



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1999

REINSPECTION JUNE 2000

# EEF West Midlands Technology Centre

## SUMMARY

EEF West Midlands Technology Centre offers good training in engineering. The modern apprentices are employed by local engineering companies from the start of training. Most trainees complete their training and achieve their intended qualifications. Retention rates are poor on the training for work programme, but many trainees who leave early go into employment. Trainees receive good support throughout their training and benefit from opportunities to further their personal development. Training in the technology centre and in the workplace is well planned and effectively managed, but contractual arrangements with subcontracted colleges were unsatisfactory. There is now good quality control for all off-the-job training. At the first inspection, the equal opportunities and quality assurance policies and related procedures were out of date. All equal opportunities paperwork has been revised and updated and equality of opportunity is now a major priority for EEF West Midlands Technology Centre. Since the acquisition of the provider by EEF West Midlands in December 1998, managers have begun to make improvements to training issues, including those subsequently highlighted by inspectors. There are now comprehensive quality assurance systems and procedures.

**As a result of the reinspection of EEF West Midlands Technology Centre, the original published report text for equal opportunities and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Quality assurance	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well-managed training on and off the job
- ◆ high retention and NVQ achievement rates among modern apprentices
- ◆ comprehensive trainees' induction and support arrangements



- ◆ strong and productive links with local schools
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees' personal development
- ◆ good initiatives to widen participation for under-represented groups
- ◆ comprehensive internal audit of training policies and procedures

**KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ poor retention rates on the training for work programme
- ◆ poor recording and no evaluation of additional learning support
- ◆ no routine monitoring of equal opportunities during trainees' reviews

## INTRODUCTION

1. EEF West Midlands Technology Centre is a training facility recently acquired by EEF West Midlands, which has over 1,200 member companies and is the largest of 13 regional associations affiliated to the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF). The technology centre has a large and adequately equipped engineering training workshop, together with classrooms and an information technology suite. Since EEF West Midlands acquired the centre, there has been a commitment to an extensive programme of refurbishment and re-equipment of the technology centre. The first phase of this has been completed. The technology centre provides workshop and technology training, short courses and conferences, and a training advisory service for clients, including those from local government, a local university, Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local group training associations and local industry. More than half the centre's work is concerned with privately funded training.

2. The technology centre provides training in engineering funded by the government through Birmingham and Solihull TEC. The main programmes are one for engineering modern apprentices employed by local engineering companies and a programme of training for work for adults and young people. The modern apprentices undertake a first year of engineering foundation training in the training centre leading to the achievement of an NVQ at level 2. They then return to their employers for a three-year programme of work-based training leading to the achievement of an NVQ at level 3 in an appropriate engineering subject. Throughout their training, they also attend a further education college, on a day-release basis, where they work towards additional nationally recognised engineering qualifications. The trainees on the training for work programme attend the training centre for up to 26 weeks and undertake training leading to the achievement of an NVQ in engineering at level 2. On both programmes, trainees often have the opportunity to achieve more than one NVQ at level 2 and, in some instances, at level 3. Currently, there are 107 trainees.

3. EEF West Midlands Technology Centre, which is located in the Tyseley area of Birmingham, works closely with the local TEC and schools, and recruits trainees from across Birmingham. Recruitment is mainly dependent upon local advertising and referral from unemployment offices. Birmingham City has a working population of 673,000 currently. The unemployment rate is 7.2 per cent compared with a national average of 3.5 per cent. At the time of the first inspection, 10 per cent of men of working age and 3.6 per cent of women were claiming unemployment benefit compared with a combined national average of 5.2 per cent. Across the area, 21.5 per cent of the population were from minority ethnic groups at the time of the first inspection. The TEC economic assessment of 1999-2000 gives the current proportion as 17 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The company prepared its first self-assessment report for the first inspection. The training manager, office manager and two training advisors compiled the report. Two members of the team attended training workshops provided by Birmingham and Solihull TEC. The report was completed prior to the provider seeing a copy of *Raising the Standard* and did not focus on the quality statements contained in the framework. A number of significant strengths and weaknesses were not identified in the report. For the reinspection, EEF West Midlands Technology Centre produced a new self-assessment report. The self-assessment report was developed in a draft form by the management team who each took responsibility for certain areas. The draft was then agreed at management level and passed on to staff to discuss and have input at their monthly meetings. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the reinspected areas were mainly accurate, with some strengths found to be no more than normal practice. For the areas reinspected, one grade given in the self-assessment report was agreed on by the inspectors and one grade was found to be too high.

5. For the first inspection, a team of two inspectors spent eight days at EEF West Midlands Technology Centre during May 1999. Inspectors met the managers and staff of the training centre and one manager of a subcontracting college, and a representative of the local TEC. They interviewed 20 trainees, visited the further education college and seven employers' workplaces, interviewing workplace supervisors, work-based assessors and employers. They observed trainees' progress reviews and five training sessions. They also examined trainees' files and portfolios, assessment records, training plans, teaching materials at the college and numerous documents relating to the training and its management. The following table shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed by inspectors.

6. For the reinspection, a team of two inspectors spent a total of four days at EEF West Midlands Technology Centre. A total of four trainees were interviewed in two workplaces and one trainee was interviewed at the training centre. Two employers' representatives were interviewed and eight interviews were carried out with EEF West Midlands Technology Centre's staff. Trainees' files and portfolios were examined, as were awarding-body documents and TEC audits. The company's paperwork and agreements were also examined.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		2	3			5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Engineering

### Grade 2

7. At the time of inspection, there were 27 engineering modern apprentices, all employed by local engineering companies, and 12 trainees on a programme of training for work. During the first year of the modern apprenticeship, apprentices undertake engineering foundation training off the job in the provider's training centre, and attend a further education college on a day-release basis. First-year apprentices are working towards achievement of an NVQ in engineering at level 2 and an intermediate General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). After the first year, apprentices return to their employers' workplaces and undertake a programme of work-based training leading to the achievement of an NVQ at level 3. They also attend, on a day-release basis, a local further education college where they follow a programme of off-the-job training leading to the achievement of an advanced GNVQ. Both adult and youth trainees on the training for work programme undertake a programme of training in the centre, for a maximum of 26 weeks, leading to the achievement of an engineering NVQ at level 2, and in some cases at level 3. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training in the centre
- ◆ well-structured and closely monitored work-based training
- ◆ trainees' good NVQ achievement rate
- ◆ trainees' clear understanding of the NVQ requirements
- ◆ well-resourced on- and off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ low retention rate on the training-for-work programme
- ◆ some trainees' slow progress at college
- ◆ some trainees' unclear understanding about college provision
- ◆ trainees' poor understanding and awareness of key skills

8. The training offered by EEF West Midlands Technology Centre is good and well resourced both on and off the job. In the centre, training is well planned and effectively carried out. Instructors provide training sessions that meet the needs of the individual trainees and the trainees' make good progress towards achievement of the NVQ at level 2. The trainees enjoy their training and have a good understanding of the programmes' requirements and the assessment procedures. Most written work is well presented and trainees demonstrate skills of a high standard in their practical work. For the modern apprentices in the workplace, training is well planned and properly structured. Employers work well with EEF

West Midlands Technology Centre's training advisors to provide close monitoring of the apprentices' progress and the support they need to help them to achieve success. In the workplaces, apprentices work with mentors and many have access to qualified work-based assessors.

9. Some modern apprentices have been slow to achieve particular aspects of their college-based qualifications. In a few cases, their motivation is low. Some apprentices lack clear understanding of the content of the college programme, and changes made are not always explained to them. Many apprentices have a low awareness of the key skills requirements of their programme. Although training in key skills is included in the college programme, there is no systematic planning of learning opportunities through which trainees can gather evidence of their attainment in key skills for assessment purposes. Their progress in developing key skills through training in the workplace or the training centre, is not reviewed.

10. Trainees' NVQ achievement rate is good overall. Since 1994, 357 trainees have started the training for work programme and 333 NVQs have been achieved, mostly at level 2 with some at level 3. Retention is poor on the training for work programme. In 1997, nearly 32 per cent of the trainees left before completing their training, and in 1998, this proportion rose to 78 per cent, although many of these left to enter employment. The retention rate on the modern apprenticeship programme is high. Of the 51 apprentices who started over the last four years, 6 left in their first year of training. Many of the apprentices take more than one NVQ at level 2. Over the four years, apprentices have achieved 132 NVQs at level 2, and 7 at level 3. A further 11 apprentices are close to completing work for their NVQ at level 3.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

11. The training provider ensures that no trainee is subject to any discrimination and reacts positively to any identified issues, but at the time of the first inspection there was a lack of structure in the company's approach to the whole area of equal opportunities. The promotion of equal opportunities had a low profile beyond statutory and contractual requirements. Since acquiring the technology centre, EEF West Midlands has begun to rectify weaknesses in this generic area which were subsequently also identified by the inspectors. No weaknesses were mentioned in the first self-assessment report, however. Equality of opportunity is now a high priority for the EEF West Midlands Technology Centre. Employers and subcontractors are required to sign agreements which outline their responsibilities with regard to equal opportunities. They are issued EEF West Midlands Technology Centre's equal opportunities policy, and it is explained to them by staff. EEF West Midlands Technology Centre has policies regarding equality of opportunity in recruitment, and monitors this policy to ensure compliance. There is representation among the staff of people from minority ethnic groups. The latest

self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses in this area with four strengths and one weakness. One strength was agreed on by inspectors, who found that two of the other strengths related to it and that the other strength was no more than normal practice. The weakness was agreed on by inspectors, who identified one additional weakness.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ out-of-date equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no analysis of data on modern apprentices in terms of ethnicity, gender or disability
- ◆ little promotion of equal opportunities to trainees or employers
- ◆ under-representation of women and trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds
- ◆ no staff development related to equal opportunities

12. The company prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses found during the first inspection and to build on the strengths. Improvements have been made in accordance with the action plan EEF West Midlands Technology Centre has invested in staff and resources to raise the profile of equal opportunities within the company. Both internal and external initiatives have been developed to address equal opportunities issues. EEF West Midlands Technology Centre produced a self-assessment report for the reinspection to assess the progress made against the action plan. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good initiatives to increase recruitment from under-represented groups
- ◆ strong emphasis on equality of access to training in promotional materials
- ◆ good use of staff resources to equal opportunities initiatives

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of routine monitoring of equal opportunities in reviews

13. Managers at the training centre are aware of the lack of applications for training received from women or people from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the time of the first inspection, there were no women in training, although some have successfully completed their training in the past. Managers and staff have taken part in several initiatives to address the issue. Through links with local schools, staff promote engineering as a career for men and women. Pupils of a local girls' school attend a short course at the training centre, where they undertake a project designed to raise their interest in engineering. There is now a range of initiatives which involve EEF West Midlands Technology Centre directly in the community with community groups, and in particular in schools with high percentages of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Initiatives raise the priority of science



and engineering. The education executive EEF West Midlands Technology Centre holds one-day seminars in schools to promote engineering as a career with an emphasis on career opportunities for women and people from minority ethnic groups. Various members of staff are leading initiatives to widen participation in engineering as a career for under-represented groups. EEF West Midlands Technology Centre is working closely with the commission for racial equality on a local basis to educate both employers and trainees on equal opportunities issues. Trainees produce a college assignment on equal opportunities which is assessed as part of their programme. Advertising and promotional material clearly carry the message that the training centre offers equality of access to training for all. Posters to this effect are also displayed in the training centre itself.

14. The training centre has an extensive equal opportunities policy, which was developed by the original parent company. At the time of the first inspection, the policy had not been reviewed for three years and parts were no longer applicable to the activities of the training centre. Since its acquisition of the technology centre, EEF West Midlands has developed a new policy which was in the process of being approved and implemented. This policy is now in use and all staff and trainees receive a copy of the policy as part of their initial induction. The policy is comprehensive and includes a policy on harassment and bullying. Although data on the ethnicity and gender of modern apprentices are collected, they were not taken into account in developing the recruitment policy prior to the first inspection. The training centre had carried out an analysis of applicants for the training for work programme in terms of their gender and ethnicity. It has identified that women, and people from minority ethnic groups, are under-represented on training programmes, but the analysis did not lead to specific action to increase the number of trainees from groups under-represented on the training programmes. All statistical information related to equal opportunities is now collated on EEF West Midlands Technology Centre's database and analysed in detail. A report is published and the conclusions are used to focus and target future recruitment initiatives.

15. Both trainees and employers are made aware of equal opportunities issues at the start of the training programme. Trainees are informed through the induction process and employers through seminars on equal opportunities which are held by EEF West Midlands Technology Centre on an annual basis for all companies who are recruiting trainees. All colleges and subcontractors have to supply copies of their equal opportunities policies to EEF West Midlands Technology Centre as part of their training agreement, and all workplace training providers have to prove commitment to equality of opportunity as part of their training agreement. Staff previously understood the key issues relating to equal opportunities, but had a low awareness of the training centre's policy. There had been no staff development activity to raise staff's awareness of equal opportunities. Staff are currently undertaking a development programme with a local specialist agency which covers all aspects of equal opportunities. Each staff member attends a seminar on a particular aspect, such as on disability, racism and gender issues. The staff member then passes this information on to colleagues through a dedicated session at the monthly staff meetings. Equality of opportunity is an agenda item at all staff and

management meetings. In addition to the commitment of staff resources to this training initiative, there is also a large amount of staff's time devoted to leading the various ongoing initiatives to promote opportunities to under-represented groups. So far these initiatives have had little success in respect of the number of people from these groups taking up training programmes with EEF West Midlands Technology Centre. The engineering sector has not been seen as an attractive option for women and people from minority ethnic groups nationally, but EEF West Midlands Technology Centre has performed well in relation to other organisations to attract applicants from these groups. The number of trainees from minority ethnic groups has risen to 16 per cent of the total number of trainees on programmes in an area where 21.5 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. Currently, women constitute less than 1 per cent of the total number of trainees and people with disabilities constitute less than 2 per cent.

16. Equal opportunities does not form part of the trainees' progress reviews. Trainees are not systematically asked if they have any issues regarding fair treatment, bullying or harassment, and their knowledge of equal opportunities is not revised or questioned. No opportunity is taken during reviews to monitor employers' continued commitment to equal opportunities.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 2**

17. Provision of support for trainees is an integral part of EEF West Midlands Technology Centre's staff team responsibilities. Members of the team provide good support. The instructor and training advisors give trainees impartial advice, guidance and occupationally relevant information. Through the thorough initial assessment of trainees and the regular progress reviews, which take place in the training centre and the workplace, staff are quickly able to identify any support needs the trainees may have. Once identified, additional learning support needs are met either by the EEF West Midlands Technology Centre's staff or by referral to appropriate outside agencies. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report, but they found other strengths which the centre had not identified. They awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong commitment of staff to providing good support for trainees
- ◆ high level of support for individual trainees
- ◆ extensive induction process in stages
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to further their personal development
- ◆ careful matching of trainees to employers

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor recording of trainees' needs and support provision
- ◆ no evaluation of the effectiveness of additional learning support
- ◆ no policy or allocation of responsibility for support arrangements

18. All trainees undertake a carefully planned induction programme, which covers all the main aspects of their training programme. The induction programme operates at appropriate stages of training. The trainees have an initial induction designed to introduce them to a career in the engineering industry and to an appropriate training programme. There is an extensive induction into the training centre and the further education college, and then, on return to their employer, they undertake induction to the workplace.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*EEF West Midlands Technology Centre was asked to make a presentation to a local school year group as part of an initiative to address poor attendance and punctuality. The training advisor decided to involve a first-year apprentice who had been a pupil of the school. As a project, the apprentice devised a presentation and developed the supporting materials. He then made the presentation to the year group. He received very positive feedback from the school. He evaluated his presentation and was able to identify evidence of his attainment in key skills for assessment purposes. The apprentice felt he had achieved something significant in terms of confidence building and personal development.*

19. The working relationship between staff and trainees is good and trainees feel able to ask for help with any aspect of their training. All the training staff and managers have a strong commitment to supporting trainees and helping them to achieve to the best of their ability. The ratio of trainees to trainers is low and, in the training centre, there is frequent and extensive one-to-one training. The training staff know each individual trainee and try to ensure that trainees are placed with an employer where they will fit in well and receive good training and support. Staff make regular visits to trainees in the workplace to carry out reviews of their progress and these give them the opportunity to provide trainees with support throughout their programme. Trainees expressed their appreciation of the pastoral support they receive from trainers and employers. Some trainees, who had serious problems in their personal lives, said that without the help they received from staff, they would not be able to complete their training programme. Apprentices have good opportunities to further their personal development through initiatives with local schools, employers and the local community and activities such as a one-week residential outward bound course with a specialist provider.

20. The provision of additional learning support is not systematic and much of the support provided is poorly documented. Records are insufficiently detailed and, in some cases, incomplete or missing. Details of initial assessment results, and the conclusions drawn from them, are sometimes not fully recorded or taken into account in training plan documents. Review of the support arrangements is not systematic and the effectiveness of additional support is not evaluated. The policy on trainee support is not clearly defined. There are no written procedures for the provision of support and it is not clear where responsibility for trainee support lies.

### Management of training

### Grade 3

21. Following a decision to restructure the core business of the parent company, the training centre went through a period of reduced funding and steady decline, lasting three and a half years. During this period, several of the company's policies

and procedures ceased to be relevant to the operations of the training centre. Despite the dramatic decline in trainee numbers and the reduced funding, staff were retained and managers focused on maintaining the good quality of the training. About five months ago, EEF West Midlands purchased the centre and began a process of reinvestment and expansion. A centre manager, two training advisors and four full-time instructors staff the centre. At the time of inspection, many of the management issues following the period of decline had been identified by EEF West Midlands and plans to address them were being developed. Changes to the management structure are in process. Inspectors found weaknesses in addition to those the company identified in their self-assessment report and gave a lower grade to this aspect of provision than that given in the report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ strong working relationship with employers
- ◆ good links with local schools
- ◆ good management of training in the centre
- ◆ well-designed and effectively implemented training in the workplace
- ◆ well-established staff appraisal linked to staff development

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ non-compliance with some aspects of policies and procedures
- ◆ insufficient use and analysis of management information in decision making
- ◆ no contract with the main subcontractor for off-the-job training
- ◆ little use of performance indicator targets
- ◆ failure to review and up-date policies

22. Communications within the organisation are good. Managers meet formally every month. The minutes of meetings detail who within the organisation needs to be informed about each agenda item. The training group meets monthly to review the progress of each trainee and discuss associated matters. Informal communications work well and complement the formal meetings. Staff are able to bring issues to the attention of managers through a well-established process of annual staff appraisal. Staff development needs are identified by individuals or through the strategic plans of the organisation and, in general, they are met. Instructors are able to discuss with managers any issues as they arise, and the training manager joins them for a general discussion over a cup of tea at least once a week. Communications between the provider and local engineering employers are good and a strong working relationship has developed over many years. The centre has worked hard to establish links with local schools and staff from the centre take part in open-days and career advice sessions in many of the schools. From some of the local schools, pupils as young as nine years old attend special events at the training centre where they are introduced to engineering and have the

opportunity to use the equipment and manufacture a small article.

23. Training in the centre is well managed. All trainees and apprentices work to a clearly planned schedule that moves them through each of the work areas during their time at the centre. There is a clear plan for the assessment of the trainees' competence as trainees gain new skills in turning, milling, the use of computer numerical control (CNC) machines, welding and each of the other sections the programme covers. In the workplace, training staff and employers work together to develop an appropriate plan for ensuring that training across the full range of the NVQ takes place and is assessed in a way which does not disrupt the company's operation. Good records of trainees' progress are kept and training plans are modified to allow trainees to achieve at an appropriate pace.

24. The organisation's management information system holds all the necessary data on trainees and their achievements, but there is little analysis of the data. Managers make little use of key data and the available management information is not always relevant to the management decisions being made. Few performance targets are set for staff and the monitoring of their performance is not carried out against clearly defined and measurable standards. During the last three years, many of the company's policies and procedures have not been reviewed or updated, and are no longer relevant to the company's activities. In some instances, current practice is no longer in compliance with the written procedures.

25. Managers regularly visit the further education college which trainees attend. The provider's managers attend a review meeting at the college every six weeks. In general, communications with the college are good, but some of the issues raised by trainees have not been promptly resolved. Some trainees expressed confusion over the content of their college programme, and a problem with one subject, noted over a long period, has not yet been resolved. EEF West Midlands Technology Centre does not have a written contract with the college to specify exactly what is to be provided.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 3

26. At the time of the first inspection the provider had a quality assurance manual containing a quality assurance policy and some supporting procedures which had been produced in 1996. The manual was distributed to all the training staff. The policy commits the organisation to the pursuance of quality in all its activities. Responsibility for quality assurance rests with the training manager. Since the first inspection, the training manager's duties in regard to quality assurance have been extended and he now leads the internal audit team. He is also the internal verifier for the training centre and has extended this role to include a programme of training observations to aid staff development and improve consistency. The centre is an approved assessment centre for an awarding body and co-ordinates a network of satellite centres and work-based assessors. At the time of the first inspection, inspectors agreed with the strengths cited in the first self-assessment report but identified weaknesses which the organisation had not cited.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ lack of systematic quality assurance procedures
- ◆ no implementation of internal quality assurance audit
- ◆ no systematic arrangements for obtaining employers and trainees' views
- ◆ company's lack of quality assurance arrangements for college provision
- ◆ lack of programme evaluation arrangements

27. The self-assessment report for reinspection has been developed with involvement from all staff and has incorporated feedback from trainees and from the results of the internal audit. Improvements have been made following the action plan with the company building on the strengths identified in the first inspection. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were also found by inspectors. Inspectors agreed on one identified weakness but did not find the other. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive internal audit of training policies and procedures
- ◆ high level of quality control for off-the-job training
- ◆ clear monthly focus on the quality of individual training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some quality assurance procedures not fully implemented

28. Managers and staff remain committed to providing high-quality training. The previously informal approach to quality assurance has been replaced by a more systematic approach underpinned by recorded policies and procedures for quality assurance and internal audit. In the past, EEF West Midlands Technology Centre had some quality assurance arrangements, but they were not being effectively implemented at the time of the first inspection. Now EEF West Midlands Technology Centre has a recorded, up-to-date quality assurance system which is being used throughout. The policies and procedures in place at the time of the first inspection have been reviewed and the scope of the quality assurance system has been extended. A redesigned internal quality audit system has been introduced and a team of internal auditors appointed. The centre manager's role as internal verifier for the training centre has been extended to include internal verification of the quality assurance audit systems and procedures. Previously much of the day-to-day quality assurance resulted from individual staff members responding to weaknesses identified in the training. This informal approach had been successful in improving the quality of the trainees' experience in several areas. Now there is a formal internal audit system for training which has already demonstrated some effective outcomes in adjusting and improving the training. There are monthly review meetings with trainees which focus on the progress and training experience of individual trainees and any issues raised are quickly addressed. Quality

assurance issues and reports from the internal audit system are discussed at staff meetings and all staff are encouraged to bring forward ideas and proposals for continuous improvement. There is a company incentive scheme to support this process. Staff remain keen to improve all aspects of training and respond quickly to suggestions raised by trainees in the centre or the workplace. Previously, the off-the-job training at the main college used was not subject to formal agreements or any effective quality assurance interventions by EEF West Midlands Technology Centre. There is now a formal procedure for specifying requirements and assuring quality of the off-the-job training and further education. Moreover, off-the-job training has been redesigned and EEF West Midlands Technology Centre's staff have more direct management control over training content. The result of this is that EEF West Midlands Technology Centre now has much more effective quality control of the off-the-job training programme.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*EEF West Midlands Technology Centre encourages all staff to contribute to continuous improvement. To this effect the company has introduced an incentive scheme for staff. Staff are encouraged to review their area of responsibility for training and bring forward ideas for improvement. Where ideas are considered to be potentially valuable, staff are asked to make detailed proposals and present them in the form of a project plan which demonstrates the added value from implementation. Review points are specified and bonus payments made on achievements of objectives.*

29. At the time of the first inspection, the quality assurance at EEF West Midlands Technology Centre was not systematic. Some of the written quality assurance procedures were out of date and did not relate to the training. There was an internal quality assurance audit specified in the quality assurance manual, but it was not being used. Standards and targets for continuous improvement were not being set and there were no formal programme review arrangements.

30. The situation now is much improved and quality assurance arrangements have been reviewed. It remains the case, however, that there is no overall system to review the programme and as yet full information to aid continuous improvement is not available. The procedures have not yet run a full cycle to be useful in evaluating the quality assurance system itself. Procedures are now being set up which provide a routine framework for assuring quality of training and setting standards. The quality assurance manual has been updated and staff and managers use the systems and procedures to both check and improve arrangements on a regular basis. There are now reports on the effectiveness of training generated by the internal audit system and discussions on matters relating to quality are held at staff meetings. Trainees' views regarding their training are now surveyed following induction, midway through their training, and on leaving the programme. Employers too are questioned. In the case of trainees, one survey has been carried out for trainees at each stage but as yet nothing is done routinely to gather and analyse information obtained from these surveys or from interviewing trainees on leaving their programmes. There is no analysis their destinations. Both surveys and interview results are important elements in an evaluation system for the overall programme. To date, there is not a system specified for evaluating training. In this respect, although there has been considerable development of the quality assurance arrangements, the current quality assurance system is not yet fully used or developed.