

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 2000

# West Berkshire Training Consortium

## SUMMARY

West Berkshire Training Consortium offers good training in manufacturing and business administration. Training is satisfactory in engineering and hairdressing. The training programmes in retailing and customer service and sport and recreation are poor. Opportunities are missed to assess engineering, manufacturing and sport and recreation trainees in the workplace. Few trainees achieve certification of key skills. Trainees in some areas are not set targets. Although the consortium promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily it has not taken specific action to attract recruits from groups under represented on training programmes. Trainees receive good support. Staff do not, however, always monitor trainees' progress towards achieving their qualification sufficiently closely, or spur them on to ensure they complete their programmes. Communications within the organisation are good. The consortium's arrangements for quality assurance of in-house training are effective and lead to improvements. There is, however, insufficient quality assurance of training provided by subcontractors.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	2
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	4
Leisure, sport & travel	4
Hair & beauty	3

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ innovative and effective training programme in manufacturing
- ◆ good business administration programme
- ◆ good co-ordination of on and off-the-job training in hairdressing
- ◆ good range of programmes to meet all trainees' needs
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ open and effective management
- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees and employers for planning continuous improvement

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities to assess trainees and employers in the workplace
- ◆ failure to ensure full implementation of all trainees' training plans
- ◆ insufficient theory work on retailing and customer service programmes
- ◆ failure to meet training framework requirements on sport and recreation programmes
- ◆ inconsistent initial assessment methods across programmes
- ◆ poor target setting

## INTRODUCTION

1. West Berkshire Training Consortium (WBTC) is based in Newbury. It was established in 1983 as a result of a joint initiative between Newbury District Council, who are now West Berkshire Council, and the two local chambers of commerce of Newbury and Thatcham. Each of the founding organisations nominated a member of the board, and the company was set up as a limited company by guarantee with charitable status. One aim of WBTC is to serve the needs of local business.

2. WBTC has contracts with Thames Valley Enterprise Training and Enterprise Council (TVTEC) to provide training for modern apprentices, national trainees, and other training. Programmes are currently offered in 12 of the 14 occupational code areas specified by the Training Standards Council (TSC). Some of these had few trainees who were not inspected. Currently there are a total of 224 trainees, 24 of whom are on the programmes inspected.

3. WBTC works with a range of companies. The majority are in the Newbury/Thatcham area of West Berkshire, but some are further afield in Bracknell, Slough, Windsor and Taplow. Currently, there are 18 permanent members of staff: one operations director, 10 trainers and/or assessors and seven administrative support staff. There are also three freelance assessors. WBTC has subcontracting arrangements with 11 local colleges and training providers. A wide range of training is offered through subcontractors including: engineering, floristry, amenity horticulture, environmental conservation, accountancy, laboratory operations, advanced science, handcraft furniture, machine printing and camera operations. WBTC has preferred supplier status with the TEC. In 1993-94 and 1994-95, WBTC was named as training provider of the year by the TEC and currently holds the silver award for this category.

4. West Berkshire is the most westerly district in the Thames Valley area. It is largely rural in nature but contains significant lines of communication, including the M4 and A4 running east-west and the A34 running from north to south, through Newbury itself. In 1998, West Berkshire had a population of 144, 200. West Berkshire's economy employs 66, 419 people in 7,118 companies. The unemployment rate in the area in March 2000 was 0.9 per cent, considerably lower than the national average of 3.9 per cent. At 1.7 per cent, the percentage of people from minority ethnic groups in the area is much lower than the average for England of 12.4 per cent. In 1999, 56.8 per cent of school leavers attained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. A high percentage of young people in the local area go on to further or higher education. In 1999, 47 per cent of year 13 leavers went into higher education and a further 13 per cent deferred their entry for one year. In March 2000 only 139 young people aged 18 to 24 age group were registered as unemployed in the West Berkshire area.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The self-assessment report used for inspection was the third WBTC had produced. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process. An inspection working party drew up the report. Each programme manager provided information. All staff read the report and participated in the final grading decisions. Employers and subcontractors were not involved in the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They considered some strengths to be no more than normal practice. They also found strengths and weaknesses which WBTC had not identified. They agreed with three of the grades in the self-assessment report. In respect of one area, inspectors awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report. In respect of the remaining six areas, they awarded grades lower than those given in the self-assessment report.

6. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 31 days at WBTC in June 2000. Inspectors interviewed 85 trainees and 22 employers. They held 19 interviews with staff. Inspectors visited seven subcontractors and 22 work placements. They looked at a wide range of documents including trainees' portfolios and files, individual training plans, training materials, assessment records and assessment documents, company documents including policies and procedures, internal and external verifiers' reports, TEC reviews, minutes of staff meetings, personnel records and analysis of feedback from trainees and employers. Inspectors observed six training sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering						
Manufacturing						
Business administration		2				2
Retailing & customer service				1		1
Leisure, sport & travel						
Hair & beauty			3			3
<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>6</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Engineering

**Grade 3**

7. WBTC has 16 trainees on engineering programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3. Of these, eight are modern apprentices, one is a national trainee, and seven are following other vocational programmes. Training leading to national vocational

qualifications (NVQs) is available in engineering production, engineering maintenance, servicing electronic systems, engineering manufacture, technical services and vehicle maintenance. Twelve trainees are employed and four are in work placements. Employing and sponsoring organisations offer a diversity of employment ranging from specialist automotive component manufacture to general engineering. WBTC subcontracts all its off-the-job training in engineering to two colleges. College staff carry out assessment and internal verification. In Newbury, modern apprentices and trainees following other programmes take the NVQ level 2 foundation course one day a week over two years. After this, they work towards an NVQ at level 3 on their employers' premises and attend college one day a week to take an appropriate further education course. In Reading, all trainees spend one day a week in the college's skills-training facility following a one-year course leading to NVQ 2 in foundation engineering. Those who obtain their NVQ at level 2 progress to training on their employers' premises leading to NVQ level 3. Most trainees also then attend college on day release to work towards an additional vocational qualification. The colleges are responsible for teaching and assessing key skills. WBTC refers all potential engineering trainees to the colleges for initial assessment. WBTC staff carry out reviews of trainees' progress and provide trainees with continuous additional support, where required, throughout training. Retention and achievement rates for work-based trainees during the training years 1997-98 and 1998-99 were low. On average, 43 per cent of trainees left early without qualifications. These rates are improving and all trainees who completed programmes in 1998-99 are now working towards higher level qualifications. Inspectors considered that the strengths stated in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They agreed with the weakness identified in the report and found one additional strength and one additional weakness. The grade they awarded was lower than that given by WBTC.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees and employers' poor understanding of programmes
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment

8. Good off-the-job training on the level 2 foundation course takes place at two local colleges. Trainees are instructed by well-qualified staff in well-resourced engineering training facilities at both locations. At both centres, staff have well-structured lesson plans. Each learning activity which trainees participate in is carefully recorded. There are comprehensive monitoring systems for trainees' progress. Trainees are provided with good guidance on how to collect evidence and build up their portfolios. Qualified assessors conduct assessments regularly. A range of assessment evidence is generated from observation of trainees and examination of the products trainees make. Records of trainees' progress held by

the trainers and assessors clearly indicate the stage the trainees have reached in their programme. Attendance at both centres is good and trainees openly demonstrate a pride in their work and programme.

9. Trainees, and many employers, are unable to define the apprenticeship or traineeship programme. Most believe that the prime requirement for apprentices is the acquisition of the vocational qualification to which the college course leads and they consider the NVQ to be incidental and of secondary importance. Other elements, such as key skills, are not covered until near the end of the programme. Some trainees do not begin to collect evidence for their NVQ at level 3 until the third year of the programme. Currently one trainee is working towards an NVQ at level 3 and two are about to do so. Trainees working towards an NVQ at level 3 are not assessed through observation of their work but staff in the workplace provide witness testimony as to the quality of their work. There are no qualified assessors in the workplaces and WBTC does not have an occupationally competent member of staff to carry out the assessment. Opportunities are missed to assess trainees' vocational competencies and key skills in everyday situations in the workplace. WBTC has acknowledged this weakness and discussion with subcontractors on ways of rectifying it is currently taking place. Assessment plans have been drawn up. The college assessor who carries out progress reviews of level 3 trainees in the workplace plans to make assessment visits to each trainee. The first visit is scheduled during the college's summer holidays.

## **Manufacturing**

## **Grade 2**

10. WBTC offers training in a range of manufacturing disciplines leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Programmes offered are advanced science and laboratory operations, engineering production and manufacture and handcrafted furniture production. Most trainees are working at two local companies, a handmade furniture manufacturer and an agrochemical manufacturer. There are currently eight modern apprentices and 11 trainees on the programmes. WBTC recruits most trainees through the careers service. Potential trainees are offered an interview and receive induction covering all aspects of their training. During their induction, trainees undergo an initial assessment and science trainees' GCSE results and grades in the general certificate of education at advanced level are taken into account. Trainees attend a local college, on a day release basis, for science programmes. Furniture production trainees attend a training centre in Salisbury for their off-the-job training on a weekly basis and WBTC arranges accommodation for them. Assessment takes place at the college or training centre and in the workplace. The science programme has been offered for the last two years and 14 trainees have joined it since 1998. Of these, four trainees have gained their NVQ at level 3, seven have left the programme early, two have gained an NVQ at level 2 and eight trainees are still in training. Many trainees transfer to modern apprenticeships during their training programmes. In 1998-99, 11 trainees started on work-based training programmes and of those, three gained their NVQ and five transferred to modern apprenticeships. Two trainees left training early with no qualifications and three are still on their original training programme. Inspectors

agreed with the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the weaknesses identified by WBTC were of no great significance. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective and innovative programme design
- ◆ particularly good on-the-job training
- ◆ effective coaching sessions in the workplace for science trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities to assess trainees in the workplace

11. Manufacturing trainees are working towards a high level qualification. They receive good on- and off-the-job training. In conjunction with a local college, WBTC staff have designed a training programme specifically to meet the needs of trainees working for an agrochemical company. Trainees working towards an NVQ in laboratory operations at level 3 can also work towards either a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in science at advanced level, or a higher national certificate (HNC) in applied biology. In conjunction with a local employer and a training centre, WBTC also offers a training programme in handmade furniture manufacturing. The programme is designed to meet trainees' career needs and offers trainees the opportunity of learning a craft skill at a centre of excellence. On-the-job training enables trainees to acquire skills in using modern machinery and in traditional handcrafts in a modern workshop environment. The off-the-job training centre specialises in teaching a variety of traditional crafts to small groups. Trainees benefit from a trainer to trainee ratio of no more than five trainees to one trainer.

12. All manufacturing trainees receive particularly good on-the-job training. All trainees receive additional training specific to their individual work role. One of the training centres' trainers visits the employer regularly to train staff in wood machining and to assess trainees' progress in completing woodworking projects set by the centre as part of the training programme. The employer is committed to training. Many of the employers' staff started with the company as trainees. Trainees are encouraged to work in all sections of the company in order to broaden their training experience. Science trainees are able to work with modern and technical equipment and they receive help from highly qualified and experienced staff. The college's course co-ordinator provides regular, half-day coaching sessions in the workplace to help trainees compile evidence for their portfolios. Workplace supervisors provide assessment evidence by confirming that trainees have carried out specific tasks. Regular reports of trainees' progress on both programmes are sent to WBTC.

13. Trainees usually complete work for their NVQ in laboratory operations at level 3 after completing work for their GNVQ or HNC. When trainees are working

towards their GNVQ or HNC, they also carry out a wide range of tasks at work. During this period, however, opportunities are missed to assess trainees' NVQ competencies and key skills in the workplace. The majority of workplace assessment is by witness testimony rather than direct observation. Furniture manufacturing trainees receive most of their assessment at the training centre. Trainees rely on their trainer to identify portfolio evidence for them through their work, for example, in specific projects. The trainees do not exercise sufficient initiative in collecting evidence for themselves. Trainees do not start the compilation of their portfolios at the start of their training programme and miss opportunities to collect evidence suitable for assessment purposes.

## Business administration

## Grade 2

14. There are 60 trainees on business administration programmes. Twenty-four are modern apprentices, 23 are national trainees, and 13 trainees are following other work-based training programmes. The table below shows the programmes trainees are following. Additionally, two modern apprentices are following customer service programmes as the first stage of their administration framework. One administration level 2 trainee is also working towards a GNVQ in business at advanced level. The scope of training leading to NVQs in information technology has recently been expanded to meet the needs of trainees and local employers.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 2 and 3	Level 3	Level 4
Using information technology		8	2	2	
Developing information technology programmes		1			
Installing and supporting information technology systems		2			
Administration	3	18	12		
Accountancy technician		3		3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

15. Trainees are recruited through personal recommendations, the careers service, recruitment events in schools, careers exhibitions and local press advertisements. WBTC are piloting initial assessment of trainees' skills and the use of a questionnaire on preferred learning styles. The co-ordinator for information technology training has developed an initial vocational assessment for trainees. The results of this are then taken into account in trainees' individual training plans. Trainees are in a variety of placements, including West Berkshire Council, a car leasing company, computing, electronics and textile companies, building societies and solicitors. Trainees usually receive induction in the workplace on an individual basis, but group sessions also take place. Training in administration and



information technology is carried out at WBTC's well-resourced training centre one day a week. Accountancy technician trainees attend a subcontracted college on either one day, or two evenings, a week. One accountancy technician trainee is working towards her qualification through open learning. Administration and information technology trainees are assessed at the training centre or in the workplace. Assessors visit the trainees who attend the centre approximately once every six weeks to carry out assessment by observing their performance. Administration trainees who are working towards an NVQ at level 3 are assessed in the workplace once a month. Unless the subcontractor carries out the assessment, the assessor also carries out the reviews of trainees' progress. Workplace supervisors generally attend reviews, which are held every three months. Of the 62 trainees who have begun modern apprenticeship programmes in the last three years, 42 per cent have left early with no qualifications, 20 per cent have left early with some qualifications and 38 per cent are still in training. Of the 39 trainees who have begun national traineeships in the last two years, 33 per cent have left with no qualifications, 5 per cent have left early with some qualifications and 62 per cent are still in training. Of the 148 trainees who have begun other training programmes in the last three years, 62 per cent have left early with no qualifications, 10 per cent are still in training and 22 per cent have achieved all the qualifications specified in their training plans. Some of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report were more relevant to generic areas. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Trainees produce a good range of evidence for their portfolios. One trainee's portfolio includes comprehensive research, from catalogues, colleagues and websites, on which type of envelopes would be appropriate to carry company welcome packs. Her recommendation was accepted and the order for this envelope was authorised. One trainee working for a computer software company designs artwork for packaging and produces a range of bitmaps and icons for software.*

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ well-structured and effective off-the-job training
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ carefully tailored one-to-one training in the workplace
- ◆ wide variety of good portfolio evidence

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ some poor retention rates
- ◆ no continuous internal verification on administration and information technology programmes

16. Trainees who attend WBTC's training centre receive good off-the-job training in administration and information technology. Training schedules incorporate key skills and clearly show what will be covered in each week's structured session. Time is made available for trainees to build their portfolios and receive individual assistance from trainers. Trainees find the sessions helpful. Trainers ensure that all trainees play a full part in these, contributing ideas and drawing on their experience in the workplace. Accountancy technician trainees who attend a subcontracted college one day or two evenings per week also receive a visit from their tutor in the workplace to help them identify relevant evidence. There is a good rapport between trainers and trainees.

17. Trainees enjoy the benefits of a well-resourced training room. The main room has 12 networked personal computers, with a further workstation for the administrator. It is light and spacious, with tables arranged to enable discussions to take place. There are a further three linked personal computers in a ground floor training room accessible to trainees with impaired mobility. Although there is no Internet access in the training rooms, trainees are able to use the computers in the administrative area. Trainers accompany trainees when they do so. There is a library which has a selection of materials for administration training, many of which have been devised by tutors. Up-to-date materials are available, including a training package on webpage design. All relevant WBTC and subcontractors' staff hold the necessary assessor and internal verifier qualifications. The administration training co-ordinator has completed the five key skills units. There are also freelance assessors to help with training leading to specialist information technology qualifications, including installing and supporting information technology systems.

18. One-to-one training in the workplace is good. It enables trainees who are not able to visit the centre to acquire the skills necessary to achieve their qualifications. For example, training for four administration trainees takes place at Bracknell at an employer's premises so that they do not have to travel to Newbury. Trainees are encouraged to choose options which are relevant to their job role. Assessors ensure they receive advice and guidance to enable them to make the right choice. They explain the requirements of specific tasks and give appropriate instructions. In between scheduled visits, trainees can contact their assessor by telephone. Trainees receive good support from their assessors and their workplace supervisors.

19. Portfolios contain a variety of good evidence. Assessors provide evidence of trainees' acquisition of competencies relevant to the NVQ units, and of their key skills, through observation of trainees' performance. Evidence in portfolios is convincing and includes personal statements about the trainees' competence by workplace supervisors, witness testimonies, trainees' answers to questions, and work products. Trainees explain their role in the evidence they put forward. Accountancy technician trainees include work-based evidence in their portfolios and benefit from the support of workplace supervisors who already have accountancy technician qualifications.

20. Statistics for the last three years show that a low number of trainees achieve all the qualifications for which they are aiming and that retention rates are poor. Retention rates, however, are affected by the fact that business administration trainees leave the programme once they have acquired some skills in order to obtain highly paid jobs. During the past year, key skills training has become an integral part of administration and information technology programmes but hitherto, trainees have received little training in key skills. The statistics do not, however, include trainees who receive assistance from WBTC to achieve qualifications after leaving the programme. Twenty per cent of the trainees on the work-based training programme in 1997-98 achieved the qualification after leaving the programme. Twenty-eight per cent of those on the programme in 1998-99 did the same. Some modern apprentices and national trainees who have left their

programmes are still receiving help from WBTC in order that they may achieve their qualifications.

21. Internal verification on the administration and information technology programmes is not continuous but is carried out at the end of the programmes. The internal verifier, however, carries out spot checks during the programme and usually observes assessors twice a year. A new form for continuous internal verification has recently been devised. New members of staff have not yet been observed. Following the intake of new staff, evidence relating to all units in portfolios is subject to internal verification. Reports on trainees' progress are discussed at team meetings. On the programme for accountancy technician trainees, internal verification is carried out on a continuous basis.

### **Retailing & customer service**

### **Grade 4**

22. There are 38 trainees following programmes in retailing and customer service. Of these, two trainees are working towards an NVQ in distributive operations at level 1 and two trainees are working towards an NVQ in customer service at level 3. There are 13 modern apprentices and 12 national trainees working towards NVQs in customer service. Seven modern apprentices and two national trainees are working towards NVQs in retail. Some trainees from other occupational areas also work towards NVQs in customer service. All trainees are employed in a variety of work environments in the local area. These include department stores, software companies, a local building society, an air-conditioning company and a local dental practice. Induction takes place in the workplace. WBTC is currently piloting a new computer software system for the initial assessment of trainees' key skills. Some trainees receive in-house training from employers and WBTC staff. Off-the-job training takes place fortnightly at the provider's location for those trainees who wish to attend. If assessment is carried out in the workplace if it is done by four of WBTC's staff, who have assessor qualifications and are also occupationally qualified. Internal verification is carried out by two of WBTC's staff who have internal verifier qualifications. Trainees are allocated training co-ordinators who carry out reviews of their progress in the workplace every three months. Of the 59 trainees who have begun other training programmes in the last three years, 63 per cent have left early with no qualifications. Seventeen per cent have left early with some qualifications, 14 per cent have achieved all the qualifications identified on their training plan and 6 per cent are still in training. Thirty two per cent went into jobs. Out of 16 trainees who have begun modern apprenticeship programmes in the last two years, 6 per cent have left early with no qualifications, 19 per cent have left early with some qualifications and 75 per cent are still in training. Out of 27 trainees who started national traineeship programmes in 1999-2000, 33 per cent have left early with no qualifications, 4 per cent have left early with some qualifications and 69 per cent are still in training. Inspectors considered that the strengths stated in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found weaknesses which WBTC had not identified and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong links between assessors and employers

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ employers and trainees' poor understanding of the programme
- ◆ failure to plan and co-ordinate training effectively
- ◆ trainees' low achievement rates

23. Assessors have developed strong links with employers and trainees. Assessors enjoy good relationships with employers, and are able to gain easy access to workplaces to assess trainees. Assessors demonstrate commitment to meeting the individual needs of trainees. Employers and WBTC's staff work together to ensure assessors can make additional assessment visits to the workplace to enable trainees to accelerate their progress achieving their NVQs. Trainees are encouraged to fully take the initiative in identifying and collecting evidence. Those that do, make rapid progress towards achieving their NVQs. Trainees receive good feedback on their progress towards achieving their NVQ. Assessment plans specify short-term targets for trainees to attain.

24. Many trainees and employers have poor knowledge and understanding of the training programme. Most trainees are unable to correctly identify whether they are on modern apprenticeships, national traineeships or other training programmes. Many are unaware of the requirements of their framework, particularly in relation to key skills. The induction process does not enable trainees to gain a clear understanding of their framework and programme requirements. Many trainees attend group inductions, but at these they are not fully informed of their rights and responsibilities. Induction packs are issued to trainees. No checks are made on whether trainees understand their content until they are allocated an assessor and begin the assessment process. Most individual training plans are not updated or amended to reflect trainees' progress. The long-term targets for groups of trainees fail to take account of the needs and aptitude of individual trainees. Assessment of key skills is gradually becoming an integral part of the overall assessment process. A small number of trainees have begun working towards achievement of key skills units, but they only do this after they have completed work for their NVQ.

25. Training is not planned or co-ordinated. Off-the-job training sessions are held every two weeks at WBTC for both customer service and retail trainees. Some trainees and employers are aware of the dates of training days, but have no published information regarding the content of the sessions. Other trainees and employers have no information at all. Trainees and employers are not advised on a systematic basis of the forthcoming session. Most trainees only find out about session topics by attending the preceding session. Some opportunities for using accreditation of prior learning are lost. Training plans for sessions do not reflect good practice and sessions lack structure. The provider has training resources available but these are not always used effectively.

26. Trainees' achievement rates are poor. Trainees on other work-based training programmes over the past three years have had low achievement rates. Of these trainees, only 14 per cent have achieved the qualification identified in their individual training plan. No modern apprentices or national trainees have completed the programme identified on their individual training plan or achieved the key skills units. However, the provider has only been offering the national traineeship programme since 1999-2000. The provider is still in contact with 15 trainees who have left the programme early but have expressed a wish to continue working towards their qualifications.

### **Leisure, sport & travel**

### **Grade 4**

27. WBTC has 10 trainees working towards sport and recreation qualifications in operational services, supervision and outdoor education. Seven are working towards an NVQ at level 2 and three are working towards an NVQ at level 3. Of these, three are modern apprentices and seven are national trainees. Trainees are employed at two local leisure centres, a fitness club and an adventure centre. Training, assessment and internal verification are subcontracted to a local college. One employer is able to carry out assessments. Trainees from two employers attend off-the-job training on a day-release basis. Trainees are visited by their assessor at least once every three weeks, and sometimes more often. They receive progress reviews with the WBTC training co-ordinator every three months. Trainees are able to acquire additional qualifications such as those in first aid, lifeguarding and coaching. All trainees receive training from their employers on operational issues. Of six trainees who started other training in 1998-99, 16 per cent gained an NVQ level 2 and the other 84 per cent left early without any qualifications. Of nine trainees who have started modern apprenticeships in the past three years, three have left with no qualifications, three have left with some qualifications and three are still in training. Of 11 trainees who started a national traineeship in 1999-2000, five left early without any qualifications and six are still in training.

28. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They considered other strengths to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses WBTC had not identified and they awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong support from employers to help trainees succeed

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees' poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ failure to ensure regular assessment for all trainees
- ◆ failure of some trainees to meet framework requirements
- ◆ poor internal verification system

29. Employers provide good work placements and enable trainees to experience a variety of tasks which afford trainees opportunities to cover all the requisite competencies for their NVQ. The employers are supportive of the training process and assist trainees by allowing them to work on their NVQ portfolios while they are at work. WBTC and employers provide opportunities for trainees to attend coaching courses and work towards additional awards. Such coaching provides them with skills which allow them to become more involved in the day-to-day operation of the organisation at which they are employed, giving them a sense of responsibility.

30. Trainees' retention and achievement rates on all programmes are poor. None of the trainees on the sport and recreation programmes has achieved all the qualifications specified on their individual learning plan. No trainee has obtained key skills certification. Of 11 trainees who started a national traineeship in 1999-2000 five left early without any qualifications. Nine trainees have started modern apprenticeships in the past three years and between them they have obtained only three NVQs at level 2 and one NVQ at level 3.

31. Most trainees can only be assessed during term time and many make slow progress towards achieving their qualification. The assessor visits trainees on a set day and at a set time. Trainees who happen to have a day off or who are working on different shifts miss their assessment. Some trainees go several weeks without contact with an assessor and opportunities for assessment are missed. Trainees are not set demanding individual targets. All are expected to complete all aspects of the framework detailed in their training plan within two years of starting their programmes. Trainees are not set short-term targets or goals. Although assessors set trainees work when they visit, there is no systematic process for giving trainees tasks progressively to help them sustain progress towards achieving their qualification. Some trainees become demotivated by the amount of work expected of them. For example, some trainees are working towards two NVQs at level 3, as well as national coaching awards.

32. National trainees are unable to complete their frameworks because they receive no training or assessment in key skills. WBTC has subcontracted key skills training to the college, but some college staff are not aware that they were responsible for this and are not carrying it out. Some trainees are working at the wrong key skills level for their qualification. Some training plans do not specify any key skills training. Key skills training is not fully integral to programmes. It is usually left until the end of the programme. Trainees miss opportunities to collect evidence of their competence in key skills, as they naturally occur. Trainees on the sport and recreation programme have not been enabled to fulfil the requirement for them to acquire wider industrial knowledge.

33. Internal verification systems have not been fully developed. Verification of portfolios is only carried out at the end of the programme. Trainees who thought they had completed work for their NVQ found they needed to carry out additional tasks. Internal verifiers monitor some of the assessments carried out by assessors

but there are no formal systems for recording the internal verifiers findings or action-planning for continuous improvement.

### **Hair & beauty**

### **Grade 3**

34. There are 57 trainees following work-based training programmes in hairdressing. Thirty-six trainees are working towards an NVQ in hairdressing at level 2 and 21 towards level 3. There are 21 modern apprentices, 24 national trainees and 12 trainees on other government-funded youth training programmes. All trainees are employed at 29 hairdressing salons across Berkshire. The training and assessment of practical skills are carried out in the workplace. Twenty-five trainees receive off-the-job training at the provider's centre. They attend on a monthly basis for one day of theory training and assessment, pastoral support and action planning. Theory training is provided in the workplace for 32 trainees who are unable to travel the distance to the training provider. Initial assessment is carried out during induction by occupationally qualified WBTC staff, who also carry out reviews of trainees' progress in the workplace every three months. Trainees have the opportunity to work towards additional qualifications in customer service and health and safety. Procedures for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning and achievement are currently being developed. Internal verification is carried out by appropriately qualified WBTC staff. Of the 71 trainees who started other programmes in 1997-98, 82 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the 46 trainees who started modern apprenticeships in the same year, 46 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the 40 trainees who started other programmes in 1998-99, 58 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the 16 trainees who started modern apprenticeships in that year, 44 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the six trainees who started other programmes in 1999-2000, two have already left with no qualifications. Of the 17 trainees who started modern apprenticeships in that year, 29 per cent have already left with no qualifications. Of the 30 trainees who started national traineeships in the same year, 13 per cent have already left with no qualifications. Inspectors considered three of the five strengths stated in the self-assessment report no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ ready availability of workplace assessors to trainees
- ◆ wide range of good salons/employers
- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to make key skills training fully integral to programmes
- ◆ trainees' poor achievement on some training programmes

35. On-the-job training provided in salons is good. The standard of trainees' hairdressing in the workplace is high. Employers offer work placements where trainees can develop a range of skills. Twenty-three of the salons have appropriately qualified assessors, and another three salons have staff working towards assessor awards. Trainees are placed in a variety of salons suited to their needs and preferences across a wide part of Berkshire. These range from smaller salons in nearby villages to larger ones in town centres. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training is effective. WBTC staff have developed good relationships with employers. They keep in constant touch with them and ensure they receive all relevant information. Employers are invited to attend the annual hairdressing competition which the consortium holds, and in which all trainees participate. Some trainees have the opportunity to prepare models' hair for fashion shows. Some trainees use photographic evidence from the shows and competition work in their NVQ portfolios. In general, the standard of work in trainees' portfolios is adequate. The portfolios, however, contain little evidence of the routine use of information technology. WBTC provide individual trainees additional workplace training and assessment sessions if they miss training at the centre or require extra support to further their progress.

36. Off-the-job training and the resources to support it are satisfactory. Trainees receive a great deal of support from the training provider's staff and their progress is carefully monitored and recorded. Staff carry out action planning to help the trainees' progress. Trainees negotiate individual targets for themselves with their trainers. WBTC is willing to help trainees gain a qualification after they leave their training programme, if they have failed to obtain one during it. Currently, WBTC is helping 10 trainees in this way. Centre staff make regular checks on assessment activity in the workplace by observing assessment in the salon every three months. Assessors are invited to attend meetings at the centre to discuss ways of ensuring their assessment practice is fair and consistent.

37. Trainees' achievement rates for NVQ level 2, NVQ level 3 and key skills certification is low. Key skills training has only recently been introduced. The integration of key skills training with on- and off-the-job training hairdressing is still at an early stage. No trainee has yet covered all key skills components. Five trainees have recently received certificates for achieving one or two key skills units. WBTC's staff are currently working towards key skills units themselves.

38. In November 1998 the training provider closed its office at Maidenhead, and 15 of the 121 trainees in the 1997-98 cohort transferred to other providers. Of the remaining 106 trainees who started in 1997-98, eight gained a level 2 qualification, seven gained a level 3 qualification and eight achieved all the qualifications specified on their training plan. In 1998-99, six trainees out of the 56 who began training transferred to other providers. Of the 50 trainees remaining, 10 gained NVQ level 2, two gained an NVQ at level 3 and six achieved all the qualifications specified on their training plan. In 1999-2000, out of 53 who began training three trainees gained a level 2 qualification, two gained level 3 qualification and two achieved all the qualifications specified on their training plan.



## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 3**

39. WBTC has an equal opportunities policy, which is reviewed on an annual basis by the operations director. All staff receive a copy of the policy at induction in their company guide. The policy exceeds the requirement of WBTC's contract with the TEC. A booklet containing information about equal opportunities has recently been issued to trainees and employers. Employers, trainees and subcontractors can receive the full policy on request. Employers who do not have an equal opportunities policy of their own are not asked to adopt WBTC's policy. Discussion of equal opportunities is a standing item on the agenda of staff meetings. Equal opportunities is an agenda item at the annual general staff meeting. Staff have received training to increase their awareness of equal opportunities issues and more is planned. Data are collected for the purposes of the TEC contract. WBTC staff have recently begun to collect data on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of applicants for training, with the aim of ensuring that all applicants, irrespective of whether they take up work-based training options or not, are treated fairly. WBTC is based in an area where individuals from minority ethnic groups form only 1.7 per cent of the population. There are also two specialist providers of training for people with disabilities in the area. The number of trainees from minority ethnic groups is proportionate to the number of persons from these groups in the local population. Similarly, the number of persons with disabilities is proportionate to the number of disabled persons in the local population. Only the ground floor of the training centre is accessible to trainees with mobility problems. Inspectors considered the two strengths stated in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They found a strength WBTC had not identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ socially inclusive programmes
- ◆ effective process for dealing with complaints

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no specific action to recruit from under-represented groups

40. WBTC aims to provide training for all prospective trainees. WBTC has run a number of diverse programmes, some with as few as one or two trainees on them to ensure that trainees can follow the programme of their choice. This arrangement has been particularly successful in enabling trainees in rural areas. For example, one female trainee was able to pursue pig farming as a career, two are taking modern apprenticeships in machine printing and one is following training in camera operations. WBTC have a clearly written complaints procedure. Few

complaints are made. Any complaints are carefully recorded. Managers deal with them promptly and do so in a way that serves the trainees' best interests.

41. WBTC has not launched any specific initiatives, or drawn up any action plans, for the recruitment of trainees from groups under-represented on training programmes. Most trainees have a basic understanding of equal opportunities issues and most can recall their inclusion in the induction programme but there is little further reference to them during the training programme. There is now a space on the trainees' progress review form where the trainer may record a comment on equal opportunities. In practice, however, issues relating to equal opportunities are not always discussed during trainees' progress reviews.

42. At team meetings for each occupational area, staff review what should be done to help individual trainees and what is being done to support individuals. Staff share good practice at quarterly meetings. Data collected and analysed to establish recruitment trends, for example, WBTC noted that administration programmes were followed mainly by female trainees and that information technology programmes were followed mainly by male trainees. Two women have now joined information technology programmes and two men have joined administration programmes. Data collection meets the TEC's contractual requirements. WBTC does not monitor whether it meets the requirements of its own equal opportunities policy. It does not check whether staff and trainees find the policy effective.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

43. Trainees are referred to WBTC mainly by the careers services. A small number make direct contact as a result of a recommendation from friends. All trainees are interviewed and some have their basic skills assessed. In some areas, subcontractors carry out initial assessment of trainees referred to them. A variety of initial assessment procedures are in use and new tests are being devised and piloted. All trainees receive an induction into the provider's policies and procedures and to their programme and the NVQ process. Each trainee has a designated training co-ordinator who provides support and advice throughout training, both on and off the job. Trainees may be visited in their workplace to avoid the need for them to travel to Newbury. Where required, additional support is provided for trainees. All trainees receive progress reviews at three-monthly intervals in their respective placements or workplaces. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They found three strengths and two weaknesses WBTC had not identified and they awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to gain additional qualifications

- ◆ strong support to meet individual needs
- ◆ well-organised events for celebrating trainees' achievements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of standard initial assessment practice
- ◆ ineffective induction processes in most areas
- ◆ some ineffective practice for reviewing trainees' progress

44. Trainees are provided with good pastoral support, which is arranged flexibly to meet individual trainees' needs. Trainees with special needs are dealt with sensitively and effectively and they value the service provided. Training co-ordinators will make additional visits to work placements and are available on call to assist and provide additional support. WBTC modify in-house programmes and work with subcontractors to modify their programmes to match the learning styles or needs of individuals.

45. Some trainees benefit from additional modules that are not part of the framework. If it is identified that the modules will help trainees, staff liaise with employers to ensure trainees are given the opportunity for additional training. Trainees make themselves more employable by acquiring additional skills.

46. WBTC is willing to help trainees even after they have officially left their programme. Many trainees receive additional assistance well beyond programme-completion dates to enable them to obtain their qualifications. WBTC celebrates trainees' success by a variety of means. An annual presentation evening has been held since 1993. Every employer and training co-ordinator is asked to nominate trainees for awards in each of 10 categories. The winner is selected by panel on the night. Each nominee receives a certificate and a medal, presented by the chairman, and national celebrities award the prizes. A newsletter is also produced and distributed which features trainees and their achievements.

47. WBTC identified that initial assessment was a weakness in the self-assessment report and has begun to address the issue. Initial assessment is not applied consistently across the range of occupational areas. Many different assessment procedures are in use and some are not effective. In some areas, trainees' occupational aptitude is not tested. Staff in other areas are using tests of their own and these are not necessarily appropriate or effective. For example, the initial assessment arrangements for sport and recreation trainees are insufficiently systematic and the training co-ordinator merely makes an intuitive judgement about the trainees' capabilities. Trainees do not always understand the nature of the industry and some enrol on an inappropriate programme. On retailing and customer service programmes, basic skills and occupational skills tests are not used to ensure that trainees commence training at an appropriate level or that their training needs are identified.

48. All trainees receive induction to their programmes. Although staff carry out some checks on trainees' understanding of content in the induction programme, these are not sufficiently rigorous. Most trainees are unable to recall key elements of their induction and do not have a clear understanding of their programme and important issues such as those relating to equality of opportunity or key skills.

49. During their progress reviews, trainees receive good pastoral support. They are, however, given insufficient advice on their vocational work and insufficient information about their progress towards achieving their qualification. Trainees on manufacturing, engineering, retailing and customer service programmes are not set clear targets during their progress reviews. In some instances, workplace supervisors are not involved in progress reviews. Some WBTC staff who carry out progress reviews are not occupationally qualified and are not necessarily able to help trainees identify appropriate evidence of their acquisition of competencies for assessment purposes. They are also not always able to identify the extent of trainees' progress towards achieving the award. The progress reviews do not focus sufficiently on trainees' vocational skills and trainees are not given help in drawing up action plans for improving their performance.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

50. West Berkshire Training Consortium is a small, well-established company offering training across a wide range of occupational areas. There are three directors of the company, one of whom is the operations director with responsibility for the strategic management of the organisation. The two other directors are principally concerned with the organisation's charitable status and advise the operations director. Day-to-day management of training is undertaken by three programme managers and each is responsible for specific occupational areas. The company has 18 permanent employees and also employs three freelance assessors. All staff are provided with a copy of the company's annual business plan which covers four areas of business activity: performance against TEC contractual requirements, new business opportunities, internal procedures and staff development. The company was recognised as an Investor in People in August 1999. Training and assessment are carried out by company staff and through 11 subcontractors. WBTC has service-level agreements with all subcontractors and these are reviewed annually. WBTC previously ceased contracting with one subcontractor who did not meet WBTC's standards. Trainees were transferred to another subcontractor. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, considered some to be no more than normal practice and identified other strengths and weaknesses. They awarded the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good management
- ◆ flexible staffing arrangements
- ◆ imaginatively designed appraisal system

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some weaknesses in the management information system
- ◆ poor target setting

51. Communications within the organisation are effective. All staff are asked to suggest amendments and improvements to the draft annual business plan produced by the operations director. The company holds an annual general meeting to ensure all staff understand, and are committed to fulfilling the company's objectives for the year ahead. Training co-ordinators meet formally with their teams on a monthly basis. These meetings are an effective means of disseminating information within the organisation. Freelance assessors attend every other meeting of the training co-ordinators in order that they may keep up to date with developments in the organisation and play a full part in the organisation's operation. All teams, including freelance assessors, have a joint quarterly meeting. Administrative staff meet every six weeks. Staff are confident that professional concerns brought to the attention of managers will be treated with sensitivity and dealt with effectively. Managers give priority to staff welfare and ensure that staff who experience personal difficulties are afforded support and practical assistance.

52. Managers encourage staff to get to know each other's job roles to enable staff absences to be covered with the minimum of disruption to trainees. Individual members of training and administrative staff are paired so that each can stand in for the other when necessary. The company has recently experienced difficulties in filling a number of key posts. Staff have helped the company maintain services to trainees and employees by agreeing to changes in their working patterns and responsibilities. Staff at all levels are committed to ensuring that the company provides an effective service to trainees.

53. There is an annual appraisal system. This covers the performance of individual members of staff. It is effective in identifying staff development needs that are consistent with the company's business objectives. The appraisal process was developed by staff at all levels within the company and is regularly reviewed by a staff appraisal committee. The appraisal system is based largely on self-appraisal. The member of staff being appraised can seek the views of other staff in the organisation on his or her performance. So also can the manager conducting the appraisal. Staff and managers are able to draw on a wide and diverse range of views on the person whom they are appraising. During the appraisal process, action points for improving the performance of staff are identified and progress in implementing these is reviewed twice during the year.

54. Managers are not always aware of trainees' progress or of issues affecting the quality of the training the subcontractors provide. For example, in sport and recreation the provider had not identified issues relating to key skills training, assessment and internal verification. WBTC has recognised the deficiencies of the existing management information systems and is taking action to improve the availability and accessibility of management information. The company uses a management information system operated by the TEC. The system cannot fully meet the company's growing need for detailed management information in relation to training programmes and trainees. The system is not always able to analyse the specific data required by managers in an accessible format and on a timely basis. The deficiencies in the company's management information system do not make it easy for managers to monitor programmes and take effective management action.

55. The company identifies a number of objectives within its business plan but sets few clear and measurable targets for improving the quality of services offered to trainees. Managers are aware that trainees' achievement rates on some programmes are low but they have not set staff and subcontractors clear targets for improving these.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

56. WBTC has a range of quality procedures covering all aspects of training and these are updated regularly. The operations director has strategic responsibility for quality assurance. A programme manager is responsible for the implementation of quality assurance, including self-assessment. The self-assessment report proposed for the inspection was produced in February 2000. Two earlier reports were produced in 1998 and 1999. WBTC has preferred provider status with Thames Valley TEC. All WBTC staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report and in determining grades, but employers and subcontractors were not. WBTC receives visits from external verifiers. The TEC carries out checks of WBTC's compliance with its contracts. There is an established procedure for obtaining feedback from employers and trainees. Training, assessment and internal verification on engineering, manufacturing and leisure, sport and travel and accountancy technician trainee programmes are subcontracted to local colleges. Training, assessment and internal verification for administration, information technology, hairdressing and retailing and customer service programmes are carried out by WBTC. Inspectors agreed with one of the two strengths, and with the one weakness, stated in the self-assessment report. The other strength related to the meeting of awarding body criteria, and inspectors considered that this should be normal practice. They found one weakness the organisation had not identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective internal audit system
- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees and employers

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor quality assurance arrangements for some subcontractors programmes
- ◆ poor internal verification practice on some programmes

57. WBTC has a simple but effective system for auditing the quality of trainees' programmes. Each training co-ordinator is linked to a 'buddy' in the administration team. The buddy carries out monthly audits of the training experienced by 10 of the training co-ordinator's trainees. Over a period of time all trainees' files are monitored. If non-compliance is identified the buddy notifies the training co-ordinator, who then has to take appropriate remedial action. The action is monitored through to its successful conclusion. Another auditor checks the work of the team. The system aims to ensure that trainees receive everything they are entitled to, when they need it. For example, it checks that trainees complete a health and safety project during their induction. The system has successfully identified many issues. For example, one training co-ordinator's reviews of trainees' progress were not taking place on time and the system identified this. Swift action was taken by the audit team and then by the programme manager to ensure that trainees received progress reviews when they should have done. The first audit is carried out after the trainee has been on programme for three weeks. This audit was initiated because WBTC identified that trainees were most likely to drop out of the programme in the first few weeks. Since carrying out this first audit, the number of trainees who leave the programme in its first few weeks have fallen. The audit system, however, does not cover individual training plans and has failed to identify that these are not updated and that some documents lack relevant signatures.

58. WBTC has an established system for gathering useful feedback from trainees and employers through questionnaires. Following analysis of responses to questionnaires, staff have made improvements to trainees' programmes. WBTC staff have acted on feedback from employers and have taken action to improve the support they give employers. Trainees and employers are asked to respond to questionnaires twice a year. Changes made to trainees' programmes are monitored carefully to make sure they are effective. The process for gathering feedback from trainees and employers is constantly evaluated. The questionnaires are clear and user-friendly. Approximately 50 per cent of all trainees and around 40 per cent of employers respond to the questionnaires. The provider uses innovative methods to encourage trainees to answer the questionnaires. An analysis is made of responses to questionnaires and this is taken into account when drawing up action plans for improvements to training in each occupational area. The implementation of action is monitored through staff meetings and reviews of trainees' progress.

59. WBTC does not ensure that subcontractors' training programmes are subject to quality assurance. Subcontractors do not always make external and internal verifier reports available to WBTC. Although most subcontractors carry out yearly programme reviews, WBTC is not involved in these and does not receive copies of the review reports. When WBTC asked subcontractors for details of their quality assurance arrangements, those who had been inspected by the Further Education

Funding Council (FEFC) provided a copy of the FEFC report, some did not respond and only one attempted to explain the arrangements for carrying out quality assurance of work-based training. Some observation of subcontractors' training has taken place, but only on an occasional basis. WBTC has a procedure for checking the quality of subcontractors' training, involving the completion of standardised forms, but some subcontractors do not allow WBTC staff to carry this out.

60. Internal verification is not carried out with the same degree of thoroughness across programmes. WBTC does not monitor internal verification on subcontracted programmes. For example, internal verification on the sport and recreation programme is subcontracted. The external verifier's report clearly identified problems with assessment and internal verification on this programme but WBTC has taken no action to resolve them. On administration and information technology programmes, internal verification is only carried out when all assessment has been completed. On retailing and customer service programmes, there is inconsistency in internal verification practice and internal verifiers do not observe assessment on programmes leading to some qualifications. However, internal verification is thorough on engineering, manufacturing, accountancy technicians, and hair and beauty programmes and includes observation of assessment, continuous sampling of portfolios and discussion with trainees. Members of staff new to WBTC are observed carrying out induction, progress reviews and training, but other staff are not. On WBTC's own programmes, there is no observation of the quality of the work of more established team members, by either colleagues or managers.

61. The self-assessment report lacked detail and failed to identify significant weaknesses. Several strengths identified through self-assessment were no more than normal practice. Some of the weaknesses inspectors found had not been identified through WBTC's quality assurance systems. Inspectors agreed with three of the grades in the self-assessment report. In respect of one area, they awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report. All the other grades the inspectors awarded were lower than those given in the self-assessment report. All staff are familiar with the action plan which was produced after self-assessment. The action plan details the action to be taken, states who has responsibility for carrying the action out, and specifies how progress in implementing the plan is to be monitored. At the time of inspection work had begun to rectify some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment.