



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 2000

Basildon ITEC

SUMMARY

Basildon ITEC offers satisfactory training in the three occupational areas of engineering, business administration and customer service, distribution and warehousing. Employers offer good work placements but some trainees make slow progress towards achieving their qualifications. The organisation's approach to equal opportunities is satisfactory, although there is insufficient staff training in equal opportunities issues. Trainees are visited regularly and receive effective personal support from staff, but there is poor use of the results of their initial assessment. There are satisfactory management information systems and effective internal communication, but employers are insufficiently involved in the training process. Quality assurance procedures are good and understood by all staff.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective preparation of trainees for employment
- ◆ good initial training for engineering and information technology trainees
- ◆ good staff appraisal system
- ◆ comprehensive business planning
- ◆ good internal auditing system

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment
- ◆ poor knowledge of the training programmes by business administration trainees
- ◆ poor management of on-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient assessment in the workplace

INTRODUCTION

1. Basildon ITEC (the ITEC) was set up in 1983 by a joint Department of Trade & Industry and Manpower Services Commission initiative. It was initially sponsored by Basildon District Council and ran a youth training scheme in computing and electronics for 30 trainees. The ITEC is now a non-charitable trust and is governed by a board of trustees from local companies, agencies and organisations, including representatives from the South West Education Business Partnership and privately owned businesses. It has a contract with Essex training and enterprise council (TEC) to provide training in accounting, business administration, customer service, information technology and servicing electronic systems. The ITEC does not have any subcontracting agreements for either training or assessment. There are 113 trainees and the training programmes on offer are advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, youth training and work-based learning for adults. There are seven full-time and three part-time members of staff and six freelance assessors. The ITEC operates from one training centre in Basildon and draws trainees from the Basildon district, which is made up of three towns, Basildon, Wickford and Billericay. The ITEC also offers courses in computing for people aged over 45 and other commercial courses. It has franchising agreements with two further education colleges.

2. Industry in the Basildon area has moved away from a manufacturing base and is now centred on service, finance and retailing organisations. In September 2000, the proportion of unemployed people in the area was 2.9 per cent. This figure is lower than the national average of 3.4 per cent but is higher than the 2.3 per cent average for Essex. The proportion of people in the area from minority ethnic groups is 2.1 per cent.

3. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Essex achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 49.3 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Staff from the ITEC attended training sessions in writing self-assessment reports. These sessions were organised by the TEC. The ITEC has produced a self-assessment report for each of the past three years. The final version of the report is produced by the deputy general manager, following consultation and input from all staff. The most recent report contains clear and detailed information about the organisation. Business administration and servicing electronic systems training are treated as separate occupational areas and graded as such. The organisation clearly identifies some strengths and weaknesses which inspectors agree with, but inspectors found some weaknesses which were not given in the self-assessment report.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Basildon ITEC during October 2000. Inspectors visited 28 places of employment and interviewed 54 trainees, 20 workplace supervisors and five employers. They also held discussions with the organisation's staff and observed five training/assessment sessions. Inspectors examined a range of documents including trainees' portfolios, trainees' personal records, some of the organisation's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and documents from the awarding body.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering			1	1		2
Business administration			2			2
Retailing & customer service			1			1
Total	0	0	4	1	0	5

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

6. The ITEC provides work-based engineering training in both software engineering and electronic systems servicing. Most trainees follow foundation or advanced modern apprenticeship programmes. Software engineering trainees work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in software creation or information systems analysis and development. Servicing engineer trainees work towards an NVQ in servicing electronic systems. For foundation modern apprentices this is at level 2 and advanced modern apprentices progress from level 2 to level 3. Trainees take the 'workshop' or 'field' servicing NVQ according to the nature of their job. There are 17 trainees on engineering

programmes. Fourteen trainees are employed and the remainder are in work placements.

Number of engineering trainees, October 2000

	Electronic servicing	Software engineering
Other training	2	0
Advanced modern apprentices	6	5
Foundation modern apprentices	4	0
Total	12	5

7. The ITEC has contracts with four employers who provide employment or work placements for software engineering trainees, and 10 employers who offer employment or work placements in electronic systems servicing. These include both small businesses and large corporations and they offer a range of work activity within the engineering sector. The employers give engineering training in the workplace. Each trainee has a mentor from the ITEC and suitably qualified staff undertake some NVQ assessments in the workplace. Internal verification takes place throughout the programme. Of those trainees starting engineering training in the last three years, 54 per cent have achieved all the targets on their individual training plans and 24 per cent have left the programme early. Year on year, these early leavers have consistently been 20-30 per cent. The table below shows achievement and retention figures since 1997.

Achievement and retention figures for engineering

	Foundation modern apprentices			Advanced modern apprentices			Other work-based learning for young people			Other work-based learning for adults			Total
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	
Starts	3	4	2	9	8	3	12	22	1	19	9	3	95
Level 2 NVQ				6	4		10	12		15	8	3	58
Level 3 NVQ											1		1
Transferred to other programmes	3	1					2	6					12
Completed individual training plan							7	12		16	8	9	52
Left early without qualification		1		3	2		3	4		3	1		17
Left early with qualification				2	2								4
Still in training		2	2	4	4	3			1				16
Total	6	8	4	24	20	6	34	56	2	53	27	15	255

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good initial training for unemployed trainees
- ◆ good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unstructured on-the-job training
- ◆ slow progress towards achieving NVQs

8. The ITEC offers a good introductory training course in its own training centre. It is a full-time eight-week course covering the use and management of information technology systems. It includes background knowledge of system architecture and networks and provides practical training in software and hardware upgrades,

system configuration, diagnostic techniques, and the use of various industry-standard software applications. This training is offered to unemployed young trainees and gives them a good introduction into electronic systems and software engineering. Trainees can gain certificates. Most applicants to the ITEC are unemployed and are able to benefit from this training, but those who are already employed are rarely released by their employers to attend this course.

9. Many employers have regularly recruited employees from the ITEC and they have a high regard for the organisation and its staff. There are several examples of former ITEC trainees who are now supervisors or have attained other significant positions in organisations. The ITEC has developed effective relationships with a range of employers and placement providers who offer good work opportunities for electronic systems servicing trainees. These employers deal in a good range of electronics products including office machinery, personal computers, communications systems, and local and wide area network equipment. Work opportunities include installation, diagnostics and repair in the workshop or field, system refurbishment, system support and technical support. For the software engineering programmes, the ITEC's placements result from employers approaching them for suitable trainees. Work opportunities include business analysis data analysis, programming, and systems support.

10. The work placement providers have good resources and provide trainees with opportunities to work on modern systems, and to collect naturally occurring workplace evidence which is relevant to their NVQ. Each trainee has a mentor in the workplace, who is usually the supervisor, to support them through their programme. Most mentors carry out this supportive role with care and enthusiasm, although their level of understanding of NVQs and the processes of assessment are generally low.

11. The TEC integrates the learning and assessment of key skills into the level 2 NVQ for foundation modern apprentices and the level 3 NVQ for advanced modern apprentices. This practice means that advanced modern apprentices are not developing, or being assessed in, key skills early in their training. It also causes confusion where advanced modern apprentices and foundation modern apprentices are employed in the same company. ITEC sets good key skills assignments such as one covering the development of a project which provides evidence for all the key skills and has the bonus of raising trainees' awareness of equal opportunities.

12. Off-the-job training is poorly structured for both employed trainees and those in work placements. With very few exceptions, trainees do not attend the training centre to develop their knowledge or skills, although they are aware that there is an 'open-door' policy which allows them to drop in and use the resources there or seek advice. There is a lack of understanding regarding the responsibility for off-the-job training and the ITEC fails to make it clear enough to employers that the responsibility is theirs. The scope, depth and quality of training provided by employers is variable. Few employers establish structured training for their trainees. They give training which is relevant to their business objectives. The ITEC has insufficient influence on this training. It cannot ensure that trainees' skills and background knowledge are developing in accordance with the

recognised national standards, nor can it plan off-the-job training to cover any gaps in this training.

13. Trainees are visited in the workplace every two to three weeks by the ITEC's assessor. These sessions are used to discuss and review the qualification standards, the context in which their work is being carried out, the opportunities for collecting evidence, and the cross-referencing and assessment of evidence which has been collected. Assessors give good guidance on interpreting the standards and collecting evidence. The assessor and trainee also use this process to set and review short-term targets for collecting evidence.

14. Insufficient use is made of observation of trainees' performance and workplace supervisors are not used frequently enough as vocational assessors. Although a very good number of assessment opportunities are afforded by the frequent visits assessors make, trainees' progress through their programmes is slow. One trainee is still working towards a level 2 NVQ after two years. Furthermore, trainees are not given the opportunity of gaining accreditation for individual units of their NVQs. Internal verification is satisfactory and occurs throughout the assessment process. Assessors are observed and some feedback is provided both verbally and in writing. There are regular internal verifiers and assessors' meetings.

15. Retention rates for the programmes are satisfactory. For those young people and adults who started on other work-based learning programmes in 1997-98, the achievement rates are good. Seventy-three per cent of these young people and 84 per cent of these adults achieved all the aims on their individual training plans. Few of those who started in subsequent years have finished their training yet.

Business administration

Grade 3

16. The ITEC has 73 trainees following foundation modern apprenticeships, advanced modern apprenticeships and other work-based training programmes in administration, information technology and accounting. Trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in using information technology, installation of information technology, support of information technology, business administration or accounts.

Number of trainees in business administration, October 2000

	Administration	Information Technology	Accounting
Other training	-	12	-
Advanced modern apprentices	5	5	1
Foundation modern apprentices	15	30	5
Total	20	47	6

17. The trainees are placed in a variety of work environments across the local area. These include schools, a car dealership, information technology support services, the local hospital, a care home, distribution outlets, a bank, computer retailing and servicing companies, local authority offices, a newspaper group, various manufacturers and several accountancy firms. Forty-four trainees are employed, and the remainder are in work placements. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by the ITEC's staff and a business development advisor conducts reviews every three months. There are seven members of staff who assess and verify this occupational area and all are appropriately qualified. The table below shows achievement and retention figures since 1997.

Achievement and retention figures for business administration

	Foundation modern apprentices			Advanced modern apprentices			Other work-based learning for young people			Other work-based learning for adults			Total
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	
Starts	10	33	34	8	10	1	24	6	14	2	21	29	192
Level 2 NVQ	6	10			3		14	1			18	27	79
Level 3 NVQ				1						1	2		4
Level 4/5 NVQ								1					1
Other qualification										1		1	2
Transferred to other programmes			2					2	4				8
Completed individual training plan	4	2		2			13	2		2	20	28	73
Left early without qualification	3	10	1		4		10	1			1	1	31
Left early with qualification	2	3		5	1								11
Still in training	1	18	31	1	5	1	1	1	10	0	0	0	69
Total	26	76	68	17	23	2	62	14	28	6	62	86	470

18. The self-assessment report accurately identified the good level of initial training for information technology trainees and the varied and well-resourced work placements. Inspectors identified an additional weakness regarding the slow progress of trainees on the youth programmes and an additional strength. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given by the ITEC in their self-assessment report

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good achievement rates for adults
- ◆ good initial training for information technology trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor knowledge of the training programmes by trainees
- ◆ slow progress on youth programmes

19. Trainees work in a good variety of appropriate work placements. All the employers offer good opportunities for advancement and for the achievement of further qualifications. Employers offer appropriate on-the-job training and some of the information technology trainees are currently working towards modules of a certified systems engineers' qualification. Several trainees are now being supervised and well supported by former ITEC trainees.

20. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace every two to three weeks to help with the development of portfolios and the collection of evidence for these portfolios. There is insufficient observation of work activities. Verbal feedback is provided at each visit and an action plan is formulated containing points for trainees to work on. Assessors ensure that action points have either been achieved or are being worked upon when they visit the next time. NVQ assessment and guidance plans are used only to indicate work to be undertaken in the future and are not used to record the events that happen during a visit. Assessors clearly enjoy good relationships with employers, which facilitates access and assessment opportunities. All trainees and workplace supervisors are extremely pleased with the level of support they receive from the ITEC's staff. Employers stated that their employees had increased their confidence in dealing with people and had developed positive professional attitudes because of the training they receive.

21. Achievement rates of NVQs are high for adults in this occupational area. Of the 29 adults who started in 1999-2000, 97 per cent achieved their intended qualifications. In 1998-99, 21 adults started and 95 per cent of them achieved all the targets in their individual training plans. All the trainees who started in 1997-98 have achieved their target qualification.

22. There is good initial training for information technology trainees. An eight-week course is provided which covers many different aspects of information technology. As well as developing competence in using different computer applications, trainees can also sample hardware and software installation and support, including network installation and administration. This opportunity to experience the different aspects of the industry helps trainees to choose an area of work suited to their particular aptitudes. Trainees work towards achieving a certificate in information processing during this training period. This award can then be accredited towards the knowledge certificate required by the modern apprenticeship frameworks. Writing a curriculum vitae and preparing for job interviews also form part of the training.

23. Internal verification is satisfactory. It occurs throughout the assessment process. Assessors are observed and feedback is provided both verbally and in written form. Sample plans and monitoring forms are used to ensure a full coverage of NVQ units and assessment methods. Regular internal verification meetings are held and copies of the minutes are distributed to all assessors.

24. Both trainees and employers have poor knowledge of the training programmes. Some trainees are unable to identify correctly whether they are on a modern apprenticeship programme or undertaking an individual NVQ. Trainees are unaware of the requirements of the qualification framework, particularly for key skills. In some cases, trainees did not know that evidence they had already collected was being used to meet key skills requirements. In some cases, individual training plans fail to show when trainees are undertaking enhancements to the modern apprenticeship framework.

25. Trainees on modern apprenticeships are slow to achieve qualifications. Some trainees have been undertaking qualifications for eight months to a year and are yet to achieve any accreditation of NVQ units. This fact is recognised by the ITEC and they are trying to speed up the process by increasing workplace observations and reorganising the staff responsibilities. Key skills training is satisfactory and is being integrated in some areas. All assessment staff are currently undertaking training in key skills to help them teach more effectively.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

26. Basildon ITEC offers NVQs in customer service and in distribution and warehousing. The numbers in training are shown below:

27. All the advanced modern apprentices and five of the foundation modern apprentices are employed in companies in Basildon, Billericay and Tilbury Docks. These employers include import and export companies, freight delivery companies, telephone call-centres and business services companies. Four trainees on foundation modern apprenticeships are not employed and have work

placements with similar employers, with a view to future employment. All assessments are conducted in the workplace by six qualified assessors employed by the ITEC, two of whom have joined the organisation this year. Assessors visit trainees once a fortnight and sometimes every week. They use this time to give guidance, assess trainees' evidence and conduct observational assessments. They also assess key skills during these visits. Internal verifiers are suitably qualified and work is internally verified throughout the programme. The table below shows achievement and retention figures for retailing and customer service trainees.

Number of trainees in retailing & customer service, October 2000

	Customer service	Distribution and warehousing
Other training		
Advanced modern apprentices	13	2
Foundation modern apprentices	6	2
Totals	19	4

Achievement and retention figures for retailing & customer service trainees

	Foundation modern apprentices			Advanced modern apprentices			Total
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	
Starts	12	7	6	10	19	2	56
Achieved NVQ level 2	1						1
Completed individual training plan	2				2		4
Left early without qualification	8	5		5	4		22
Left early with qualification	1			1	6		8
Still in training	1	2	6	4	7	2	22
Total	25	14	12	20	38	4	113

28. The self-assessment report for this occupational area was largely accurate, although the ITEC failed to recognise one weakness regarding the insufficient emphasis on training. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly suitable work placements
- ◆ high standard of portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ insufficient emphasis on training

29. The ITEC takes care to place trainees with employers who understand the needs of customer service trainees. Trainees are given roles which allow them to explore and expand their skills in dealing with customers' problems and queries. Those trainees undertaking level 3 NVQs are employed in supervisory or management positions which allow them to use their initiative and take responsibility for customer service. This is an important part of the NVQ requirements. Employers give encouragement to trainees and arrange for them to conduct meaningful customer surveys, supporting them to implement changes as a result of these. Trainees are motivated by this to complete the work needed to gain their NVQs.

30. Trainees produce work which is of a high standard. Portfolios of evidence often exceed the requirements of the NVQ. Assessors give good guidance to trainees on developing their portfolios, which are well presented and contain a wide range of work-based evidence. Trainees produce a good variety of different types of evidence, including customers' records, photographs, detailed case histories and graphs of the results of customer surveys. Portfolios also contain well-recorded action plans and clear assessment records. Work which trainees produce for their NVQ is also used for their key skills units where appropriate.

31. Data on retention and achievement rates show that a high proportion of trainees left before completing their training in the two years between 1998 and 2000. In 1998-99 ten trainees started on advanced modern apprenticeships and 60 per cent of these left early. The following year, 19 trainees started advanced modern apprenticeships and 21 per cent left before completion. Of the 12 trainees who started foundation modern apprenticeships in 1998-99, two were recruited by Basildon ITEC and one left early. The other 10 trainees were taken on from another training provider when that organisation lost its contract with the TEC. None of these trainees had completed any key skills work. Seven of the trainees left before completing their apprenticeship, soon after they transferred to the ITEC. The ITEC had little influence over their decisions. This partly accounts for the low achievement rate over the last two years. Some of the current trainees are making slow progress with their NVQ. Four have been in training for up to two years and have yet to complete any units of their customer service NVQ, and two distribution and warehousing trainees have achieved their first unit only after 21 months. However, training centre managers have recognised this and made

changes to the staffing. Trainees' rates of progress are improving steadily.

32. Trainees do not receive off-the-job training for the customer service NVQ. They receive relevant on-the-job training, but this is not always structured to meet the requirements of the NVQ and can mean that trainees are trained to the employers' standards and not to the standards of the NVQ. The ITEC has a number of useful and appropriate resources for customer service training. Not all trainees are aware that these are available and therefore do not access them. Trainees often struggle to find the information they need to enable them to learn about, for example, employment regulations, consumer law, telephone and listening skills, dealing with angry customers and interpreting body language, and the different methods of gathering customers' opinions. Without this wider knowledge, trainees develop a narrow understanding relating only to their current workplace.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

33. The general manager of the ITEC is responsible for assuring equality of opportunity for staff and trainees. The organisation's commitment to equal opportunities is stated in its equal opportunities policy, which was reviewed and updated in September 2000. The policy covers recruitment and selection of both staff and trainees, defines direct and indirect discrimination, lists all relevant legislation and includes an anti-harassment policy. There are also procedures for reporting incidences of bullying and harassment. The ITEC's board of trustees monitors the implementation of the policy at a monthly meeting when the general manager reports on equal opportunities. Board members are involved in the recruitment and selection of staff. All trainees receive an equal opportunities policy statement when they start their training. The full policy is displayed in the rest room, together with a short summary of relevant legislation. The procedure covering appeals against assessments is also issued to trainees and displayed at the training centre. Equal opportunities is an agenda item at staff meetings. The organisation has recently included a short statement confirming their commitment to equality in its advertising and course leaflets. Just over 2 per cent of the local community are from minority ethnic groups. People from minority ethnic groups are well represented among trainees on adult programmes, but less well represented on the youth training programmes. Twenty-five per cent of trainees on adult programmes have disabilities.

34. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were largely accurate, although inspectors considered strengths concerning the publicising of facilities and parking for disabled drivers to be no more than normal practice. The inspectors identified an additional weakness in that the ITEC does not monitor equal opportunities in the workplace adequately, but agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good access for disadvantaged trainees
- ◆ effective complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient staff training in equal opportunities
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ disproportionate ratio of male to female trainees

35. The ITEC makes good arrangements to ensure equality of access to its training. Two trainees with profound hearing impairments recently gained qualifications with the help of sign language interpreters employed to work closely with assessors. Flexible training hours were arranged for two trainees to allow them to attend training without compromising their religious commitments. Another trainee was placed with an employer who practised the same religion as the trainee, to ensure he was well supported. The training centre offers a special training programme for unemployed adults over 45 years of age. The training centre has been adapted to allow access for trainees with disabilities. Some of the monitors in the computer training rooms have large screens. All these measures have enabled trainees who may otherwise have been excluded from training to gain qualifications and employment.

GOOD PRACTICE

The ITEC has recently developed a project which is designed to raise trainees' awareness of equal opportunities. This is now issued to all trainees early in their programme, together with a useful booklet on equal opportunities. Posters produced by trainees as part of the project are displayed in the training centre. The work produced by trainees is used as evidence for their key skills qualifications and information technology NVQs

36. The general manager keeps a file for customers' complaints and one for customers' compliments. The complaints procedure is followed to ensure that all complaints are investigated and a satisfactory conclusion is met. These investigations are promptly instigated and well recorded. Complaints are analysed annually by the general manager to identify any trends.

37. As a result of self-assessment, the ITEC recognised that it was not doing enough to promote equal opportunities. The company has, in the last six months, implemented a number of activities designed to raise the profile of equal opportunities within the organisation. Attempts have been made to raise trainees' awareness, the equal opportunities policy has been reviewed, and data on equal opportunities are now collected and analysed. However, some activities are not yet established and require further improvement. For example, recent starters to the programmes have been given training on equal opportunities, using a video which prompts discussion, but staff need further training in running discussion groups on equal opportunities. The general manager keeps a file of information on equal opportunities, but not all staff are aware of its existence. A space to record the discussion of equal opportunities has been added to the progress review form, but a prompt list to use with this has not yet been developed.

38. The company has attempted to raise awareness of equal opportunities among staff, but there is insufficient training for staff in equal opportunities. The general

manager researches information on legislation and passes this on in writing to staff. The most recent notes gave an overview of the *Human Rights Act*, which came into force in October 2000. Some trainers have a low awareness of issues such as harassment and bullying. Staff have only a basic knowledge of different cultures and religions.

39. The ITEC's monitoring of equal opportunities for trainees in the workplace is not effective. Some discussion takes place at the company's first visit to employers. A request is made for a copy of the employer's policy on equal opportunities. However, staff do not make sufficient effort to follow up employers who do not submit their own policy. The ITEC makes no attempt to ensure that employers who do not have a policy can, and do, meet the requirements of its own policy. No guidelines are given to employers on the fair recruitment and selection of trainees. This means that the ITEC cannot effectively monitor or influence equality of opportunity in the selection of trainees for employment or work-experience placements. Staff have begun to discuss equal opportunities with trainees at their progress-review meetings.

40. The ITEC collects data on the gender, ethnicity and any disabilities of trainees and through this has recognised that too few women are joining its training programmes. It has not been successful in addressing this problem. The ITEC has taken insufficient action to attract women, particularly to its information technology programmes. Staff have identified some methods of raising the profile of these courses with women, but the ITEC has no cohesive strategy to carry these actions forward effectively. Publicity and advertising materials are not reviewed to ensure that positive messages are given to women. Some stereotypical images remain on publicity materials.

Trainee support

Grade 3

41. Most trainees are unemployed when they join the ITEC, and in most cases they are referred by the local careers service or the Employment Service. Unemployed applicants to training programmes undergo a basic skills test and are invited for a formal interview. They are offered places on the basis of their aptitude, potential to complete the course and career aspirations. The process of matching trainees to work opportunities begins immediately. A few trainees are already in employment when they apply to join a training programme. The ITEC runs short courses in the installation and use of information technology hardware and software which are normally repeated three times a year, and many trainees attend these courses to develop their skills and knowledge while the ITEC looks for a work placement for them. ITEC offers other training aimed at enhancing trainees' employability. The ITEC staff visit trainees in their workplace regularly to review their work activity, performance and progress. In addition, each trainee is allocated an assessor, who also acts as a mentor, and who visits the trainee on a regular basis to support him or her through their programme.

42. The ITEC was reasonably accurate in identifying its strengths but underestimated the importance of induction for employed trainees and the effective use of individual training plans. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent and effective reviews
- ◆ good initiatives to prepare trainees for employment
- ◆ good record of gaining employment for young trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor use of initial assessment results in developing individual training plans
- ◆ weak induction for employed trainees
- ◆ poor use of individual training plans

43. Progress reviews are frequent and effective for both trainees who are employed and those undertaking training at the centre. Unemployed trainees undertaking initial training in the centre have a progress review after four weeks and when they finish the eight-week course. Those trainees who are employed or in work placements have an initial review after one month and subsequent reviews at approximately eight-weekly intervals. A member of staff other than the trainee's assessor conducts the reviews. There is a clearly defined process for the reviews. The employer's representative, who is usually the trainee's supervisor, is actively involved in the review. The reviewer discusses the trainee's work activities, performance and behaviour with the supervisor. The supervisor grades the trainee in a range of skills and personal attributes, which are recorded on the review form. The reviewer also records the outcomes of discussions regarding the trainee's targets, strengths and weaknesses, and appropriate forward planning. The trainee is then invited to the meeting, and an open discussion takes place. The trainee's views are also recorded. The reviewer normally gives the trainee an opportunity to discuss any problems in private. The reviewer consults the trainee's assessor before undertaking the review, and gives feedback to the assessor following the review. Each reviewer has a monthly meeting with the ITEC's deputy manager and discusses individual trainees' performance and achievements. The benefits of this thorough review process are recognised by employers, many of whom do not have their own review systems for training and development.

GOOD PRACTICE

It is the ITEC's policy to put forward nominations for the Chamber of Commerce's 'Trainee of the Year' award. Five trainees were nominated in 1997, eight in 1998 and four in 1999. On each occasion awards were won by the ITEC's trainees. Eighteen trainees have been nominated in 2000, of whom six have progressed to the final round.

44. In parallel with the review process, trainees in employment or work placements are visited every 2 to 4 weeks by their assessor. Assessors give constructive guidance on collecting evidence and building portfolios, but do not discuss the trainees' work with the workplace supervisor often enough. There is some poor assessment practice. Trainees are often unclear about whether the evidence they are presenting meets the required standards and what progress they are making towards achieving their qualification.

45. The ITEC recognises the importance of preparing young people for real work situations, and to this end it imposes a dress code, and requires trainees to clock in and out of the training centre. It includes appropriate training in writing a curriculum vitae and preparing for interviews as part of the initial training programme. Trainees comment on the way in which the initial training has enhanced their confidence and improved their skills in seeking jobs. Trainees are well aware that the ITEC's staff are available to support them at any time

46. The ITEC has an excellent record of finding full-time employment for young people. The average rate of trainees moving into jobs over the past three years is 76 per cent. Trainees are given an opportunity to train for work and given immediate and continuing support in seeking appropriate employment. Unemployed trainees are invited to attend a full-time initial training programme providing skills and knowledge in computer hardware and software, and training in the use of word-processing spreadsheet, and communications software applications.

47. A number of employers who have taken on the ITEC's trainees and employers speak well of the standard of these young people. There are many examples of former ITEC trainees progressing successfully within their organisation. The South Essex 'trainee of the year' award has been won by six of the ITEC's trainees, and the ITEC's trainees have achieved the National Young IT Technician of the Year award. Two went on to represent England at the Skill Olympics.

48. Unemployed trainees who apply to or are referred to the ITEC, take aptitude and basic skills tests at their interview. Their existing qualifications, experience and career aspirations are discussed at this stage. The interview and selection process is well structured and appropriately recorded. Employed applicants are not required to take the aptitude and skills tests. The ITEC does not use effectively the information it gains from the interview and tests to identify any additional learning support needs. Some trainees, for whom additional support needs are subsequently identified, are disadvantaged at the start of their programme. The ITEC is effective in providing appropriate support but weak in planning to meet the needs identified in the initial assessment process. Employers generally give caring and constructive support, but some trainees are given little or no opportunity to work on their portfolios during work hours.

49. Those trainees initially based at the training centre have a comprehensive induction. It gives trainees a good overview of their rights and responsibilities, health and safety, equal opportunities and learning objectives. It introduces them to the staff who will support them through their programme. Trainees are given a pack of documents to support their induction, which includes a list of outside support agencies they can call upon. For trainees in employment, this initial induction is provided in a one-to-one session with a member of the ITEC's staff, and is neither as structured nor as comprehensive as that carried out in the training centre. The ITEC has recognised this weakness and has developed improved procedures which have yet to become fully established.

50. The ITEC does not use individual training plans effectively. The plans are drawn up at the start of the programme. The copy which the ITEC keeps has the dates of trainees' progress reviews added but the trainees' own copy is not referred to or amended. The individual training plans are not used to record progress in any other way. Some individual training plans refer to trainees' prior learning, but in insufficient detail. The records do not identify which assessor is making the judgement on accrediting the prior learning, nor what impact this prior learning has on trainees' qualification targets. Individual training plans are not used to record additional learning support. However, some of the information which would normally be written on the individual training plan is recorded by the ITEC in other documents. The aim is that these documents should be used as a planning and monitoring record, but in reality they only record achievement of targets after the event.

Management of training

Grade 3

51. The ITEC is managed by a general manager who has a deputy. The organisation gained Investors in People Standard in 1997 and was successfully re-accredited in 2000. There are five other full-time and three part-time members of staff who have training, assessing, business development or general office administration roles. The ITEC also employs five freelance assessors. All the staff have job descriptions and they all understand their roles and responsibilities. There were few changes in staff until 2000. Three assessors have left since February 2000. All new members of staff spend time working alongside other members of staff to enable them to learn about the ITEC and their role within it. There is an open style of management and contributions from staff are welcomed. The management information system is used to record details of all the trainees and when they start and finish their programme. Other information, such as whether they convert to another programme, and the dates they complete key skills are also recorded. The self-assessment report did not identify the weakness of poor management of on-the-job training and inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the ITEC.

GOOD PRACTICE

There is a good monitoring form for staff training. In the first part, members of staff list the reasons for wanting to attend training. They fill in the second part after having the training and state what they have learned and how that knowledge can be applied within the ITEC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff appraisal system
- ◆ effective internal communication
- ◆ good business planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor management of on-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient involvement of employers in the training process
- ◆ lack of occupational updates for staff

52. All staff take part in an appraisal system. The system is very clear and staff have two comprehensive appraisal interviews each year. Before each interview, the member of staff writes a self-assessment report and the two managers responsible for the appraisal also complete assessment forms. All three people are present at the appraisal interview. The interview covers the strengths, weaknesses and satisfactory elements of the member of staff's performance but the main emphasis is on forward planning. Staff discuss what training they need. All the requests are noted. Those needs which correspond to the business plan are given priority. The whole process is well recorded. Staff view the appraisal process as constructive.

53. The ITEC has developed good internal communications. There is a well-presented newsletter which is regularly distributed to staff. This covers topics such as the progress of trainees who have finished their training. There are also well-attended monthly staff meetings at which each member of staff takes a turn to chair the meeting. At these meetings general information and good practice is conveyed to all members of staff. The meetings have a set agenda which includes quality assurance. Following each staff meeting a clear action sheet is drawn up detailing what needs to be done, by whom and within what timescale. There are also effective assessors and verifiers' meetings. There is a standard agenda which includes discussion and feedback on the verification which has taken place and updates from the awarding body. At the end of each of these meetings a training session is held when an NVQ unit is discussed in detail. All aspects are appropriately covered including, for example, how many trainees will cover the unit in their workplace, whether any additional assignment material is needed and methods of assessment. One of the managers holds a quality project management meeting with individual members of staff each month. Any relevant issues and the monthly progress of trainees is discussed. It is also a meeting where problems can be shared and action taken if necessary. The ITEC's performance against the contract with the TEC is looked at and if a member of staff is not meeting the required target the reasons why will be discussed and new targets agreed. The weekly schedule of training is displayed in the training centre so that both staff and trainees know what training is taking place each week.

54. The business plan covers a three-year period and is updated annually. It is comprehensive and contains sections covering each aspect of the organisation's work. There is a review of the previous year and outline plans for the future. It covers staffing, staff development, budgets, premises, marketing and capital expenditure. Each year, the manager holds a full-day meeting to involve staff in developing the business plan. They are involved in reviewing the previous year, setting new performance targets and planning the training. When the business plan is finalised and approved by the board of trustees a comprehensive action plan is written to back it up.

55. The ITEC's staff work hard to find suitable jobs for trainees and then to match an appropriate NVQ to the trainees' job. There is, however, no structured planning of on-the-job training and no record of the training which does take place. If a trainee identifies a training need, he or she either asks the workplace supervisor for assistance or telephones the ITEC and one of the assessors comes to the workplace

and gives training on a one-to-one basis. When a trainee produces work, the assessor reviews it and decides where to file it in the trainees' portfolio. Inevitably, there are some topics which are not covered by the trainee at work, and these gaps have to be filled by assignment work.

56. The ITEC does not fully involve employers in the training process. The ITEC has built up long-term relationships with many employers but does not always use these relationships effectively. Its assessors and reviewers meet with workplace supervisors during their visits to trainees. The ITEC and the employers draw up and sign a contract but it focuses on health and safety and does not lay out clearly the roles and responsibilities of both parties. The employers support their trainees in a pastoral way and most of them help trainees to complete work for their portfolios. However, many are not fully familiar with the frameworks of the NVQs and cannot offer help to the trainee unless asked to do so. Other employers see it solely as the ITEC's role to train the trainees. Some employers do not allow enough time during working hours for the trainees to complete their portfolios. Some employers have expressed an interest in being given more information about NVQs.

There is a staff development plan but it concentrates on immediate needs rather than planning for the future. Staff have had training in equal opportunities and key skills and have gained training qualifications. Some training, such as that in equal opportunities, has not been carried out in sufficient depth, nor was it available to all staff. Self-study time is allocated each week for staff to update themselves on software packages. The internal verifiers have not had recent training in the specifications of the revised information technology programmes and their existing qualifications do not necessarily equip them to deal with detailed problems and queries.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

57. The ITEC meets the quality standards of the TEC and also has achieved ISO 9002, a national quality standard. The organisation also meets the requirements of its awarding bodies in terms of quality. The general manager is responsible for quality assurance and is supported by the deputy manager. The organisation accurately identified strengths and weakness and the inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good quality-assurance procedures
- ◆ good internal auditing system
- ◆ good involvement of staff in continuous improvement process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient observation of assessments
- ◆ some training procedures not established

58. The ITEC has a comprehensive 'quality management' manual, which contains details of the quality assurance system and copies of all the procedures. The basic manual was written several years ago by a consortium of ITEC members from across the country. The ITEC added extra procedures to this manual to ensure that all areas of the company's work are covered. All the full-time staff have their own copy of the manual, are aware of its contents and use it regularly as a reference document.

59. Six full-time members of staff are trained as internal auditors. They carry out effective reviews of the quality assurance system. All staff are involved in an audit and if a member of staff is new to the system he or she shadows a more experienced auditor. Internal audits are carried out three times a year and individual members of staff are given the task of auditing one area. A lead auditor compiles the overall final report. The audit identifies whether all jobs have been carried out and whether all procedures are current. An action plan is compiled and distributed to all staff and freelance assessors. A copy of this plan is put on the staff-room notice board and kept up to date. The action plan is a regular item on the agenda at staff meetings to encourage staff to report on and monitor the activities.

60. All staff are involved in making improvements to the training programmes and to the support offered to trainees. Quality assurance issues are given a high profile within the company and quality assurance is a set item on the agenda of many meetings. Staff ask trainees and employers for their views on their training at each progress-review meeting. Trainees are given evaluation forms annually and also when they achieve an NVQ. Employers also receive an annual questionnaire. All the comments on the forms are analysed and staff are told the results. Relevant action points are included in the action plan drawn up following the business planning meeting.

61. All staff provide evidence for the self-assessment report. Worksheets were drawn up, based upon statements in *Raising the Standard*, and the staff worked in groups to analyse the impact of their work on the trainees and to identify any strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment process is seen as an integral part of the cycle to promote continuous improvement. The self-assessment report was clearly laid out, giving an introduction to each area and a little background information about each strength and weakness. Overall, it gave an accurate assessment of the ITEC's work.

62. The amount of observation carried out by assessors is insufficient. It is not routinely included in the training programmes. Assessors draw up action plans after observing trainees and discuss them with the trainees. The trainee also receives written feedback but some of this is lacking in detail. The internal verifier

does not observe trainees' assessments often enough and any feedback tends to concentrate on recording the event happening during the observation. There is insufficient emphasis on discussing areas for improvement and future planning. Overall, internal verification is satisfactory.

63. Following the self-assessment process and analysis of feedback from trainees and employers, the ITEC introduced some new procedures. The new procedures are not yet fully established. There is now a detailed check-list for employers to use to ensure they cover all the relevant details during the trainee's induction. Another example is a training development table which trainees complete to show what they are doing in the workplace, with the aim of providing a bridge between on- and off-the-job training.