range of construction qualifications within the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. Details of their types of training, numbers, occupational specialisms and NVQs are given in the table below. The manufacturing skills of producing hand-crafted furniture and woodmachining are included in this occupational area as the numbers of trainees were too low to warrant separate inspection.

SUBJECT	NVQ LEVEL	MODERN APPRENTICES	OTHER YOUTH TRAINEES	NEW DEAL CLIENTS	ADULTS	TOTAL
Gas services installation & gas services maintenance	2	1	5	3	19	28
	3	2	3	1		6
Mechanical engineering services (plumbing)	2	5	14	6	7	32
Wood occupations (construction)	1	5	4			9
	2		1			1
Producing hand-crafted furniture	1			1		1
	2			1		1
Wood occupations (construction)	2		10	3	2	15
	3	1	3			4
Shopfitting (construction)	2	1	2	2		5
Shopfitting benchwork (construction)	3	3				3
Woodmachining	2				1	1
Decorative occupations (construction)	1		1	3		4
Painting and decorating (construction)	2		1			1
Bricklaying (construction)	2		4		4	8
	3			1		1
Block paving				1		1
TOTAL		18	48	22	33	121

8. Trainees are able to join the programme at any time, and attend off-the-job sessions on one or two days a week on a block-release basis. On-the-job training is carried out by local firms. Employers used by the college range from large

contractors involved in new-build projects to small subcontractors involved in a wide range of construction work. The self-assessment report was largely accurate and inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and varied off-the-job training
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ flexible training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of awareness of NVQs by employers
- ◆ some poor portfolios
- ◆ late implementation of key skills

9. Off-the-job training at the college is good. Tutors respond quickly to trainees and clients' needs and establish effective working relationships with them. Many of the college staff have recent industrial experience, which is used to relate training sessions to the real work environment. There is innovative use of construction projects around the college, to provide realistic work activities for trainees. Work has been completed on recreation areas, access ramps and decorative building work, and this work was also used as evidence for assessment. The standard of practical work produced for assessment is generally of a high quality. In the hand-crafted furniture department a young female trainee has gained employment with a local cabinet-making company. There is good availability of a high standard of work placements. On one project, trainees are involved in a self-build housing project, which allows them to gain occupational experience in a wide range of work activities. In cases where this range of opportunity is not available, trainees are relocated to more appropriate placements. Following recent changes in staffing there have been frequent visits to workplaces by the new placement officer and college tutors. However, these visits are not co-ordinated or effectively used. Training programmes are very flexible and are regularly adapted to suit both individual trainees and employers' needs. There is a good choice throughout the year and the college is not restricted by traditional term times. Retention rates are high. In 1998-99, 90 per cent of trainees completed their training and of these, 47 per cent achieved a qualification.

10. The number of work placements has increased recently since the appointment of a new placement officer who has a number of local contacts in the construction industry. This improvement has addressed the problem of the lack of work placements, which was identified in the self-assessment report. Some trainees are employed and others are placed by college staff with companies for work experience. The quality of work placements is good, but some opportunities to use

work-based evidence are missed. In some cases, trainees regularly produce work which meets employers, clients' and industrial requirements, yet this work is repeated at college under simulated conditions, for assessment purposes. The college has recently introduced site diaries to record work activities, but the use of these diaries is not yet fully implemented. Employers lack awareness of the NVQ process and are not involved in reviewing trainees. The college staff clearly differentiate between employed trainees and non-employed trainees in work placements. Insufficient information about trainees' progress towards their NVQ is given to the workplace supervisors of non-employed trainees, as college staff feel that they would not be interested. Most employers are unaware of the content of the off-the-job programme at the college and the order in which topics are taught and assessed. There is a lack of involvement by workplace supervisors in the planning of the work-based training, and there are poor links between workplace and college activities to encourage trainees to practise their skills. There is a lack of structured on-the-job training to help trainees to achieve their NVQ units.

POOR PRACTICE

In the carpentry and joinery department there is poor administration of written theory test papers. Awarding body guidelines clearly state that these papers should be completed unaided, under exam conditions. Trainees were observed using textbooks when being assessed on their knowledge.

11. There is some poor assessment practice and no systematic approach to portfolio building. In some areas, such as gas occupations, the quality of portfolios is good, with good use of diverse evidence, such as photographs and witness testimonies from clients and employers. However, in the other construction skill areas, portfolios are merely collections of learning materials and activity packages, with no registration details, assessment of prior experience or use of cross-referencing. Few trainees can recall the planning of assessment and many are not directly involved in compiling their NVQ portfolios. Problems have been identified with the internal verification process and, although a new system has recently gained approval from the awarding body, this system is not yet fully established. There is little sharing of good practice across the various skill areas and a lack of effective management and quality assurance of the work-based trainees' programmes.

12. Key skills training has only very recently been introduced. It is not yet fully implemented, nor is it effectively related to the vocational skills and on- and off-the-job aspects of the programmes. The learning packages used for key skills work are occupationally specific, to help trainees to see the relevance of key skills to their occupational area. Key skills are offered to all trainees and are taken as additional qualifications by those trainees not on a modern apprenticeship or national traineeship scheme.

**Management & professional
(accounts)****Grade 5**

13. Nine adult trainees are working towards an NVQ at level 2 in accounting. The course is advertised in the college and in job centres. The trainees have an interview with the course co-ordinator and complete a numeracy and literacy assessment prior to starting the programme. There are two part-time

tutor/assessors, one of whom is the course co-ordinator. Induction lasts for the first week of training. Trainees attend the college for off-the-job training sessions for three and a half days each week. They have one day each week for home study. Work experience is for one day each week and replaces an off-the-job training day or the home study day. The college's placement officer arranges work experience placements. Off-the-job training sessions are held at college either in classrooms, the practice office or the learning resource centre. The computers in the learning resource centre have industry-standard accounting software. The training programme lasts for four months. There is an external assessment at the end of the programme. Achievement rates for the last year stand at 62.5 per cent. Eight completed portfolios have not yet been internally verified and certificated by the awarding body. In 1999-2000, retention rates are steady at around 75 to 80 per cent. The college identified some of the weaknesses, and identified strengths which were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified no significant strengths and further weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ no significant strengths identified

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of programme co-ordination
- ◆ insufficient work-placement opportunities
- ◆ poor assessment and internal verification practices
- ◆ poor standard of portfolios

POOR PRACTICE

Trainees received no on- or off-the-job training for three weeks over the Easter period, as they were given a compulsory holiday to coincide with staff holidays and not placed with employers for work experience for this period.

14. The programme is managed by a curriculum area manager and co-ordinated by a part-time visiting tutor. There are no defined roles and responsibilities and teamwork is mostly informal and not always effective. One tutor relies on the other to pass on verbally details on trainees' identified prior learning, as these are not recorded on any documents completed in the curriculum area. Tasks are not always completed when necessary. For example, eight trainees completed all the individual units of the NVQ but have not had their achievement recognised because the results from three months ago have not been reported to the awarding body. Therefore these trainees have no evidence of their success on the programme. The course is run as two distinct parts of administration and accounting and these are not co-ordinated. Evidence is only used for part or the other, with no cross-referencing. When trainees' achievements are recognised through an accreditation of their prior learning there is no planned development of their skills. The pace of training is slow and is unstimulating. Off-the-job training is satisfactory, but it does not meet the needs of individual trainees, as it is focussed on group work. No reviews are carried out for trainees who have been on the programme for two months, meaning that half the training programme is completed before trainees have their progress formally reviewed. There is no target setting and action planning with

trainees to link their on- and off-the-job work. There is no structured on-the-job training or effective liaison by college staff with workplace supervisors.

15. There is an imbalance of work-placement experience and time in comparison with the off-the-job training in college. The work placements are for one day each week and the majority of the trainees have not started on the placements until at least half way through the length of the training programme. Most trainees attend work placement for eight days out of the four months of the programme. Insufficient emphasis is placed on the importance of work experience and four trainees from the last group intake of 14 trainees did not attend a work placement at all. This has been recognised by the college and a placement officer has recently been appointed who has successfully managed to gain work placements for all the current trainees. There is also a lack of work experience for adults, many of whom have been away from the workplace for some time.

16. Some of the work placements are inappropriate and are not sufficiently related to the NVQ trainees are following, nor do they provide the necessary learning or evidence opportunities. Most trainees attend the work placements for a very short period and are not always able to demonstrate their competence over a period of time. Few assessment methods are used throughout all areas of the training programme. Direct observation is not used to assess trainees on work placements. Witness testimonies from workplace supervisors are not sufficiently explicit to use effectively for assessment. There is no recording of the oral questioning used to check trainees' background knowledge. Portfolios are based on a restricted range of evidence and do not show their competence over a period of time. There is an over-reliance on simulated evidence such as learning materials and classroom exercises. The awarding body records are not completed fully and are not always signed by the assessor. There is little use of work products as evidence. Cross-referencing of evidence within the portfolios is negligible. Portfolios are poorly presented.

17. Assessment for accounting trainees is not ongoing, and is only planned for the few last weeks of the programme. This is done by externally set assessments which are marked by the assessor. No supporting evidence is provided to reinforce the assessment decision. There is no formal action planning with the trainees. The business administration assessor holds an assessor qualification, while the assessor who has accounting experience is working towards the assessor qualification. There is no system to monitor NVQ unit achievements to date. Individual assessors do not keep any records as an overview of trainees' progress and achievements. There is no qualified internal verifier with any accounting experience or qualifications. The internal verifier is the curriculum area manager who has been included in the team in response to the external verifiers' reports. There has been no internal verification for the last nine months. There are no previous records of any internal verification. There has been no internal verification of the portfolios of trainees who left the programme three months ago. Trainees' achievements have not been accredited by the awarding body and trainees have not received certification of their achievements.

Foundation for work**Grade 3**

18. There are 11 trainees on the foundation for work programme. The programme is designed for young people who find it difficult to access mainstream education or training. Trainees lack a clear vocational focus and may also lack basic skills in literacy, numeracy or information technology. Many need to overcome other barriers which place them at a disadvantage when seeking training and employment, such as a history of exclusion from school, of offending, or abuse of drugs or alcohol.

19. The programme aims to help trainees to begin to develop basic skills, make an informed work or training choice and to provide additional support to enable them to build their confidence and motivation. The programme lasts for 15 weeks and includes an introductory week during which the co-ordinator works with trainees to explore vocational interests, assess their basic skills and agree a timetable for the rest of the programme. Trainees select a timetable to include 'tasters' in vocational areas, as well as literacy and/or numeracy training and an introduction to information and communications technology. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by NBC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured and -taught programme
- ◆ effective use of work 'tasters' to identify aptitudes
- ◆ good retention and progression rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic identification of trainees' individual needs
- ◆ poor links between staff in different areas of the programme
- ◆ some dull training and inappropriate learning materials

20. The foundation programme is well structured with a clear schedule and established lesson plans and course materials. Training is calm and provided at an even pace, with tutors working with small groups of trainees in a relaxed atmosphere. Tutors develop a rapport with trainees, to get to know them and to provide the options they want. The learning environment is welcoming and trainees feel comfortable. They work through a programme which includes sessions on vocational interests, career choice, decision making and confidence building. Trainees have access to training to gain qualifications in wordpower and numberpower, computer literacy and information technology and other qualifications. Training and assessment for these qualifications is competent. The

basic skills tutors have recently developed new materials for wordpower and numberpower which are relevant to some construction trades, but these are not yet in full use. In addition to classroom-based training, trainees have access to residential activities which help to develop their team work and increase their confidence. Some trainees also make use of the college's 'enrichment programme' which includes sports activities such as archery, football and ski-ing.

21. Trainees attend work tasters in their chosen vocational area. Some trainees choose to sample several occupations, others remain in one only. The experience gives trainees the opportunity to work in a particular trade, test their aptitude and find out if they enjoy it. It also helps trainees to adapt to the world of work, develop attendance patterns and mix with mainstream trainees. Trainees are encouraged to work through foundation programmes relevant to their chosen occupations. Fifty per cent of current trainees are on tasters in construction trades. The remaining trainees are sampling other occupational areas including information technology, beauty and media.

22. Progression rates on this programme are good, with 100 per cent of trainees who joined this programme since it began in October 1999 progressing to employment, further education or training with NBC or with other colleges.

23. Trainees are assessed by the careers service prior to joining the programme to identify their broad occupational interest, basic skills levels and provide some information on their educational attainment and personal background. This information is confirmed during the first week of the programme using a series of exercises including a literacy and numeracy test. The assessment is mechanistic and trainees are not encouraged to identify other training and support needs, or to access any support, guidance and training needed to help them to address them. Trainees build a programme from a narrow range of activities.

24. The programme co-ordinator maintains regular informal contact between trainees and the staff in the different areas of the programme. Recording of initial assessment, training plans and progress is limited to listing the main programme elements. The information is not easy to access and there is no system for sharing information between staff. Trainees and the various staff involved in the programme do not work to the same objectives.

25. The programme content and training methods used are not sufficiently varied or appropriately timed to reflect individuals' objectives or learning styles. For example, trainees attending tasters in carpentry and joinery find the academic content of some learning packs too advanced. Similarly, new trainees are asked to read through vocational interest exercises and careers guidance packs before completing the basic skills assessment for literacy skills. Materials are not sufficiently adapted to make them accessible to the trainees. Assessments for wordpower and numberpower make little use of work tasters and naturally occurring evidence. There are few opportunities for trainees to review what they have learnt and to recognise the confidence and skills which they have gained.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

26. NBC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, which has recently been reviewed and is in the new staff handbook issued this year. The student charter given to trainees makes reference to the equal opportunities policy. The college's strategic plan includes an analysis of the ethnic mix of local communities and compares these with the college's applicants. Fifteen per cent of work-based trainees are from minority ethnic groups. The catchment area of the college is varied. Some areas are multi-cultural and in some local wards around 60 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The strengths were no more than normal practice, inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective response to identified equal opportunities issues
- ◆ good use of positive images of under-represented groups in promotional materials

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of understanding of equal opportunities by staff and trainees
- ◆ poor use of equal opportunities data

GOOD PRACTICE

Off-the-job attendance times at college can be adapted for trainees with childcare responsibilities. They can vary the start and finish times to fit in with their children's timetables.

27. College staff respond promptly and effectively to equal opportunities issues when they are identified. For example, the college's reception area has recently been altered in consultation with a student with disabilities. This involved moving the entrance and installing ramps to connect the original reception to the new areas. The new reception is a welcoming area. It is accessible to wheelchair users, with automatically opening doors and a low reception counter. The area includes adapted toilet facilities and good access to the advice and guidance centre. The college has increased the amount of reserved parking for those with disabilities by the main reception door. Staff respond effectively to individuals' needs. The college provides a counselling service which is well established. It has provided counselling for 18 trainees in this academic year in addition to responding to a number of other requests for help. The college is involved in an 'inclusive learning initiative' and has developed an action plan for extending access to young people aged between 16 and 19.

28. Promotional materials such as the college's prospectus contain positive images of under-represented groups to promote equality. Trainees' successes in non-traditional roles are celebrated. A female trainee who completed qualifications in the traditionally male-dominated hand-crafted furniture trade was featured in the

college newspaper.

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainers in the hand-crafted furniture area have prepared learning materials which are colour coded and laminated to reduce glare, making them easier to use for trainees with dyslexia.

29. Equality of opportunity is not included on the college's induction checklist. Few trainees remember equal opportunities or their rights and responsibilities being mentioned at induction or at other stages in their training. Trainees are unable to suggest what might be expected in terms of their behaviour or their rights in the event of discrimination, bullying or harassment. The placement pack for employers includes a paragraph about equal opportunities. Workplace supervisors have a poor recollection of the statement and do not remember equal opportunities being discussed when placements were agreed. There is no checklist to confirm that equal opportunities have been discussed with workplace supervisors. Staff involved in the work-based training have not received training in equal opportunities issues. Many of the work-based training staff are unaware of the reviewed equal opportunities policy. They have little understanding of equal opportunities and its place in work-based training.

30. Data are collected which allow new trainees to be monitored against equal opportunities criteria. However, there is no system for monitoring progress, retention and achievement rates in relation to gender, race, disability or occupational area to establish any trends. Trainees' complaints and grievances are responded to promptly, but there is no system for encouraging feedback from trainees or for collecting and analysing this information to identify sources of problems relating to equal opportunities.

Trainee support**Grade 3**

31. Trainees are usually introduced to the work-based training unit of the college by the careers service, their employers or through the Employment Service. Most trainees have an interview with either a member of staff from the vocational area they are interested in joining or a representative of the training unit. Trainees complete an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy and results are sent to the training unit for the trainees' file. Trainees' needing additional learning support are referred to the college's learning support unit. The induction to the training unit includes completing training scheme documents with a member of the unit's staff. An occupational induction is carried out at the outset of training in the appropriate college department. Employers are responsible for the induction given to introduce trainees to the workplace. Reviews of trainees' progress are carried out by a tutor at the college, and in the workplace by a training unit representative. Tutors have recently begun to visit trainees in the workplace. Trainees who are not employed have work placements arranged by the college. Towards the end of trainees' programmes, they are given careers advice by staff from the college's careers service. The self-assessment report was accurate in its identification of weaknesses although additional weaknesses were identified by inspectors. Many of the strengths given in the report were considered to be no more than normal practice. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support for trainees with identified learning needs
- ◆ effective support from college's careers service
- ◆ effective action taken to widen participation in training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ review process lacks rigour
- ◆ details of additional support not shared among staff
- ◆ lack of detail in individual training plans
- ◆ unmemorable induction

32. Trainees with additional learning needs receive effective help from the specialist learning support unit. Additional literacy and numeracy support is often related to vocational topics and trainees take assignments from their classes to work on with support tutors. Support unit staff have started to develop basic skills work packs to complement the vocational programmes. Trainees include young people with dyslexia and those who have achieved few formal qualifications. The work of the support unit helps them to achieve vocational qualifications and secure employment.

33. The college's career service staff offer objective advice to prospective trainees about career opportunities and qualifications. Skilled staff give further advice to trainees and work effectively with the training unit to promote vacancies and arrange interviews. An interactive computer programme is used to suggest career opportunities which link to trainees' aspirations and qualification aims. One of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report states that work placements are in short supply. To address this, NBC has appointed an experienced placement officer who works effectively with the college's careers staff to find new opportunities for trainees.

34. The learning support unit is open outside of normal college hours, including weekends. Special arrangements can be made for trainees to attend classes to suit their needs, and the childcare facility has enabled single parents and women returning to work to enrol and remain on courses. Even if trainees do not qualify for the college's hardship funds to subsidise places in the nursery, the training unit works with other agencies to secure alternative funding so that nursery places can be made available. The childcare facility is also open outside normal college hours. Most college programmes are accessible at any time of the year and links with local schools to offer vocational training to year-11 pupils have proved effective in recruiting trainees onto work-based and full-time courses.

35. Visits to the workplace have recently increased in frequency and improved in their content. Tutors now visit the workplace to monitor the progress of trainees, and there has been some assessment in the workplace, although this has yet to be

established as normal practice. The volume and quality of evidence from the workplace has improved recently.

36. Information about additional support for trainees is systematically shared among staff. Trainees leave their training sessions to attend the learning support unit and the link between support staff, vocational tutors and work-place supervisors is poor. Tutors are often not aware of trainees' attendance or progress at the additional support sessions and are unclear about the way in which parties can work together to assist trainees' development. Some workplace supervisors only find out about the additional support being provided when they identify problems themselves and contact the college. Staff involved in reviews with trainees often give confidentiality as the reason for not sharing information with parties involved in training.

37. Reviews of trainees' progress are not approached in a uniform way. Details of the reviews undertaken by the tutors responsible for off-the-job training are rarely passed to the training unit and reviews in the workplace do not include input from the workplace supervisor. Agreed targets cannot be shared by all parties. Trainees and employers only receive a copy of reviews if they request it.

38. Trainees' individual training plans are often poorly completed and do not record past achievements or individual targets. Trainees with learning difficulties or additional support needs identified through the initial assessment process do not have these details systematically recorded so that tutors, employers and training unit staff can monitor their progress. Trainees with previous occupational experience or qualifications rarely have this information considered and recorded so that the learning programme can be customised to suit their needs. Many of the documents in trainees' files are incomplete.

39. Induction to the programme is carried out by the training unit's staff and this is followed by an induction to the occupational area by a tutor. Many trainees have poor recall of the content of induction, which does not effectively cover equal opportunities. Progress reviews do not reinforce the content of induction, which many trainees remember only as information on health and safety. The induction content varies according to the time of year that trainees enrol onto programmes. Trainees enrolling in September have a more comprehensive induction than those that starting at other times of the year.

Management of training

Grade 5

40. The training unit is based on the first floor of the college. It is responsible for the administration of the TEC contract. The training unit has five members of staff. There have recently been changes in the management of the training unit. Until recently, the TEC funding co-ordinator and three administrative assistants were responsible to the business development manager. They now work to the management information system and administration manager. The three

administration assistants each have a primary responsibility, for youth training, adult training and for the New Deal and foundation trainees. The recently appointed placement officer is based in the training unit and her line manager is the business development officer. She is responsible for placing all trainees who are not employed in a work placement and for carrying out workplace reviews. The head of construction has recently been given responsibility for the management of the occupational aspects of on- and off-the-job training. Work-based training is integrated into the college's curriculum areas. The curriculum staff are responsible for the on- and off-the-job training of the work-based trainees in their area. The trainers, assessors and tutors are line managed by the curriculum area managers, who meet as a team to discuss curriculum issues. All college staff involved with work-based training are employed by the college and included in college procedures and systems. The college achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1998 and is now re-assessed annually.

41. The self-assessment report identified some strengths which were agreed on by inspectors. One of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report has already been addressed. Inspectors identified more weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of internal and external networking and communications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient involvement by employers in training programmes
- ◆ unclear staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ ineffective systems for providing information on trainees' progress
- ◆ achievement and retention data not easily available
- ◆ ineffective use of appraisal systems

POOR PRACTICE

A new placement was graded as satisfactory when there was a health and safety issue with the computer workstations.

The chairs being used are inappropriate, as they are not designed for use with computers, and cannot be manoeuvred or adjusted in any way.

42. Staff have a range of external networks with local referral and support agencies to advise on local employment trends and specialist support advice. The staff from the training unit work harmoniously with curriculum staff. Curriculum managers meet regularly to discuss college issues.

43. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor. Systems are inadequate to manage work-based training programmes. There is insufficient involvement by employers in training programmes. Employers lack awareness of the content of the NVQ work carried out at college and of their responsibilities in providing on-the-job training for trainees. There is little structured on-the-job training and poor links between the work the trainees do in college and at work.

44. Systems for providing information on trainees' progress are ineffective. There is insufficient monitoring of trainees' progress and recording of their achievements. There is a general confusion about the roles and responsibilities of staff. Achievement and retention data are not easily available. Trainees are sometimes integrated into curriculum groups with young people from many different funding sources and data on trainees are not collected separately to guide decisions about work-based training. The college's appraisal systems are not used effectively to identify staff's training needs in relation to work-based training and to help them improve their effectiveness in their roles. Staff training is inadequate.

Quality assurance

Grade 5

45. NBC has a quality assurance policy and a number of associated procedures. It satisfies the quality assurance requirements of Birmingham and Solihull TEC. Some written policies are contained in the staff handbook which is issued to all staff. A newsletter is produced to update staff on quality assurance issues. Overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with the personnel and quality manager. There is a quality assurance sub-committee of the academic board which has responsibility for reporting to the academic board on matters of quality assurance. The college's quality assurance strategies include self-assessment, audits of training, monitoring, review and evaluation of all its work, and the use of feedback from questionnaires. Inspectors found that, of the eight strengths identified in the self-assessment report, only one applied to work-based training. They agreed with two of the weaknesses identified by NBC, found additional weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive observations of off-the-job training sessions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ no formal monitoring of on-the-job training
- ◆ little effective sharing of good practice
- ◆ poor analysis and use of data to make improvements
- ◆ some unsatisfactory internal verification practices
- ◆ underdeveloped systems for obtaining and using trainees and employers' feedback

46. The college has developed an auditing process in order to monitor the quality of the training carried out in the college as a whole. This involves one occupational area being paired with another and curriculum area managers ensuring that all staff

within the paired department are observed teaching on at least one occasion in the academic year. Staff are able to be involved in the observations. Less experienced staff work with a more experienced member of staff for the purposes of observation. All observations are carried out following clear and detailed guidelines and result in a detailed written assessment of the training session and feedback for the member of staff. All observations are graded.

47. NBC's quality assurance policies and procedures have been updated as the college has undergone change but this is not yet complete. Many key aspects of the work-based training are not covered by procedures. For example, there are no procedures of the initial interview, accreditation of prior learning arrangements or trainees' reviews. Those that have been developed recently are not incorporated into the college's quality assurance framework. There is no guidance for staff to ensure that if a new procedure is required or documents need to be updated, it is done in a systematic and controlled way. Staff use documents and performance standards they have developed themselves, using no quality check. There is a system for keeping trainees' information in a number of different files. Some of this information is incomplete with gaps in individual training plans, incomplete initial assessment documents and review forms missing information on quality.

48. The existing quality assurance arrangements are focused on college-based activities rather than on work-based training. There are no procedures for the effective control of on-the-job training. There is no systematic planning, monitoring or recording of training in the workplace. The college's procedures focus on compliance with the TEC contract rather than on setting definitive standards for the quality of on-the-job training. There are no effective links between the theory and practical training at the college and the training received in the workplace. There are many gaps in the quality assurance arrangements for work-based training and it is not possible to effectively monitor many aspects of programmes.

49. NBC's systems do not ensure consistently high standards of practice across occupational areas and, on occasions, different disciplines within the same occupational area. Good practice is not routinely shared among staff. For example, dyslexic trainees are given support in handcrafted furniture, but not in any of the other construction areas. Communication between the training unit and teaching staff is weak and information about trainees is not being shared or easily accessed by all parties.

50. The data generated by the quality assurance system are not effectively collated or used in order to make improvements. Data are difficult to extract from the management information system. There is limited information technology expertise within the administration team for work-based training. The college's management information system is not compatible with the software used to administer the TEC-funded programmes. Interviews are not conducted with trainees who leave the programme. Responsibility for carrying these out is unclear among staff. All the planned internal audits have not yet been completed and the schedule of audits does not cover all aspects of the quality assurance system. The quality assurance sub-

committee has met four times out of a planned seven, and has yet to achieve one of its main aims of checking and reporting on the quality audits within the college. Information is gathered in order to comply with the TEC contract but there is little analysis outside of TEC requirements.

51. There has been little attempt to obtain feedback from trainees and workplace supervisors. Other feedback includes regular course evaluations, but this does not result in specific information being produced on work-based training.

52. In some occupational areas, the quality of internal verification is poor. It ranges from being non-existent within the accounting programme to being good in the gas programme. Some qualified assessors in the workplace are not being used to assess trainees. In some cases, evidence generated in the workplace is not used and the internal verification system does not identify this. The planned cross-college internal verifiers' meetings have not been held as regularly as planned.

53. NBC's self-assessment report was clear and easy to follow. The self-assessment process has used to identify the strengths and weaknesses and action plan to make improvements. However, many of the planned actions have not yet resulted in demonstrable improvements. In one occupational area, significant weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report. The college's self-assessment process is not sufficiently rigorous to provide a reliable and comprehensive quality assurance system. It has no clear and coherent quality assurance process which focuses specifically on the quality of the work-based training programmes.