



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

# Wirral Metropolitan College

## SUMMARY

Wirral Metropolitan College offers TEC-funded vocational training in construction, engineering, hospitality, hair and beauty and foundation for work. The foundation for work programme provides good prevocational training which focuses on teamwork and practical activities. The construction, engineering, hospitality and hair and beauty training programmes are satisfactory. Trainees receive good support and guidance from liaison officers, who maintain close links between programme tutors and employers. Equal opportunities procedures and practices meet legislative and other requirements. Management of training is satisfactory. Tutors and liaison officers work effectively together to ensure that all partners in the training process are well informed about it. At the first inspection, quality assurance arrangements were incomplete. Now, there is a college-wide quality assurance framework which is focused on ensuring that trainees' experiences of training is good.

**As a result of the reinspection of Wirral Metropolitan College, the original published report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

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

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ liaison officers carefully link on- and off-the-job experience
- ◆ excellent integrated basic skills programme for foundation trainees
- ◆ good achievements by trainees on foundation programmes
- ◆ carefully integration of key skills into occupational programmes
- ◆ well-recorded engineering training programmes
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance framework



### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ insufficiently systematic sharing of good practice between schools
- ◆ ineffective promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient resources for motor vehicle and hairdressing programmes
- ◆ insufficient variety and practical activity in off-the-job training in hospitality

## INTRODUCTION

1. Wirral Metropolitan College (WMC) is the only further education college on the Wirral peninsula. It is a large college with 564 full- and part-time staff, including 204 full-time teaching staff who are located across the three main college campuses: Borough Road campus in Birkenhead, Carlett Park campus in Eastham and the International Business and Management Centre, also situated in Birkenhead. The college is a major provider of further and higher education, with an annual enrolment of around 15,000 students. The college attracts students from all age groups, although approximately 75 per cent are aged 25 years and over. Programmes are offered in all of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas and at most levels from basic literacy to masters degree courses.

2. In the last twelve months, the college has been through a period of radical change. This has included the resignation of all except one of the previous board of governors and appointment of a new board of governors, in February 1999, under the direction of the secretary of state for education. A new principal was appointed in May 1999 and a new college directorate was appointed through open competitive process. A major reorganisation and restructuring exercise was completed in August 1999 which involved an internal skills-matching exercise to appoint every post within the new structure. This ensured the best fit between organisational needs and available skills. Staff in 170 previous full-time education posts were made redundant, and there was a rationalisation of employment contracts. The college developed and implemented a recovery plan driven by a focus upon quality and the student experience, which supports the financial repositioning of the college. An accommodation strategy was also developed to reduce space by almost 50 per cent, while making overall improvements to the quality of the learning environment. This strategy has been informed by a thorough needs analysis which involved a public consultation exercise. The first phase of the strategy is now being implemented.

3. The college is one of the major training and assessment providers in the area, offering work-based training, assessment, basic skills, key skills, training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4, modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. The college has a contract with Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide modern apprenticeships national traineeships and other work-based training programmes for young people and adults. TEC-funded training is offered through the specialist vocational teams within the programme areas, primarily at the Borough Road and Carlett Park sites. Responsibility for the overall management of the TEC training rests with a contract management team which is based at the Borough Road Campus, with the management of the related curriculum training being the responsibility of staff in each programme area. At the first inspection, there were 127 trainees including 11 modern apprentices, 88 trainees on other work-based training for young people and 28 trainees on work-based training programmes for adults. At the reinspection there were 193 trainees, with a further 309 enrolled to start in the contract year 2000-01. The new contract includes 25 new qualifications within the occupational areas already offered by the college.

4. The college also offers New Deal training programmes funded by the Employment Service through subcontracts with the TEC. Currently, there are clients working on the full-time education and training option, part-time education and training option, environment task force option and the voluntary sector option.

5. Wirral has a population of some 330,000 people within an area of 128 square kilometres which offers considerable diversity in both its geographic and economic characteristics. There are strong contrasts between its areas of settlement. The TEC area is surrounded on three sides by water and is further separated by the barrier of the Welsh Hills. The proportion of people claiming unemployment benefit is high in comparison with the national average and the labour market is dominated by the public services, which account for almost 40 per cent of all employees in Wirral. Other dominant sectors include chemicals, food and drink, distribution and hotels and catering. The college provides education and training to support these sectors. Unemployment in the Wirral and area for May 2000 is 7.5 per cent which is higher than the national average of 3.8 per cent. The proportion of the local population from minority ethnic groups is less than 1 per cent.

6. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 46.9 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 1998, this was 45.3 per cent for the Wirral area compared with a national average of 46.3 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. Wirral Metropolitan College held awareness-raising workshops to introduce staff to *Raising the Standard* so that everyone had a clear understanding of the self-assessment process and their role within it. Staff who had responsibility for any aspects of training were required to carry out self-assessment, focusing on their occupational area. Their findings were considered together with documentary evidence, and formal and informal feedback from trainees, employers and staff. All this information was then collated centrally involving representatives from all the schools in the process. The self-assessment process for the first inspection was completed in January 1999. The college produced a detailed action plan following the first inspection and a status report in January 2000 to update the information included in the self-assessment report. This status report, identifying the progress made to date in achieving the action plan, was presented to the Training Standards Council (TSC) before reinspection. The report was based on input from all staff, employers' views, and feedback on training from trainees.

8. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Wirral Metropolitan College in March 1999. They interviewed 24 staff and 48 trainees. They visited 23 work-placement providers and spoke to 20 employers. Inspectors completed a total of eight observations of training activities and reviewed trainees' records, documents and a wide range of scheme records, external audit reports and external verifiers' reports.

9. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at Wirral Metropolitan College in May 2000 to reinspect the generic area of quality assurance. They spoke to 13 trainees, 20 staff, visited four work placements and spoke to three employers and four external partners. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of college documents and records, training records, trainees' portfolios and trainees' files.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Construction

#### Grade 3

10. Wirral Metropolitan College offers training leading to NVQs in brickwork, painting and decorating and carpentry and joinery. At the time of inspection, there were 24 trainees on an adult training for work programme. Eight of these were pursuing qualifications in brickwork, 11 in painting and decorating and 5 in carpentry and joinery. All trainees are working towards level 2 qualifications. Adult trainees attend the college on a full-time basis for a period of up to 12 months. There are no work placements available and therefore the trainees complete all the elements of their training in the college workshops. The college provides trainees with a non-contracted, 16-hour bridging programme to help them to progress to further training.

Inspectors considered some of the strengths in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses, which the college had not identified, and they agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ careful integration of key skills with the content of the occupational programme
- ◆ innovative information technology resource unit
- ◆ good tracking of trainees' assessment

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ no systematic planning of internal verification
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans
- ◆ no documentation to monitor target dates for learning

11. Staff have identified how trainees can develop and demonstrate proficiency in key skills through all the NVQ level 2 units. Furthermore, the trainees not only receive the key skills training, but fully appreciate its relevance in a future work context. The information technology resource unit for the construction school provides job-search information for the trainees, and also the learning packs for their training programmes. The liaison officer is occupationally qualified and suitably experienced as well as being a qualified assessor and a member of the school team. The liaison officer has a very close relationship with the tutors. The trainees' achievements are effectively monitored and their future learning and support requirements are identified through the liaison officer's reviews. The trainees understand the assessment procedure. Each trainee has a personal progression profile and log book. These are both cross-checked against the course tutor's assessment file each week by the liaison officer to make sure they are up-to-date. The progress made by each trainee is also displayed in the workshops.

12. In the past, some work placements have been of poor quality and trainees now gain simulated work experience by undertaking realistic work projects on the college premises. Wherever possible, trainees are assessed for their qualification through these. Internal verification is not systematically planned and in some cases, is not sufficient to meet awarding body requirements. While trainees' progress is well documented, the trainees' individual training plans are not updated or amended to reflect individual trainee progress or changing needs. Tutors carry out reviews of trainees' progress each term, when trainees agree action plans and target dates for improving their performance. These reviews are not recorded, however.

13. Compared with previous years, there has been a drop in the number of early leavers in 1998-99 and an increase in the number of trainees achieving their qualification. In 1996-97, 38 trainees started the programme, 21 left early and 18 NVQs were achieved. In 1997-98, 42 trainees started the programme, 22 left early and 11 NVQs were achieved. In the current year, 29 trainees started the programme and to date, seven have left and 16 NVQs have been achieved.

### Engineering

### Grade 3

14. At the time of inspection, there were 39 trainees in the engineering school. The number of NVQ trainees is indicated in the table below. Only eight of the 31 trainees were employed at the time of inspection. Level 2 vehicle maintenance and repair trainees attend the Borough Road Campus facility, which has a vehicle workshop containing sufficient space for eight to 10 vehicles with some bench work activities. A dedicated motor vehicle classroom has recently been made available. Training for all motor vehicle mechanics and vehicle body trades at level 3 are located at the Carlett Park Campus. All trainees attend WMC one day per week during term time and the remaining periods are spent on work experience and on-the-job training. The training liaison officer is the link between the workplace and the engineering school's tutoring staff at the College. The inspection team mainly agreed with the self-assessment findings on the engineering provision. Some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice and the inspectors found strengths and weaknesses which the college had not identified. They awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

Vehicle maintenance & repair: replacement	level 2: 18 trainees
Vehicle mechanical & electronic systems (modern apprenticeship)	level 3: 7 trainees
Vehicle body fitting	level 2: 9 trainees
Vehicle body repair (modern apprenticeship)	level 3: 1 trainee
Engineering foundation: fabrication & welding	level 2: 3 trainees
Engineering production: machining (modern apprenticeship)	level 3: 1 trainee
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 trainees</b>

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-recorded and carefully documented training programmes
- ◆ thorough initial action planning for trainees
- ◆ improvement in trainees' achievement rates on vehicle trade programmes
- ◆ careful integration of key skills



*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inappropriate resources for training and assessment
- ◆ some trainees' uncertainty about the level of their vocational and key skills programme
- ◆ insufficient opportunity for workplace assessment of trainees on level 2 vehicle trade programmes

15. The main provision of the engineering school is the motor vehicle mechanics programme, which is divided between two of the WMC's sites. The level 2 programme is based at the Borough Road Campus and level 3 trainees are based at Carlett Park Campus. The level 2 motor vehicle mechanic trainees work through their NVQ programme on a bi-weekly timetable. Alternate weeks are spent in the classroom and in the vehicle-training workshop. The extent to which training and assessment opportunities are available depends on the range of vehicles booked into the training workshop. Training timetables are amended to allow trainees to stay in the workshop to take advantage of working on particular vehicles as they become available. The college's own vehicles have been too heavily used to be helpful as training and assessment aids, but they are supplemented by modern vehicles belonging to staff. This system helps to overcome the problem of trainees having to work on vehicles which are too old, as highlighted in recent awarding body external verifier reports. However, there is no rigorous monitoring to ensure that all trainees are provided with the full range of work and assessment required by their NVQ programme. The training workshop is suitably equipped, but requires constant updating as tools and equipment are damaged or go missing. A number of new engines are also available for trainees to work on in order to develop new skills and extend their knowledge. Trainees are encouraged to produce job cards from their employer or placement provider, as well as witness testimonies, as supporting evidence for the assessments that are carried out in the college's training workshop.

16. Decisions on whether or not trainees should progress from level 2 to level 3 are made on the basis of discussions between the liaison officer, the trainee and the employer or placement provider. All level 3 trainees on the modern apprenticeship programme first completed a level 2 youth training programme. The key skills of trainees who transfer to level 3 are not subject to an initial assessment. Level 3 motor vehicle mechanics attend the Carlett Park site. They spend their day at college in a classroom and computer-based environment. Motor vehicle theory and key skills, which are integrated and assessed throughout the academic year, are taught in dedicated classrooms. The current trainees are all working on the same assignment that cover the work of the key skills units. All level 3 practical competencies are assessed at the trainees' workplace, although some trainees are not always aware that assessments are taking place. Trainees attend Carlett Park site every week for the first three weeks of each month, then they spend the fourth week back in the workplace in order that they might be assessed and observed there. The college's internal verifier/assessment recording system is well documented and effective.

17. The vehicle body programmes are also located at Carlett Park, and take place in their own compact vehicle body workshop. Vehicles, tools and equipment resources match those used by the level 2 mechanics at the Borough Road Campus and the programme format is similar to level 2 and 3 programmes for motor vehicle mechanics.

18. Initial action plans for trainees are produced at the start of each programme. They are not updated during the programme, however, although other records are kept on trainees' progress. Trainees on the motor vehicle mechanics programme and the vehicle body programmes are provided with work packs on the relevant theoretical knowledge. To some extent, they rely on these packs too heavily and do not exercise enough initiative in producing evidence of their acquisition of theoretical knowledge for their portfolios. In general, work placements range from those which are acceptable to those which are excellent and provide good opportunities for evidence collection. Two of the motor vehicle companies have one member of staff who has achieved assessor/trainer qualifications. In general, trainees receive relevant on-the-job training and useful experience in their work placements. The college is currently producing information packs for employers and workplace supervisors.

19. The numbers of NVQs obtained by trainees in the past three years are as follows; 1995-96: five; 1996-97: none; 1997-98: nine. Retention rates in the same years have been 64 per cent, 43 per cent and 81 per cent respectively. This year, to date, 13 NVQs have been achieved.

### **Hospitality**

### **Grade 3**

20. There are 19 trainees on hospitality programmes. Two are chef modern apprentices and 13 are on other youth training programmes. Four adult trainees are on adult training programmes. Fifteen of the trainees are working towards a NVQ in food preparation and cooking at level 2, the other four are working towards a NVQ in kitchen and larder. In addition, all trainees work for the welcome host and basic food hygiene certificates at level 3. Trainees are employed in work placements. Their off-the-job training is timetabled to take place at the college for one day per week, usually from 9am until 1pm for the level 2 candidates and 2pm until 8pm for the level 3 candidates. Placements include small residential homes, large and small industrial catering outlets, contract caterers, hotels and restaurants. Six trainees had employed status at the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered others to be no more than normal practice. The inspectors also identified three further strengths. They agreed with three of the weaknesses, but found two weaknesses which the college had not identified. They awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ exceptionally good relationships between the provider, trainees and employers
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ opportunity for trainees to undertake work experience in Europe

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of variety and practical activities in off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poor success rates on the adult training programme

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Trainees are encouraged to undertake a period of work experience in Europe. This is well supported by the college with members of the hospitality team accompanying trainees for the duration of their work experience abroad. This has helped trainees to further their personal development in areas such as working with others, communication and their independence.*

21. There is an atmosphere of trust between staff, trainees and workplace providers. Trainees value the level of support they receive to help them overcome difficulties. The liaison officer ensures that trainees receive all the support they need and that they are given every opportunity to achieve their qualification. The liaison officer is quick to take action in the event of a trainee failing to make progress or learn effectively while on work placement. There are examples of the liaison officer working with the placement provider and overcoming difficulties or changing a trainee's placement. The workplace providers are also very supportive of the trainees and their learning needs.

22. All parties involved in the training process have a clear understanding of the programmes, and also of the NVQ system. Employers have shown their willingness to support the training by altering menus to help trainees' to develop their skills. Some employers also buy in special food items to enable their trainees to practise their skills. The college has a good range of training facilities, including practice kitchens, good classrooms and restaurants which are open to the public.

23. The off-the-job training is provided to trainees in groups. Trainers do not adapt their training methods sufficiently to take account of the varying abilities of trainees in the groups. Sessions are structured round the completion of work packs and tutorial support is available to the trainees on a one-to-one basis. Currently there is no practical off-the-job training for level 2 trainees. Recently, a one-off structured session was provided to cover a particular area of the programme. This was well received by the trainees and a number commented that they would welcome more of this type of training as well as the opportunity for practical skills training. There is no written scheme of work for the trainees outlining how their programme will develop. The absence of a scheme makes it difficult for the employers to link the training in the workplace with the off-the-job training. Some trainees had completed all their work packs but not the practical elements of the NVQ units. As the trainees near completion of the programme assessment becomes more focused, but for the majority of their time on the programme, assessment is not systematically scheduled and organised.

24. The numbers of adult trainees who achieve an NVQ is low. The college is

taking action to improve recruitment and retention on programmes. In 1996-97, there were 35 trainees on the various programmes and only six NVQs were achieved. In 1997-98, there were 32 trainees and 22 NVQs were achieved.

**Hair & beauty  
(hairdressing)**

**Grade 3**

25. There are 16 trainees in hair and beauty at the college. All the trainees are on youth training programmes. Twelve have employed status. Two trainees are on beauty programmes, one is taking NVQ level 2 and the other is taking NVQ level 3. Currently, the college uses 12 salons for work placements. All trainees attend the college one day each week, either Monday or Tuesday, for off-the-job training. These training days cover theoretical knowledge and practical training including sessions with clients in the afternoon. All assessments are carried out during the off-the-job sessions and no work-based assessment takes place. The college liaison officer who monitors and reviews the trainee's progress visits trainees in their salons. Trainees are recruited for the hairdressing and beauty programmes either through the careers service or as a result of a direct approach from local salons. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and some of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade.

*STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good monitoring and careful recording of trainees' progress
- ◆ improved retention rates
- ◆ effective use of well-designed learning packs
- ◆ good salon-based training

*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ shortage of models for assessment purposes
- ◆ some out-of-date equipment
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ underdeveloped links with employers

26. The liaison officer visits all trainees very regularly in the workplace. She visits them at least every six weeks but usually every four weeks. During these visits, progress is discussed with both the trainee and the work-based supervisor and this is recorded on review sheets and copies are retained by the trainee and the liaison officer. In addition, the liaison officer attends the college during the off-the-job training sessions to check and monitor trainees' progress further. Trainees are appreciative of the help and support they receive.

27. Trainees benefit from learning packages that cover theoretical knowledge. These packs are well designed and entail effective learning approaches to the subjects to be studied. They incorporate good diagrams and short tests or tasks that check the trainees' learning. There is a pack for each of the programme units. On completion of each pack, the trainee has to take a revision test and do well in this before starting another pack.

28. There is a shortage of client models for trainees to work on during their off-the-job training. This is particularly problematic because the majority of assessments are carried out during off-the-job training sessions and some trainees have been slow to complete their practical assessments. Although two salon supervisors have achieved the necessary assessor qualifications there is little assessment of trainees' work in the salons.

29. There is good work-based training offered by most salons which the trainees value. Most of the salons offer the trainees special model nights and they are encouraged to observe and assist well-qualified and supportive staff. Opportunities are missed to give the employers greater involvement in the training process. They are not supplied with college schemes of work and few have attended functions at the college.

30. The current retention rate on the programme is 89 per cent. In 1995-96, there were 19 trainees and three achieved an NVQ. In 1996-97, there were 12 trainees and one achieved an NVQ. In 1997-98, there were nine trainees and none achieved an NVQ. In the current year, five out of eight trainees have obtained an NVQ.

## **Foundation for work**

## **Grade 2**

31. The college offers two preparatory training courses. The army preparation course and the prevocational programme. There are 12 trainees on the army preparation course and 17 trainees on the pre-vocational training programme. The army preparation course gives trainees the opportunity to develop occupational and personal skills over a 12-week period and can lead to successful application to a career in the British army. Trainees can only be accepted onto this programme if they satisfy the army's minimum age and health regulations. The pre-vocational course offers trainees up to 26 weeks' training. This programme involves the exploration of individual trainees' career aims, with a weekly opportunity to see a careers link officer, and develop personal skills, job search skills, and take up a work placement. Trainees can complete a variety of courses leading to awards in sport, English, tourism, hospitality and food and first aid. They can also work for the wordpower and numberpower certificates at foundation level. Training takes place at the Carlett Park site and at a range of locations in the Birkenhead area. The programmes are directed towards trainees who have experienced difficulties in gaining or maintaining full-time employment and/or have additional learning support needs of a behavioral or academic nature. Inspectors found strengths and

weaknesses which were not identified in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report related to generic areas rather than foundation for work training. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' good achievement rates
- ◆ excellent integration of basic skills provision with all aspects of training
- ◆ well-planned and carefully-organised evidence gathering activities
- ◆ imaginative training methods to help trainees to overcome behavioural problems

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*In working for the basketball qualification, trainees have to throw a ball over various distances. Trainees measure the distances for themselves and take a photograph, thus producing evidence for their numberpower portfolios.*

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate introductions to training sessions
- ◆ failure to set trainees clear targets

32. Trainees joining the basic preparatory course are given opportunities to gain a wide variety of qualifications and good opportunities to develop personal skills to help them in employment. In the last complete contract year, 63 per cent of trainees continued into mainstream training, gained employment or entered full-time education. In addition, 75 per cent gained three or more qualifications. On the first Army preparation course, 65 per cent achieved their goals. Trainees can move between preparatory courses if they need to and they can take part in Princes Trust Volunteers' courses.

33. On both preparatory courses, trainees develop interpersonal and personal skills. There is a heavy focus on developing good time-keeping skills, self-discipline and team working. Trainees' placements are contacted usually twice per week, by telephone, to check on trainees' attendance and wellbeing.

34. Activities are well planned and organised to help trainees to develop application of number and communication skills. Many of the course activities are planned to take place outside college premises. These consist of team sports and outdoor activities which are designed to encourage a high level of team work and communication between the trainees. The trainees cited hiking exercises, climbing, sailing and playing basketball as examples. Throughout the training course, opportunities to develop trainees' skills are maximized. All the evidence which trainees collect of their knowledge and skills is discussed and carefully matched to the requirements of the various awards.

35. Strong links have been forged with the army. Trainees on the army preparation course spend time with army personnel during a residential course and have the opportunity to complete the army assault course and other activities. At the end of

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Separate provision of delivery of basic skills is kept to an absolute minimum in the classroom. Activities for a basic skills qualification are combined with all communication activities and used as evidence for wordpower and for key skills portfolios. Trainees plan and cost outings and activities as part of their work for numberpower.*



the course, a presentation event is held. This is attended by army personnel, trainees' families and college staff at which trainees who have successfully completed the programme are presented with a certificate.

36. Specific classroom sessions on basic skills are kept to a minimum. Basic skills training is an integral part of all the training. All training is carefully planned and structured to enable trainees to realise their full potential. Training methods are imaginative and they help some trainees to overcome behavioural problems and work constructively and productively. All sessions are designed with some flexibility to enable the trainer to modify the activities to meet individual trainees' needs. In order to increase their employability, trainees are encouraged to acquire additional skills, including information technology skills, and to work for basic hygiene and emergency first aid certificates.

37. Trainees are not set clear individual targets. No checks are made at the end of activities to identify whether identified learning goals have been achieved. Trainees take part in activities with enthusiasm, but they are not set targets for their own personal development. Some training sessions are not clearly introduced and their objectives are not explained to the trainees. Links between what has previously been learned and new learning is not made clear to trainees. Individual training plans are not updated to show trainees' progress and achievements.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 3**

38. There is an equal opportunities policy which meets the requirements of awarding bodies and the TEC. The policy is implemented and procedures ensure that the legislation is complied with. The college has a clear commitment to equal opportunities and ensuring that training is accessible to all who can benefit from it. The policy is distributed, at induction, to all staff and trainees. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and one of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report and with the grade given by the college.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ open access to programmes
- ◆ provision of appropriate clothing for women on engineering programme

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no recent staff training on equal opportunities
- ◆ language on a range of materials is overly complex

39. Wirral Metropolitan College's mission statement is that 'personal achievement is everyone's right and the College will organise itself behind that right'. Every applicant is accepted onto the course of his or her choice. The college is clearly committed to giving every trainee full access and opportunity to develop and progress. Every effort is made to help female trainees who join programmes usually taken by males, and vice-versa. For example, women joining engineering programmes are supplied with overalls which fitted them properly. Policies and procedures comply with current equal opportunities legislation. There is an effectively managed complaints procedure and all complaints are logged and dealt with appropriately. Some monitoring of the promotion of equality of opportunity has been carried out and this has led to the planning of action for improvements.

40. The language used on a variety of materials is unnecessarily complex. The student handbook is not written in simple language to enable trainees to use it easily. The promotional literature uses sophisticated language. Preparatory courses are aimed in part at those with literacy and numeracy difficulties but the marketing literature is too complicated to be easily understood by some trainees. Although the college has a clear commitment to accept all trainees regardless of their race, gender and religion, it is 18 months since staff received any training related to equal opportunities.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

41. The college provides trainees with an induction programme. This includes initial guidance and screening of their skills and knowledge in order that their training requirements and learning support needs may be identified. Trainees receive regular reviews of their progress. Liaison officers are responsible for trainee support in the workplace as well as providing a link between the on- and off-the-job training programmes. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ role of liaison officers in providing an effective link between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good initial assessment
- ◆ comprehensive system of basic skills support
- ◆ good support to help trainees find employment or progress to further training
- ◆ extensive range of trainee support available

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little use of accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ some poor reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ failure to give the basic skills test to some trainees



42. Initial assessment tests are used to assess trainee's ability. The test results are used to prepare learning plans which address individual trainees' needs. The tests are administered in a careful and sensitive way and trainees respond well to them. Trainees identified as requiring additional or basic skills learning support are referred to specialist staff. The college fails to ensure, however, that all trainees take the initial tests.

43. The liaison officers hold weekly review meetings with their trainees to ensure that every aspect of progress is reviewed. Because they are part of the school and meet trainers very frequently, any issue, be it occupational or pastoral, can be dealt with in a timely manner with the trainee. Liaison officers also link closely with the employers and exchange information about the trainees' performance and how they can assist in the training process. Liaison officers are involved in the job-search element of the training and regularly discuss progression with trainees at their tutorials. Students who are considering self-employment have been directed to another training provider to receive training on self-employment in addition to continuing with their NVQ training.

44. Trainees have access to an extensive range of support services personnel including careers advisors, counsellors, a crisis worker and a welfare advisor. The trainee's first port of call, the liaison officer, can ensure that these services are available when needed. Apart from some isolated examples in engineering, accreditation of prior learning is not used. Although trainees' reviews take place regularly, their quality varies considerably and some are poor. The records of some reviews are detailed and include trainees' comments, while others are insubstantial. There is no system to ensure that all trainees receive the handouts to which they are entitled.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

45. The management of the TEC contract is the responsibility of the business development information services unit working closely with each of the academic schools. There have been two previous management structures to support this provision, and the current system was introduced in 1998. The most significant change is the de-centralising of the management of the delivery of training through the liaison officers who link the trainee, employer or placement provider and the college's seven vocationally specific schools. Each school is responsible for managing its own vocational resources, training, NVQ assessment and the day-to-day support for their trainees. Trainees' files are held by the individual schools. Six of the training liaison officers are occupationally qualified and experienced. Inspectors mainly agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ good communication between staff, trainees and work placement providers
- ◆ regular and detailed team meetings at school and management levels

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of systematic sharing of good practice between schools
- ◆ failure of managers to take responsibility for both on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ ineffective arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development

46. The college has a clearly defined management structure. Staff understand and fully support the college's values, policies and strategies. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are effectively deployed. All members of staff have been issued with a copy of their current job description. A comprehensive staff handbook is issued to all new staff at their induction. The business development services manager agrees and sets targets for each school and is responsible for reviewing training standards. Progress towards reaching training targets are monitored by the head of school and discussed at the regular business development services and school management meetings, as well as the programme team meetings. Each school has a school review committee which is responsible for the quality and development of programmes. Progress towards reaching contract targets is monitored on a monthly basis and a detailed analysis of performance against contract is provided for heads of schools, the contract manager and liaison officers.

47. Strong team links have been established between tutors and liaison officers. Information about trainees' performance and development needs are discussed regularly and feedback on the quality of trainees workplace performance is also exchanged. Strong links have been developed with employers who are given detailed information about the trainees' achievements and future training needs.

48. The opportunity for trainees to gather evidence of their performance in the workplace has not been fully exploited. There is no strategy to involve employers and placement providers more in the training and assessment process. Statistical data are used as a means of informing heads of schools and training liaison officers of progress in meeting contractual targets and requirements, but these data are not always taken sufficiently into account when making management decisions.

49. There are no systematic arrangements for sharing good practice in, and between schools. However, some individual staff share good practice of their own volition. Staff appraisals are scheduled to take place once a year, but are not always effective. The appraisal system is cumbersome and bureaucratic. Staff appraisal includes the observation of teaching and tutorial work. Some staff have not receive appraisals. Other staff say that their appraisals have been superficial or

incomplete. Staff training needs are identified from the outcomes of the appraisals and an analysis of the college's future needs. Liaison officers do not all receive the same degree of training and some have assessor qualifications while others do not.

50. Liaison officers visit the trainees in the workplace and monitor their progress. They do not, however, link their monitoring of the trainees' general progress with trainees' specific progress towards attainment of the NVQ. Data on trainees' destinations are collected in accordance with contractual requirements, but this information is not taken into account when making management decisions about the future planning of provision.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 3

51. The college complies with the quality assurance requirements of the TEC and relevant awarding bodies. The director of quality and performance review is responsible for the implementation of a new cross-college framework for quality assurance, which comprises a vision, mission statement and teaching and learning policy. A quality assurance committee is responsible for strategic level quality assurance within programme areas. This committee reports to the academic board, which advises on decision making within the college management team. Operational quality issues are considered at course level at course team reviews, and at programme level by programme boards of studies.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ inconsistencies in the application of quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ work placement providers' lack of awareness of quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of training provision

52. Since the first inspection, quality processes have been rationalised, and a programme of consultation and staff development has supported the introduction of the new systems. The quality assurance framework now embraces key areas such as target setting, teaching observations, assessment and verification, evaluation of trainees' performance, self-assessment, audits and action planning. The college has made a commitment to the achievement of the Investors in People Standard by July 2001. Most of the strengths identified in the updated self-assessment report relate to identified improvements made during the past year, and the most significant area of weakness was realistically recognised. Inspectors found that all of the weaknesses identified at the first inspection have been addressed and have become satisfactory practice within the college. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the college in its updated report for reinspection.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance framework
- ◆ meaningful target setting and detailed reviews
- ◆ purposeful evaluation of training at all levels
- ◆ accurate self-assessment judgements supported by realistic action plans

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some quality assurance arrangements not fully tested
- ◆ some systems yet to be used

53. The restructuring of college responsibilities for quality has led to a radical corporate approach to the redesign of its quality assurance arrangements. The implementation of a new quality assurance framework, in a little over half a year, has encompassed a cultural shift in staff's involvement and understanding of quality. It has seen the view of trainees' experience and their future progression placed firmly at the centre of quality assurance arrangements. Trainees' individual training plans have developed to become accurate and meaningful working documents. A clear teaching and learning policy drives the strategic focus of the quality assurance systems. It allows sufficient flexibility for each course's quality assurance file to reflect the different needs regarding quality within individual courses.

54. A partnership with the TEC has supported the implementation of some performance-based aspects of the new quality assurance framework. It has assisted with the development of internal audits, linked to an agreed activity calendar, which are based on monthly performance reviews. The overall quality assurance framework now has a solid foundation with explicit links to business planning assurance. A copy of the framework has been reproduced as a wallchart which is displayed prominently in programme areas. The breadth of the quality assurance framework is substantial in that it clearly ensures the development of strong communication and external links with bodies like the local employers' network, community groups, student focus groups, the careers service, the Employment Service and schools. Additionally, the framework has benefited from the implementation of a marketing strategy and the effective use and dissemination of supporting information. Staff are all involved in the quality assurance arrangements. The college takes its responsibilities for the quality assurance of work-based training seriously, even though work-based training is a comparatively small part of the college's total activity.

55. Target setting is now carried out with the full co-operation of staff at course level. Targets are meaningful and realistic in the context of the programme area and have started to be used to monitor and plan for continuous improvement. There is a detailed review of progress towards targets each month. Reviews are carried out both at course team and programme team levels. Staff at all levels use action

points to steer corrective measures. Additional input to quality is received through the contract management team. This team reviews all external contacts across the college and develops links with external bodies to improve facilities for training.

56. A college-wide cycle of quality assurance meetings engages and involves all staff teams. At this early stage of the operation of the new quality assurance arrangements, it is evident that evaluation is carried out by course teams in a self-critical and analytical fashion. The hairdressing team, for example, has already established that this current year has witnessed a significant improvement in trainees' assessment progress. Similarly, the construction team can easily demonstrate improving retention rates for trainees on specific courses. Action planning is comprehensively carried out and recorded. Action plans require considerable management time and are produced at many levels within the quality assurance system. While the action planning arrangements appear on the surface to be complex, their effective management does result in the successful completion of actions or their reconsideration in the light of other changes. Evaluation of feedback from trainees is thorough and is presented attractively and meaningfully. Staff use trainees' views to improve the quality of their training and support of trainees and management of programmes.

57. An annual self-assessment process is a well-established part of quality assurance arrangements at programme level. Self-assessment for reinspection was accurate and supported by well-presented evidence. The improvement action plan prepared as a result of the last inspection was detailed and clearly cross-referenced. A progress review of the post-inspection action plan prepared in readiness for reinspection was clear and accurate. The self-assessment process is now a critical part of the quality assurance framework, with real benefits resulting from its use.

58. The new quality assurance framework has been well received across programme areas. Over six months of implementation, however, the systems have had insufficient time to be tested thoroughly. For example, course team reviews have only just completed their second round of meetings. The work of the quality assurance committee is too new to be fully evaluated. The internal verification system has yet to be extended to cover the increasing numbers of work-based assessors. While there are a number of early examples of the system contributing to improvements in the quality of work-based training, these have been focused on immediate and relatively short-term concerns. The quality assurance cycle has not been completely closed, so improvements in quality cannot be properly analysed, especially those with longer-term implications. Potential improvements to the system have already been discussed, and a formal review is expected in July.

59. There have been improvements in the way that the college interacts with employers on work-based training programmes. The liaison officers have a pivotal role in maintaining contacts. They have been instrumental in improving the trainees' review process, the management of individual training plans, and ensuring adequate co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training through regular meetings with the



employer, college tutor and trainee. It is too early to assess how liaison officers will manage in the longer term as a result of receiving ever-growing quantities of audit feedback information. Audits of the quality assurance process have yet to take place, and the formal review of quality assurance documents has not begun. The role of the liaison officers is broadened by their part in the work of the contract management team. Visits to employers are regular, constructive and, in particular, have made a significant impact in beginning the process of improving employers' commitment to work-based training. The college offers a range of free training services to employers, including assessor training, risk assessment training and management training. Employers have recently received new pamphlets outlining the quality assurance arrangements in which they might become involved, but it is too early to assess the impact of this marketing. Currently, there are means for employers themselves to share good practice and for the college to play an important role in developing on-the-job training and tackling common training concerns in the workplace. Employer forums are planned to expand and develop this activity.