



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 2000

Darlington Borough Council

SUMMARY

Darlington Borough Council provides training in motor vehicle engineering and administration. There are good-quality work placements, both within the council and with local employers. The quality of practical and theory training in motor vehicle is good, with close links created between the two. Retention rates for these programmes are poor. In administration trainees the make slow progress towards their NVQs. Trainees' selection and recruitment procedures ensure that there is equal access for all, irrespective of ability. Monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is inadequate. Support for trainees is good, with comprehensive induction programmes and thorough initial assessment of trainees' basic skills. Additional learning support is provided for those who need it. Staff training and development is strong. Management information is not fully used. Quality assurance arrangements cover aspects of the training programme but are insufficiently focused on the quality of training and assessment.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	4
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ♦ good-quality on- and off-the-job training in motor vehicle
- ♦ good-quality work placements
- ♦ comprehensive and sensitive trainees' recruitment and selection procedures
- ♦ comprehensive induction
- ♦ through basic skills assessment
- ♦ effective learning support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ♦ poor retention rates in motor vehicle training
- ♦ slow progress of trainees in administration NVQs
- ♦ little monitoring of equality of opportunity at work
- ♦ no initial assessment of key skills
- ♦ poor collation and use of management information
- ♦ no systematic evaluation of the quality of training and assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) set up its training unit in 1981. It contracts with Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide training for young people through modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other work-based training. The training centre has recently moved its base and is now located within the Arts Centre in Darlington. Training is offered in five occupational sectors, which are construction, engineering, business administration, leisure, sport and travel and health, care and public services. Trainees are all working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3. Some trainees are also undertaking awards in basic skills. There are currently 66 trainees and eight members of staff. DBC subcontracts training and assessment for the sports and recreation and childcare programmes, to a local college of further education.

2. The Borough of Darlington is compact, comprising the town of Darlington and its surrounding area. The river Tees and North Yorkshire lie to the south, the Teeside conurbation to the east, County Durham to the north and rural Teesdale to the west. Formerly a district within County Durham, Darlington Borough Council became a unitary authority on 1 April 1997. The borough has a population of approximately 100,000, with most people living in the urban areas. There are excellent communication and transport links. Darlington has a principal railway station on the east-coast rail mainline. The motorway and Teeside International airport are within its boundaries.

3. Projections suggest that the borough's population will remain fairly stable until 2011. Within the same period a number of variations are anticipated, with a decrease in the number of children and an increase in the number of people above retirement age. Average household size is predicted to fall. By 2011 there are expected to be 3,300 additional households, an increase of nearly 8 per cent.

4. Unemployment in Darlington is high at 6.6 per cent, compared with the national figure of 3.8 per cent in April 2000. The educational achievement of school leavers is slightly lower than the national average. In 1999 the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 42.9 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The number of people in Darlington from minority ethnic populations is low, representing only 1.5 per cent of the population.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. DBC produced its second self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. The self-assessment process and production of the report were co-ordinated by the training manager. Each occupational sector evaluated the quality of its work against the quality statements in *Raising the Standard*. The views of employers and trainees were sought and taken into account. Judgements were discussed among all staff. Action plans were drawn up to remedy the weaknesses highlighted.

6. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at DBC in June 2000. The engineering and business administration sectors were inspected. The construction, sport and recreation and childcare sectors had nine, three and two trainees respectively and were not inspected owing to small numbers. Inspectors interviewed 23 trainees and examined 20 trainees' files. They interviewed six employers and 10 DBC staff. Thirteen portfolios of assessment evidence were examined. Inspectors also scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence including minutes of meetings, external verifier reports, internal correspondence and management information. Two sessions of learning were observed, both in engineering. Each was awarded grade 2.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering (motor vehicle)

Grade 4

7. There are currently 13 trainees in motor vehicle engineering. Eight are on a national traineeship programme and are working towards NVQ at level 2 in unit replacement plus key skills units. A further five trainees are on the other training programme and are working towards NVQ at level 2, or the level 1 award in motor vehicle maintenance. The level 1 candidates are also working towards basic skills qualifications. Many of the trainees who join the motor vehicle programme have a history of poor school attendance and have shown little interest in previous academic work. Over 90 per cent of trainees have additional learning support needs. Trainees are either employed or they are on work experience. They attend the training centre for one day each week for theory sessions and for support with compiling their NVQ evidence portfolio. There is one staff member responsible for the programme, who is occupationally competent and experienced and holds NVQ assessor and trainer qualifications.

8. In 1999-2000, 12 people started on the national traineeship programme. Of these, five left early without a qualification and seven are still in training. In the same period, 20 people started on the motor vehicle maintenance programme, 14 of whom left early without a qualification. Six are still in training. Some of the strengths highlighted by DBC in the self-assessment report for this sector related

to trainee support rather than engineering. Inspectors agreed with some of the other strengths. Of the three weaknesses found by inspectors, only one was mentioned in the self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ employers and trainees' comprehensive understanding of the programmes
- ◆ close links between practical and theory work
- ◆ high-quality training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' poor retention rates
- ◆ insufficient resources for theory sessions
- ◆ lack of individuality in trainees' portfolios

9. DBC has built excellent links with local garages and motor vehicle dealers and now has 25 work-placement providers. Companies that offer placements are supportive of the training. DBC recently held an evening presentation for the motor vehicle placement providers and eight employers attended. They are given information packs containing guidance on the structure and assessment requirements for the NVQs. The DBC instructor visits trainees on placement every two weeks and uses these occasions to inform and update workplace supervisors. The supervisors' knowledge of the NVQs is impressive. Trainees are also knowledgeable about the NVQ and key skills units. They are aware of how much progress they have made and are clear about the tasks that they need to carry out to cover each unit.

10. The quality of training is good. Workplace training is provided by experienced staff who are keen to help trainees develop their skills and knowledge. Work placements are provided by companies that cover a good range of size, activities and location. Trainees discuss which work placement they wish to attend. They are able to change work placements during the programme for legitimate reasons, such as to gain a broader range of experience to cover all parts of the NVQ. Off-the-job training sessions are well planned and competently delivered. The instructor carefully pitches the sessions at the right level to ensure that the less able trainees do not struggle with the work. The atmosphere is informal and purposeful. There is plenty of individual tuition provided and there are rarely more than six trainees in attendance. Close links are created between theory and practical training. The instructor uses the two-weekly visits to each workplace to co-ordinate the two parts of the programme.

11. Trainee retention rates are poor. In the last two years, 74 per cent of trainees have left the programme early without a qualification. In the period 1996 to 1999, one trainee achieved an NVQ at level 3, 10 achieved level 2 and five trainees

gained level 1. Of the 27 trainees who completed their programme in the same period, 20 progressed to full-time employment.

12. Trainees do not have sufficient opportunity to gain further guidance and practice their skills during off-the-job training. Equipment is not available to enable them to do this. The off-the-job sessions are generally theoretical and there are sufficient books, computers and worksheets.

13. Evidence portfolios are well organised and contain sound assessment evidence. All assessment evidence is generated at work. However the evidence portfolios are all very similar and fail to reflect the different work settings or the range of work undertaken in each garage or dealership. One trainee carried out some work on a specialist vehicle, but his evidence portfolio made no reference to this activity. Trainees are not sufficiently encouraged to produce evidence portfolios that would provide a prospective employer with an interesting and impressive account of the trainees' practical experience.

Business administration

Grade 3

14. There are 39 trainees in business administration. Ten are modern apprentices, 13 are on a national traineeship programme, and a further 16 are the other training programme. Two thirds of trainees have additional learning support needs. Trainees are all working towards NVQs in administration at levels 1 to 3. Some of those working towards the level 1 award are also undertaking qualifications in basic skills. Just over half of trainees are employed by, or on work placement with, DBC. The remainder are in a wide range of placements including a school, the TEC and a motor dealership. There are three staff in this sector who deliver off-the-job training sessions and visit the workplace to carry out assessment and reviews. They are all appropriately qualified and experienced.

15. In the last three years, 23 people have started a modern apprenticeship. Eleven are still in training, of whom nine started in the 1999-2000 contract year and are still on the programme. Ten people have achieved NVQ at level 3. In 1999-2000, 18 people started a national traineeship of whom 15 are still in training. In the past three years, 125 people have started on other training programmes. They have achieved 22 NVQs at level 3, 23 at level 2 and 5 at level 1. In the current year, 33 people have started this programme of whom 28 remain. Of the five early leavers, three obtained employment and one entered further education. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The slow progress of trainees in achieving NVQs was not identified as a weakness. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ flexible arrangements for off-the-job training

- ◆ effective use of the workplace to generate assessment evidence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards NVQ achievement
- ◆ lack of integration of key skills into some NVQ programmes
- ◆ no targets set for unit achievement

16. DBC's staff have strong links with employers and have developed a wide range of placements to suit the needs of trainees across the range of programmes. During induction, trainees are given the opportunity to consider the variety of placements available to them. They discuss the options with the tutors who try to ensure that they are matched according to their skills and career aspirations. At the end of the induction programme, all trainees have a placement arranged for them to start their NVQ training. Most work placements employ trainees at the end of the programme. Where internal vacancies arise within the council, trainees on placement are eligible to apply. Those who succeed are able to continue with their studies once employed by the council. The range of jobs available is interesting, stimulating and challenging.

17. Trainees are scheduled to attend regular off-the-job training sessions. Some employed trainees have difficulty attending each week due to work demands. Staff have developed flexible arrangements for training. Times and days for attendance vary, to suit individual trainees and their employers. Overall attendance at these training sessions is good. Trainees normally carry out individual work under close supervision and guidance from staff. Where appropriate, group sessions are held to cover background knowledge. Trainees and employers appreciate this flexibility.

18. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace to carry out assessment and reviews. Most employers are keen to help trainees learn and progress. Where necessary, arrangements are made for trainees to carry out tasks not normally within their work remit, to generate assessment evidence. Portfolios are of a good standard with all of the evidence collected in the workplace.

19. Achievement of NVQs is slow across all of the programmes. Some modern apprentices have been on the programme for two years and have not had any units formally assessed. Many of these trainees have gathered a substantial amount of assessment evidence. DBC has recruited school leavers with good GCSE results directly onto the NVQ level 3 award. In many cases the work they are doing in the first year of their employment is of a junior nature and more appropriate to a level 2 award. There is little recorded assessment for these candidates until they are well into the second year of the programme. Trainees are not set targets for unit achievement in their individual training plans or during the review process. The action plans drawn up during most assessment planning sessions are informal. The frequency of staff visits to the workplace is now satisfactory following the appointment of a new member of staff.

20. DBC has been slow in introducing key skills into the programmes. Modern apprentices have concentrated on NVQ achievement with key skills assessment left to the end. Level 3 candidates have little knowledge or understanding of how key skills link with their NVQ work. Those on the national traineeship programme that were recruited in 1999 have had key skills training from the outset. Staff are working on a set of training packs to assist trainees to identify opportunities to gather key skills evidence in the workplace.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

21. DBC has an equal opportunities policy which meets both legislative and TEC requirements. It is supported by a set of procedures which are updated regularly. All staff are issued with a handbook during their induction which includes a copy of the policy and procedures on harassment, grievance and complaints. Trainees are also supplied with a copy of the equal opportunities policy during their induction, plus information on complaints and appeals. A simplified version has been written for those with reading difficulties. Fifty-five per cent of trainees are men. There are no trainees with physical disabilities, although several have health problems such as asthma or epilepsy. There are no trainees from minority ethnic groups. In its self-assessment report DBC highlighted some strengths which are considered by inspectors to represent normal practice. Inspectors agree with one strength and the weaknesses and with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ equal access to training for less able trainees
- ◆ comprehensive and sensitive recruitment and selection arrangements
- ◆ trainees' good understanding of the complaints and appeals procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little positive promotion of equality of opportunity
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of equality of opportunity at work

22. DBC's new training premises are on the second floor and are inaccessible to those with mobility difficulties. A formal agreement has been drawn up with the Arts Centre stating that, if a trainee with mobility difficulties is recruited, training accommodation will be made available on the ground floor. There is a ramp into the building and a cafeteria with lavatory facilities on the ground floor.

23. All trainees who could benefit from the training are accepted onto the programme. Many applicants have learning difficulties and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Others have a history of poor school attendance. DBC gives the applicant a new start and a chance to succeed. Initial assessment is used to

determine support needs and not as an instrument to reflect less able or disadvantaged young people.

24. There are clear procedures for recruitment and selection of trainees, which are carefully followed by staff. Interviews are well structured and there is a standard list of questions that are asked. Records are kept of the answers given. There is also a list of topics on which staff should record information to ensure that all relevant issues are covered. This system is designed to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all applicants. A new equal opportunities monitoring form for applicants was introduced in April covering gender, ethnicity and disability. There have been 52 forms completed so far. Only one application has been received from a person from a minority ethnic background who was offered a place.

25. Trainees' knowledge and understanding of the complaints and NVQ appeals procedures is good. The complaints procedure has been used effectively. Trainees readily express any dissatisfaction or concerns to the instructors who often resolve matters informally.

26. DBC has taken little action actively to actively promote equality. There have been no efforts made to target specific groups for training. Recently produced marketing literature does not encourage trainees to consider non-traditional training areas, for example women in engineering.

27. There is insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity for trainees at work. There is brief reference to equality of opportunity in the employer contract and employers are provided with a guide to good practice on equality of opportunity that has recently been produced by the TEC. There is, however, no checking that the employer has an equal opportunities policy. Smaller organisations, which do not have a policy of their own, are not required to accept and implement that of DBC. The vetting and monitoring of employers covers only health and safety matters. Trainee reviews do not always include discussion of equality of opportunity.

Trainee support

Grade 2

28. Most young people are referred to DBC by the careers service. Some respond to advertisements placed by DBC in the local newspapers. All applicants are invited to attend an interview. During the interview an initial assessment of the applicants literacy and numeracy skills is undertaken. The results of this assessment are used to determine the appropriate level of qualification and to draw up a programme of learning support. Approximately 95 per cent of applicants are offered a training place. Those who have severe basic skills learning needs who would be unlikely to cope successfully with an NVQ are referred back to the careers service for referral to a training provider offering prevocational training. From June until September each year there are three-day group induction training programmes. For the rest of the year a one-day induction programme is provided

for individuals or small groups. Each trainee has a further induction in the training sector within DBC and in the workplace. DBC identified the strengths found by inspectors for this aspect but did not mention the absence of key skills initial assessment in its self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction programmes
- ◆ thorough basic skills assessment
- ◆ effective learning support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills

29. All trainees undertake a comprehensive induction programme to ensure that they have full information on their training programme from the start. There are detailed session plans for the initial induction programme. The programme includes input from a variety of speakers including the training manager, TEC representative, training co-ordinator, council safety officer, a careers officer, training instructors and a local bank representative. At the end of the induction trainees are set an assignment to assess their knowledge of the main topics. They are supplied with a handbook containing the information covered for future reference. Trainees then undertake a further induction in their training sector which is given by the instructor. The content includes the structure and content of the NVQ and health and safety issues relating to the vocational area. Trainees receive and sign a copy of the NVQ appeals procedure and given copy of the complaints procedure. A further induction is provided in the work placement. All aspects of the induction programme are evaluated and checklists are used by staff to ensure that all necessary topics have been covered.

30. The initial assessment of trainees' ability in basic skills is thorough. The TEC requires DBC to administer the Basic Skills Agency screening tests for reading, writing and numeracy. This is to establish which trainees are suitable for basic skills qualifications at entry level, for which DBC receives TEC funding. In addition, a further assessment is carried out to establish any learning support needs for all trainees. This includes trainees' self-assessment of their communication, writing and numeracy skills, discussion regarding prior learning and a centre-devised assessment paper to identify specific learning needs such as letter writing, measurement and use of time. Each trainee has an individual interview with the member of staff responsible for administering the assessment to discuss the results and draw up a support programme if appropriate.

31. Learning support is available for all trainees, with two-thirds of them in receipt of such help. There is one experienced member of staff who holds a specialist qualification in teaching basic skills who oversees the work. This staff

member is also an assessor for the business administration programme. A further member of staff holds a basic qualification in teaching literacy. There is a good range of learning resources including worksheets, books and specialist training packages for use during sessions. All learning material is suitable for young adults and relevant to the trainees. Much basic skills work takes place within the vocational area. Efforts are made to link the basic skills work to the NVQ.

32. All trainees undertake a personal effectiveness programme consisting of sessions on health and safety, money management, job search and career progression. Sessions last for either a full or half day. There are lesson plans including learning objectives for each session. In addition, 15 trainees recently attended a residential team-building and personal-development course.

33. DBC does not carry out initial assessment of key skills for modern apprentices or national trainees. Plans are in place to identify and use an appropriate assessment tool.

Management of training

Grade 3

34. The training centre is an integral part of DBC within the Human Resource Management Division. The management structure, responsibilities and internal lines of communication are clear and understood by staff within the unit. There are currently eight members of staff: a training manager, a training co-ordinator, five training instructors and an administrative assistant. Training instructors are given the responsibility and authority to manage their own programmes with support and regular meetings with the training manager. DBC holds the Investor in People award. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths claimed by DBC for this aspect and found two different weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong partnerships with employers
- ◆ comprehensive staffing procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little sharing of good practice
- ◆ poor collation of management information

35. DBC has long-standing and well-developed links with local employers. Employers are encouraged to play a central role in the training programmes. All unemployed trainees have work placements. The quality of the work placements is good and DBC maintains employers' enthusiasm and commitment to training

through frequent contact and an effective flow of information.

36. DBC has recently introduced a staff appraisal scheme which includes, as one outcome, identification of staff development needs. Staff within the training unit have good access to training and development. They are well qualified, possessing a range of training and NVQ assessor/internal verifier awards. Currently, four members of staff are working towards a key skills assessor award. Trainers maintain the currency of their industrial knowledge through the regular visits to the workplace.

37. DBC has a comprehensive, written recruitment policy which aims to ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants. One week before a new member of staff starts at DBC they are assigned a mentor, and a planning meeting with both line manager and personnel officer takes place to co-ordinate the induction process. On appointment, staff take part in an induction programme which extends over a two-month period. The programme is well planned, with topics specified and target dates set for the completion of each. Topics include introduction to DBC policies on sexual harassment, grievance procedures, smoking and alcohol. Welfare and employees' benefits are also covered within the induction timetable. All staff have comprehensive job descriptions listing the job purpose, reporting relationships within the unit and all duties and responsibilities. These have recently been re-issued following a major restructuring of the unit.

38. Communication within the training unit is effective with formal monthly, staff meetings. These meetings give priority to the dissemination of management information and current issues raised by members of staff. The training manager also has six-weekly meetings with individual trainers to discuss the training programmes and trainees' progress towards achievement. Targets for trainee achievement are agreed following negotiation. These targets form the basis of future contract bids by the training unit. Trainers work together effectively and there is much informal communication. There is an open management style within the unit which allows the free flow of information and access to management by staff.

39. Good practice is not always shared between staff. In staff meetings trainers are not encouraged to discuss issues that are common to all sectors, such as trainees' review, assessment practice and internal verification. Trainers, even within the same occupational area, work in different ways. For example, not all trainees' files contain the same set of documents.

40. DBC has two management information systems running in parallel. One is required for Tees Valley TEC and a further system was required by another TEC with whom DBC used to contract. The administration assistant has received training in the use of both systems. The systems are complementary, each with its own advantages, and together form a powerful system that is capable of producing a wealth of information, including reasons for trainees leaving the programme early and the destinations of all programme leavers. Trainees' contact details and counselling notes are also put into the system. The systems are used largely to generate information required to complete TEC-funding claims. DBC makes

insufficient analyses and use of the data for its own purposes.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

41. The training unit has a written quality system which is maintained by the training co-ordinator. This is separate from the quality assurance arrangements for DBC as a whole. There are six quality manuals which cover a wide range of operational activities. Feedback from trainees and employers is sought through the use of questionnaires. The training manager carries out an annual audit of the system. The quality assurance system meets the requirements of the TEC. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and one further strength and one weakness were identified. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly written quality assurance system
- ◆ full involvement of staff in quality assurance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of training and assessment
- ◆ little analysis of data to inform continuous improvement

42. The quality assurance system is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the training programme from recruitment to departure. Links are created between DBC's policies and procedures and the separate quality assurance arrangements for the training unit. Two of the quality manuals are devoted to the process of self-assessment. All arrangements are regularly reviewed and updated whenever necessary by the training co-ordinator. The procedures accurately reflect the working practices of staff and include close document control procedures.

43. Staff are fully conversant with the quality assurance manuals and generally follow the procedures. All new staff are given an overview of the quality assurance system as part of their induction programme. Amendments to the system are carried out by the co-ordinator, but all staff are consulted and involved in changes. Staff support the system and see that it is relevant and important to their work. They also participate effectively in the self-assessment process. Trainers were responsible for evaluating their own sector and contributing this information to the self-assessment report. Judgements on the generic aspects were made through discussions with the whole staff team. Self-assessment is viewed by staff as a genuine tool for improving the quality of the trainees' experience.

44. There is little evaluation of the quality of training and assessment. Trainers are not observed training or given feedback on their performance to help them improve. The service level agreements signed by the subcontractors do not include

measures to ensure that the quality of training and assessment meet an acceptable minimum standard. The college to which DBC subcontracts is not required to submit its own self-assessment report, and there is no formal monitoring of the quality of training it provides.

45. There is little analysis of data produced by the management information systems. Not enough use is made of information on trainees' retention, achievement and employment rates to improve the quality of the programmes. For example, the poor retention rates in motor vehicle had not previously been quantified, and the severity of the problem only came to light when DBC completed the data forms required for inspection. DBC has recently introduced a system for obtaining feedback from trainees and employers through questionnaires. The feedback has not been analysed.

46. The self-assessment report is clearly presented. Supporting evidence is cited for each of the strengths and weaknesses. Many of the strengths identified in the report are no more than normal practice or contractual requirements. The report fails to take sufficient account of the low retention and achievement of trainees. In both occupational areas and in the management of training inspectors awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the other self-assessment grades.