



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

Weston College

SUMMARY

Weston College provides good training in hairdressing. Achievement and retention rates are good, although progress towards the modern apprenticeship is slow. There is good assessment practice and training is organised to meet the individual trainees' needs. The college has good arrangements to protect trainees from harassment. After a thorough induction process, trainees receive good support from approachable staff and benefit from a wide range of resources. Management of training is good and there is strong communication throughout the college. Staff understand their roles and employers have a good understanding of NVQs. Key skills training is poorly managed. Quality assurance arrangements are good and are described using detailed procedures. The college's self-assessment process is effective, with good action planning and continuous improvement of training. Internal verification is thorough. However, some feedback systems are underdeveloped and there is little direct observation of training in the workplace.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement and retention rates
- ◆ good assessment practice
- ◆ good use of college's own training plans
- ◆ flexible training opportunities to meet trainees' needs
- ◆ good internal and external communication
- ◆ positive action taken following effective self-assessment
- ◆ thorough internal verification

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of key skills training
- ◆ slow progress towards modern apprenticeship in hairdressing

INTRODUCTION

1. Weston College in Weston-super-Mare is a further education college, which was set up in its present form in 1992. The college has a staff of 262 and has 1,900 full-time students and 7,000 part-time students based across four sites. The college also provides training for 39 local companies with 1,214 employees, which it carries out at local company sites across north Somerset. The college contracts with Western Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to offer modern apprenticeships. It first began to offer government-funded work-based training in 1997. There are 34 trainees in hairdressing. It also offers courses in engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, hospitality, and health, care and public services but these areas were not inspected, owing to small numbers of trainees. There are also nine New Deal clients.

2. North Somerset has a population of approximately 200,000, and most employment in the area is in public administration, health and education, hotels and restaurants, and tourism sectors. All occupational groupings, except clerical, sales and services have demonstrated growth over recent years. The unemployment rate for north Somerset for 1998 is 2.6 per cent, which is below national, regional and local levels. However, unemployment rates for five wards within Weston-super-Mare are significantly above the national average and they contain half of north Somerset's unemployed.

3. The proportion of minority ethnic groups in the area is low at less than 1 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Somerset was 51.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Weston College completed its second self-assessment report in November 1999. The business development unit compiled it, in consultation with the parties relevant to and involved in work-based training, including trainers, assessors, employers and trainees, as well as college management. Two key members of staff attended training provided by the TEC. The report was concise and gave inspectors a clear idea of the scope of training offered.

5. Three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at Weston College in May 2000. They conducted 19 staff interviews, with workplace supervisors, managers and trainers, and interviewed 22 trainees. They observed training in a college salon, visited 16 work placements, and reviewed trainees' files, management information and promotional material. The instruction session observed was given a grade 1.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hair & beauty (hairdressing)

Grade 2

6. There are 35 trainees in hairdressing; 28 of whom are modern apprentices and seven are national trainees. The programme started in 1997 with seven trainees, with 14 recruited in 1998 and 23 in 1999. Trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3. All trainees are employed. Off-the-job training is carried out in the hairdressing salons at Weston College with level 2 trainees attending on a weekly basis throughout the year. Level 3 trainees attend the college for a half day of training each month. Most assessment is carried out on employers' premises by visiting assessors, and this is supplemented by additional assessments at the college's training salon. The self-assessment report was critical and evaluative and a number of identified weaknesses had been acted upon since the report had been written. The grade awarded was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ training organised to meet the individual needs of trainees
- ◆ effective co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good assessment practice
- ◆ good arrangements for teaching background knowledge

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards achievement of full modern apprenticeships

GOOD PRACTICE

As an example to illustrate the principles behind talking to clients, there was a good link between the theory and immediate practice. Trainees worked on a relevant, short group-work assignment and were able to quickly assimilate the key points of the task. The lesson was immediately followed by a practical session in which the trainees were observed carrying out consultation. Trainers' feedback to the trainees was constructive and effective.

7. The teaching of the theoretical aspects of hairdressing is well organised and is supplemented by a comprehensive series of written handbooks, which provide good-quality reference materials. Trainees attend the college weekly throughout the year when working towards level 2 and monthly when working towards level 3. Brief but effective lessons are held at the start of each college training session. These lessons are well planned and integrated with the practical training which takes place immediately after the theory lesson.

8. Trainees are able to start on the programme at any stage during the year and can immediately join the off-the-job training course. Initial assessment is used effectively to draw up appropriate learning plans. Trainees are encouraged to work through the assessments at their own pace and assessment opportunities are arranged to suit their individual needs. This has enabled some trainees to complete the level 2 NVQ within one year.

9. The college staff have excellent working relationships with the salon owners and work-based supervisors and regular visits are made by the assessors to the salons. Salon owners are well acquainted with the NVQ programme and participate enthusiastically in the regular assessment reviews. Most salons arrange training activities in the salon to complement the off-the-job training. These include demonstrations by salon staff and specialist companies, as well as sessions when trainees are able to practice their skills on models. The college also organises an 'employer consultative committee', which is well attended by salon owners involved in the NVQ programme. Employers consider this to be effective in improving the links between themselves and the college.

10. Most practical assessments are carried out in the workplace by two well-qualified, occupationally experienced assessors who are also responsible for all other aspects of assessment. Additional practical and theoretical assessments are carried out during the off-the-job training sessions in the college's salons. Trainees' portfolios contain evidence to show that the full range of appropriate assessment techniques is used. Portfolios are of a good standard, with a consistent layout, thorough cross-referencing and a wide range of evidence. Internal verification practices are comprehensive.

11. Retention rates are good and are improving at 77 per cent for those trainees recruited in 1998-99. Eighty per cent of the trainees remaining on the programme have already achieved an NVQ and the remainder are expected to complete within the expected timescale. These rates are above the national averages for these qualifications.

12. There are limited opportunities for trainees to gain key skills qualifications in information technology during their vocational training. Consequently, many trainees

have completed the NVQ but have yet to complete the key skills work required for the modern apprenticeship framework. There are few opportunities for trainees to access computers during their regular off-the-job training at the college. Trainees make slow progress towards achieving the full modern apprenticeship.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

13. Weston College has policies on equal opportunities and harassment which are issued and explained to trainees at induction and to all employers. The college's equal opportunities committee, on which the business development unit is represented, produces the policies and procedures. Data on trainees are regularly collected. There are no trainees from minority ethnic groups, which reflects the situation in the local population. Trainees are normally recruited directly by employers. Inspectors considered that good progress had been made in addressing the weaknesses in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that given by the college.

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are protected from any potential harassment in sensitive and appropriate ways. One trainee is supported in any environments in which there may be potential for bullying behaviour from other students in the college. A trainer always arranges that the trainee is not left alone during time spent in the college's communal areas. As a consequence the trainee has gained confidence and this has had a beneficial impact on her performance in the workplace.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective equal opportunities committee
- ◆ good understanding of equal opportunities and their implications by trainees
- ◆ good understanding of complaints and appeals procedures by trainees
- ◆ good arrangements to protect trainees from harassment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ ineffective use of equal opportunities data

14. The college's equal opportunities committee meets regularly and advises the senior management team. The committee has wide membership including a member of the governing body. The committee works enthusiastically to raise the profile of equal opportunities within the college and has monitored access for people with disabilities to the main college site. The college allocates a budget to the committee and this is mainly used for training. The college also has a 'disability equality committee' and 50 per cent of the members of this committee have disabilities. Training areas for work-based trainees within the college are accessible to those with restricted mobility.

15. The equal opportunities and harassment policies are comprehensive. They are reviewed regularly, and comply with current legislation and the requirements of the

TEC. Employers and trainees all receive copies of the policies and trainees' portfolios include a copy of the most recent policy document. The trainees' induction includes a thorough briefing on the equal opportunities policy and its relevance.

16. All trainees are aware of what they should do if they have any complaints about any aspect of their training. They are also well informed and knowledgeable about the procedures for appealing against an assessment decision and know how to contact the internal verifier. There have been no recent examples of complaints from trainees on any of the programmes.

17. The college does little to promote equal opportunities. Its part-time prospectus and the regular newsletter to employers make no reference to the policies or to the college's commitment to equal opportunities. The short paragraph in the full-time prospectus contains a comment but there is no reference as to what it means in practical terms. This weakness has been recognised by the college.

18. Data on trainees' gender, ethnicity and disabilities are collected and analysed. However, the college has not yet evaluated these data to determine the actions needed to be taken in order to further implement its equal opportunity policies.

Trainee support

Grade 2

19. All trainees are recruited directly from employers. If a prospective trainee contacts the college directly, they are given advice and guidance on potential employers. After initial contact, the employer is visited to discuss the work-based training possibilities and is provided with information regarding the college. It is suggested to employers that trainees remain in work for a minimum of three months before they start on a training programme. The prospective trainee is visited in the workplace to discuss their needs and to identify a suitable programme. Before a trainee is enrolled, the college undertakes a workplace health and safety check to meet TEC requirements, and subsequently asks the employer to sign a work-based training agreement. If the employer does not sign the agreement, the trainee does not start on the programme. All trainees undertake a psychometric test as part of the initial assessment process. This provides evidence of their verbal, numerical and literacy skills and is used to identify any additional support that may be required. This test may be taken prior to, or shortly after enrolment. Trainees attend a college-based induction for generic aspects such as health and safety, equality of opportunity and the NVQ process, and receive a work-based induction from their assessor for their particular training programme. A 'skills scan' is used to identify any work experience relevant to particular units and to help to identify any possible training needs. Once enrolled, an individual training plan is generated by computer. This training plan is supplemented by a learning plan, the working document, and is used for target setting. Trainees can access all of the support available to students of the college. Reviews are held every four weeks for the first three months and quarterly thereafter. The self-assessment report correctly identified some strengths

while others were no more than normal practice. As a result of action planning following the self-assessment report, some weaknesses had been addressed. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of individual learning plans
- ◆ strong pastoral support from approachable staff
- ◆ wide range of resources available
- ◆ thorough induction process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic accreditation of trainees' prior learning

20. Trainees' learning plans were developed after the college identified that the TEC's computer-generated individual training plans did not meet its needs. These documents are used to record units of the qualification to be achieved and give each an individual target date for achievement. These documents are updated to record achievement of NVQ units, as well as to adjust target dates which may be either brought forward or extended. In addition, the learning plans are used to record any training needs and to identify when the trainee may be ready for assessment against particular units. The learning plans are used effectively and enable trainees, who have their own copy, to monitor their progress. Previously, there was also a combined document used for action-planning and reviews. The college changed the procedure and now uses separate forms for action plans and reviews. The former are completed at every assessor's visit to plan assessment and evidence needs, and to monitor progress. A separate review record is completed to address, not only the NVQ progress, but also more general areas such as attendance, work role development, health and safety, equal opportunities and welfare, and both trainees and employers contribute to this. The new review procedure requires reviews to be undertaken every four weeks for the first three reviews, and quarterly thereafter. The reviews are normally completed by the assessor and are in triplicate so that the trainee and employer each receive a copy. In addition, occasional visits are made by the trainee support officer to monitor the trainee. This new system of documentation has proved to be effective, and target-setting is rigorous.

21. Assessors and support staff visit trainees and employers frequently and keep them informed of issues relevant to the training programme. This pastoral support helps to motivate trainees and means that employers have a good understanding of NVQs and of their trainees' progress. There is a clear disciplinary procedure.

22. All trainees are able to access the wide range of support services available to full-time students of the college. Some trainees have accessed funding for childcare which has been arranged, not just in Weston-super-Mare, but also in other locations convenient to the trainee. Dyslexic trainees have been able to access additional

skills support, and all trainees have been issued with a help-line card in case of problems. Other services such as counselling are available if required. The college is currently looking at the issue of travel for those trainees who live some distance from the college to determine if there is a possibility of funding to assist with travel costs.

23. Learning support resources are available across all programmes and are accessible to assessors to pass on to their trainees. However, there is some inconsistency in their use. For example, one trainee did not receive her level 2 hospitality support book until after completion of the NVQ.

24. One of the improvements made to the programme, following self-assessment, is the more structured approach to induction. Trainees now attend college for an induction day, where they receive information on health and safety, equality of opportunity including harassment, the assessment process and initial assessment. In addition, a workplace induction is arranged to ensure that trainees are aware of health and safety issues and employment conditions. Assessors meet with the trainees in the workplace to carry out an induction to the appropriate training programme. Trainees who have experienced the new induction process are able to recall the content of induction and confirm their understanding of their programme and the assessment process. Initial assessment is satisfactory. It consists primarily of a psychometric test, which all trainees undertake, and this is used to identify any additional support needs.

25. The procedures for induction, skills scans, action plans, learning support, and reviews, are clear and easy to understand and all staff are given training and guidance. A named member of staff who has achieved the level 4 NVQ in training and development has responsibility for trainee support.

26. Although all trainees are referred to the college from existing employment, there is no systematic accreditation of all trainees' prior learning. For example, one trainee who had previously achieved an administration NVQ did not have it accredited.

Management of training

Grade 2

27. Work-based training is organised by the business development unit which is part of the customer service directorate of the college headed by a director who is a member of the senior management team. The business development manager is in charge of the unit and is supported by three external programme co-ordinators, support officers and administrative staff. The external programme co-ordinators oversee administrative matters in relation to trainees and deal with contractual issues. Trainees are directly managed by trainer/assessors within the college's curriculum areas. They report to programme team leaders within the areas, and take advice and guidance from the external programme co-ordinators. The division of responsibilities is detailed in a service level agreement. Some training and

assessment is subcontracted to other providers. Staff rules and procedures are published on the college's intranet and there are separate procedures to cover work-based training. There is an annual appraisal of all staff and this links to training and development plans. The college was accredited with the Investors in People Standard in December 1997. The strengths given in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice, and the weaknesses had been addressed. The grade awarded was higher than that given by the college, indicating the progress that had been made since the self-assessment report was written.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong internal and external communication
- ◆ well-defined roles and responsibilities
- ◆ good use of data to set appropriate targets
- ◆ good understanding of NVQs by employers
- ◆ comprehensive planning of training and monitoring of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of key skills training

GOOD PRACTICE

To keep employers informed of college events, a brief newsletter is produced quarterly by the business development unit and distributed to local employers. It contains articles by employers showing how NVQs have benefited their business, useful articles on relevant law and encourages employers to make contact with the college.

28. There are good lines of communication within the college. From a strategic plan, directorate plans are produced and clear and widely published procedures support the strategic aims. There are termly briefings from the principal and staff and trainees understand the college's aims and objectives. Regular meetings are held at all levels and effective notes are taken. Staff are involved in the production of sectional annual reports; these contain many action points. There is a monthly college newsletter containing a short principal's brief, relevant items and extracts from senior management team meetings. It is well produced, informative and widely read. Staff are keen to contribute to it and disappointed if their submissions are not published in the next edition. Occupational areas have consultative committees which include employers. Representation on this committee, together with regular visits from assessors, helps employers to be kept informed of developments at the college. External subcontracted assessors attend monthly meetings in the college.

29. There are separate and clearly worded policies and working procedures for work-based training. These are explained clearly at staff's and trainees' inductions, which are recorded. A clear service level agreement describes the day-to-day responsibility for administration of trainees which is split between the business unit and the curriculum areas. Staff understand their roles and carry them out effectively. They make frequent visits to employers and trainees to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Annual staff appraisals and the staff development programme are satisfactory.

30. At a strategic level, the college is kept informed of local employers' needs by the information supplied by external agencies such as the TEC, but also by consultative committees and the governing body which advises it. From this, targets are set and monitored. An annual review of its performance is carried out, in addition to the normal reports which are sent to the TEC. Data from the management information system are effectively analysed by the business development unit and this is being further developed. For example, achievement times for NVQ level 2 were analysed and found to be excessively long. Targets for reduced timescales were set and the college is able to demonstrate graphically how the times have significantly reduced over time.

31. Employers providing work placements have a good understanding of NVQs and are able to effectively contribute to the training and to supporting trainees. Employers are kept well informed of training. They attend the college, are given a good briefing on the training process at their premises by the external programmes co-ordinators, and receive well-presented, concise and informative leaflets on work-based training which are produced by the college. Some employers and supervisors are progressing with assessor qualifications.

32. The business development unit accurately plans and monitors the numbers and progress of work-based trainees across the curriculum areas. A monthly check is kept of trainees on clear spreadsheets.

33. All trainees are required to complete key skills units. In some areas, the key skills training is well integrated with trainees' NVQ work, but in others, this is not the case. Where the key skills cannot be covered in the workplace, the college organises training but this is not integrated with the NVQ and trainees make slow progress.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

34. The college has a quality assurance system covering all aspects of its mainstream programmes. Overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with the director of customer service, supported by the quality development manager. There are regular internal quality audits for each curriculum area. The business development unit uses a quality assurance procedure which is based on the college's internal verification system. In addition, it has developed a work-based training operating manual which covers all the aspects of training. Training is monitored through the management-information system, the review process, internal verification, and regular staff meetings. All occupational areas, with the exception of hospitality, are the responsibility of the curriculum department. Hospitality is currently the responsibility of the business development unit, although this will change from September 2000. A member of the business development unit sits on the college's quality assurance committee and is able to raise issues relating to

work-based training. As part of the quality assurance process, a health check of the business development unit was undertaken in September 1999 prior to the self-assessment of the work-based training completed in November 1999. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths in the self-assessment report, while the others were considered to be no more than normal practice. An additional strength was identified. Although improvements have been made following action planning, there are still elements of quality assurance which are underdeveloped. However, inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong action-planning continuous improvements
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance framework for work-based training
- ◆ thorough internal verification system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate systems to gain feedback from trainees and employers
- ◆ little direct observation of training in the workplace

35. The self-assessment process was successfully undertaken, and resulted in a critical analysis of the training against all aspects of *Raising The Standard*. The college used evidence gathered from trainees and employers, as well as holding regular staff meetings to receive comments and suggestions. Judgements were accurate, particularly the weaknesses, and an action plan was produced with target dates for progress and achievement. The targets were set for three to six months following the completion of the self-assessment report, and a review of the action plan just prior to inspection revealed that all action points had been addressed or progress had been made. The process has been used to help to drive the organisation forward and to make continuous improvements, not only within the organisation but also to the work and personal development of individual members of staff.

36. Standards for training are set out in an operating manual. It refers to applications, induction, initial assessment, reviews, learning support, procedures for leaving and management. There are also individual files for induction, assessors' roles, and employers' information. All files contain relevant documents and guidance notes and are written in a clear and concise manner. Some processes are subject to regular audit. For instance, an external programme co-ordinator regularly samples the reports and has recently begun to observe trainees' reviews. A good manual describes the quality assurance process. It is regularly updated. There is good monitoring of training. Each month, statistics are produced from the management information system. The business development unit reviews these at its monthly meeting. A monthly assessors' meeting provides an effective forum for feedback from trainees and employers gathered at reviews to be gathered and discussed. It is also used to share good practice across occupational areas. At a

higher level, the unit produces an annual report whereby the performance of work-based training is monitored by the senior management team. Minutes and action plans are produced from all meetings.

37. The internal verification system used by the college is thorough and well recorded. A named individual is responsible for co-ordinating internal verification across the college, and for all records including those generated by the business development office which undertakes internal verification in hospitality. The system incorporates all aspects of planning, sampling and monitoring of assessors and portfolios, observations of assessment, and regular assessor meetings attended by assessors across occupational areas. Internal verification meets awarding body requirements.

38. Feedback is gathered regularly from trainees and employers, particularly at the review stage, but the system for formally collecting feedback and for evaluating such data is underdeveloped. There are currently two questionnaires for trainees, one given after induction and one midway through the programme, and two questionnaires for employers. So far, only one questionnaire has been issued late in 1999 and although some analysis has been undertaken, which identified some improvements needed in the wording of some of the questions, there has not been an in-depth evaluation. Two other questionnaires have been developed for NVQ satisfaction and a leaver survey but these have yet to be implemented. Targets have been set for responses to questionnaires, for example, to achieve 75 per cent satisfactory grades or above, but no analysis has been carried out to see if this is being achieved.

39. Although the college is aware of its own progress and performance, it has made no comparisons with local and national standards of performance.

40. The college has a thorough procedure to monitor the quality of its training by observing classroom tutoring. It has not fully developed this process in the workplace to measure the quality of the work-based training, which is particularly important in the case of trainees whose training takes place solely in the workplace. A procedure for observing training in the workplace has been developed, and it is also used to observe assessment, reviews and/or portfolios. However, it is still in the early stages of being implemented.