



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 2000

Basingstoke ITeC  
(Basingstoke Youth Action  
Trust Ltd)



## SUMMARY

Basingstoke ITeC provides good training in business administration. Assessors consider a wide variety of portfolio evidence and use a good range of assessment methods. There is satisfactory training in customer service, where effective use is made of workplace projects. Some trainees are unaware that they are on a modern apprenticeship programme and do not realise they have to achieve key skills and additional occupational units. Equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance are all satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is actively publicised but there is little ongoing reinforcement of equal opportunities issues with trainees or employers. Basingstoke ITeC is aware of the diverse needs of trainees and ensures that its staff are able to support trainees with disabilities and specific learning difficulties effectively, but trainees' inductions are inadequate. There are good links with local organisations and these are used to improve the opportunities for trainees but there is no systematic use of data to support decision-making. The organisation involves its staff and trainees in making improvements to its training programmes, but its quality assurance procedures are inadequate.

### GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS           | GRADE |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Business administration      | 2     |
| Retailing & customer service | 3     |

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ high achievement rates
- ◆ comprehensive and well-written equal opportunities policies
- ◆ good individual support for trainees
- ◆ highly effective preparation of trainees for work placements or employment
- ◆ open-management style
- ◆ effective setting and monitoring of targets for individual staff

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective recording of progress reviews
- ◆ little knowledge of NVQs by business administration employers
- ◆ poor analysis and use of equal opportunities data
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective use of some management systems
- ◆ poor integration of self-assessment into quality assurance procedures



## INTRODUCTION

1. Basingstoke ITeC is a division of Basingstoke Youth Action Trust Ltd, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The ITeC is currently the only operational activity of the trust. The trust was founded in 1980 by Basingstoke and Deane borough council to provide education and leisure facilities for young people in the Basingstoke area, and this was later extended to young people in north Hampshire. In 1993, the trust was incorporated as a company. The ITeC was founded in 1985 to offer government-funded training in information technology. In 1990, the ITeC started a contract with Hampshire training and enterprise council (TEC) for youth training in information technology. In 1997-98, it added customer service, and in 1998-99, business administration. The ITeC currently employs eight staff, seven full time and one part time. All training is carried out by the ITeC's staff, either in its training centre or in the workplace. Most trainees spend their first eight weeks in the training centre, and then either are on work placement or are employed.

2. There are currently 75 trainees. The following table shows how many trainees there are in each occupational area, and how many are on each of the different types of training programme.

Trainees' numbers and programmes

| Programme                    | Other training | National trainees | Modern Apprentices | Total     |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Business administration      | 5              | 33                | 28                 | <b>66</b> |
| Retailing & customer service | 0              | 0                 | 9                  | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>5</b>       | <b>33</b>         | <b>37</b>          | <b>75</b> |

3. The ITeC occupies spacious premises on the outskirts of Basingstoke. It is shortly to move to other premises in Basingstoke. Basingstoke is a growing commercial centre with large national and international companies and an above average number of information technology and software companies. Basingstoke town centre is currently undergoing major rebuilding and modernisation costing £300 million. There will be further labour demands and skill shortages once this is completed. Basingstoke town has a population of 89,000, and Basingstoke and Deane borough a population of 150,000. Seventy per cent of the trainees live or work in Basingstoke and Deane. The rest of the trainees come from the surrounding areas or from Andover and Aldershot. The unemployment rate for Basingstoke and Deane in July 2000 was low at 1 per cent, compared with 3.5 per cent in England. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is 1.7 per cent.

4. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Hampshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was



49.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Seventy-one per cent of 16 year olds stay on in full-time education and training compared with 69 per cent in England as a whole.



## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The ITeC's staff attended a seminar on the self-assessment process in 1998. This was provided by Hampshire TEC, and included a format for self-assessment and support from a consultant. The ITeC's manager completed a self-assessment report in the format suggested by the TEC. In 1999, the TEC gave the ITeC consultancy support to produce a report in the format set out in *Raising the Standard*. The manager wrote the report and it was reviewed by the consultant. The ITeC also had a review before the inspection by a team from the TEC and the consultant. The report was finalised in May 2000. An action plan was produced and the ITeC has implemented some of its action points. Inspectors did not agree with all the judgements in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a higher grade to business administration, and agreed with the rest of the grades given in the self-assessment report.

6. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 10 days at the ITeC in August 2000. They interviewed 28 trainees, seven staff, and nine workplace supervisors and employers. They observed two training sessions, two assessments and five progress reviews, and awarded the grades given below. Inspectors examined trainees' individual training plans, records of progress reviews, files and portfolios. A wide range of other paperwork was examined including contracts, external and internal reports, minutes of meetings, staff personnel records, and company policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to observed sessions

|                              | GRADE 1  | GRADE 2  | GRADE 3  | GRADE 4  | GRADE 5  | TOTAL    |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Business administration      |          | 2        | 5        |          |          | 7        |
| Retailing & customer service |          | 1        | 1        |          |          | 2        |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>0</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>9</b> |

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 2

8. Most trainees join the ITeC shortly after leaving school. Five groups of 12 trainees are recruited each year as national trainees or modern apprentices. There is also one group of 12 trainees with learning difficulties, who require extra support. All trainees have an initial assessment of their competence in information technology. The national trainees and modern apprentices follow an information technology national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in the ITeC's training centre for six to eight weeks before moving into a work placement. A trainee's time in a work placement is followed, in most cases, by employment. On achievement of their qualification the more able national trainees progress to the modern apprenticeship programme, in information technology or in administration

depending on their job role. Those not ready to take an NVQ at level 3 are offered a second NVQ at level 2 in either customer service or administration. Trainees recruited directly from employers follow modern apprenticeship programmes in information technology or administration. The trainees with learning difficulties start on the other work-based training programmes for young people, and work towards an information technology NVQ at level 1. Many of them progress to units at level 2 when they are on work placement.

The three trainer/assessors have occupational experience and assessors' qualifications. Two have training and internal verifiers' qualifications, and one holds the key skills practitioners' award. They visit trainees regularly and frequently in the workplace. There are also quarterly progress reviews. There are three information technology training rooms in the training centre, each with a network of 14 workstations and industry-standard software.

There are 66 trainees working towards the following qualifications:

| Qualifications                         | Other training | National Trainees | Modern Apprentices | Total     |
|--|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Business administration NVQ at level 2 | 5              |                   | 13                 | 18        |
| Business administration NVQ at level 3 |                | 1                 | 5                  | 6         |
| Information technology NVQ at level 2  |                | 32                |                    | 32        |
| Information technology NVQ at level 3  |                |                   | 10                 | 10        |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>5</b>       | <b>33</b>         | <b>28</b>          | <b>66</b> |

9. The self-assessment report identified several strengths which inspectors considered to be no more than normal practice, and one which they considered to be a trainee support issue. Inspectors found additional strengths. They agreed with two of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified another. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

Achievements over the past three years are given in the table below:

| Year      | Other trainees' achievements  | National trainees' achievements   | Modern apprentices' achievements  |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| 1997-98   | Out of 69 starters,<br>57- full training plan   |   | Out of 22 starters,<br>17- full training plan   |
| 1998-99   | Out of 64 starters,<br>47- full training plan   |   | Out of 7 starters,<br>5 - full training plan  |
| 1999-2000 | Out of 11 starters,<br>6- full training plan<br>10- level 1 NVQ<br>5- still in training | Out of 65 starters,<br>30- full training plan<br>44- level 2 NVQ<br>17- still in training | Out of 36 starters,<br>11- full training plan<br>13- level 3 NVQ<br>19- still in training |



### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good range of assessment methods
- ◆ wide variety of portfolio evidence
- ◆ high achievement rates

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ ineffective recording of trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ poor understanding of key skills achievements by trainees
- ◆ little knowledge of NVQs among employers

10. The placement officer has built up successful links with many local companies, and the ITeC is a popular recruitment resource for local employers. All employers offer a wide range of work and training opportunities and use modern technology. Trainees have plenty of opportunity to develop their skills and produce evidence for their NVQs. Employers support their trainees well. Many employers offer additional training relevant to the trainees' work. Trainees are given responsible and interesting work roles. A trainee with additional learning needs is now employed in a responsible job and is being offered more work-related training. Trainees are well motivated and have a mature approach to their work.

11. In response to the new standards for information technology NVQs, 80 per cent of evidence is now taken from the workplace and there are more workplace assessments. Assessors use a wide variety of assessment methods including observation, witness testimony and questioning. They examine activity logs for projects which trainees complete in the training centre. The assessments are well recorded. The trainer/assessors visit trainees in the workplace every two weeks, and trainees can contact them by telephone or e-mail in between these visits. Progress is reviewed at these meetings, and trainees are encouraged to identify learning opportunities which could be used to gather evidence for their portfolios. An innovative link is made between the NVQ standards and trainees' personal development. When trainees' behaviour does not meet NVQ criteria, this is recorded in the assessment paperwork. For instance, the practice of wasting paper is linked with efficient use of resources, and poor teamwork or communication is linked with key skills.

12. Trainees' portfolios are well structured. The training officer reviews them at the quarterly progress-review meetings, and internal verification takes place at these times. There are good systems to monitor trainees' progress. On-the-job training is well planned to suit individual needs, and trainees are aware of what progress they are making towards gaining their qualification.

13. Over the past three years a high proportion of trainees have consistently achieved the aims of their individual training plan and the full national traineeship or modern apprenticeship qualification. The achievement figures for trainees who

started other training in 1999-2000 are for trainees with learning difficulties and additional support needs. Ninety-one per cent have achieved their level 1 NVQ, and 45 per cent are now working towards units of the business administration level 2 NVQ. There is a highly successful placement programme which leads to employment for most trainees within three months of placement. The retention rate for all groups of trainees is excellent.

14. Action points on the forms used at trainees' two-weekly progress reviews are brief and rarely contain target dates. They do not always refer to specific NVQ criteria. Information on the quarterly review forms is often incomplete. Issues are dealt with verbally but are not always recorded. The employer does not receive copies of either of these review forms. There is no clear procedure for ensuring that the information from the two types of review is brought together and communicated to the trainees. Some reviews have been delayed. This weakness has been identified by the internal audit process. Trainees do not appear to have been disadvantaged by these delays because they can contact their trainer/assessors and the training centre by telephone and e-mail.

15. Trainees and employers are not fully aware of key skills and their relevance to the workplace. The training programme is structured to include key skills but trainees are not aware that they are achieving them. Teamwork and communications exercises take place in the induction period and the evidence from these exercises is used for key skills. Additional worksheets for application of number are used to supplement evidence gained in the workplace. Links are made between information technology and administration programmes and key skills. Trainees' prior qualifications are taken into account when individual training plans are prepared. Tutors cross-reference evidence at the end of the programme, but trainees do not monitor and record key skills evidence during their work in the training centre and in the workplace. This weakness has been identified, and action is being taken to fully integrate key skills into the training programme.

16. Employers have insufficient knowledge of the NVQ. They rely on trainees and their trainer/assessors to identify work roles which will enable them to gather the evidence required for their qualifications. Employers do provide such work roles, and they sign witness testimonies. They have recently been given handouts about the NVQ and checklists of competences to be achieved, but they do not receive copies of the NVQ assessment sheets completed at each visit and rely on discussions with the trainer/assessor and training officer for information about a trainee's progress.

### **Retailing & customer service**

### **Grade 3**

17. There are nine customer service trainees. All are modern apprentices working towards an NVQ at level 3. All are employed, and have been recruited onto the modern apprenticeship programme through their employers. Two of the trainees have previously completed NVQ programmes with the ITeC. A part-time trainer/assessor is employed by the ITeC to give on-the-job training in the





workplace, and to carry out all assessments. The trainer/assessor is experienced in providing training and assessment for customer service and business administration NVQs. She is a qualified assessor and is working towards the internal verifiers' qualification. Trainees are visited on average twice each month for assessment, and progress reviews take place quarterly. Ten of the 12 starters in 1997-98 completed their modern apprenticeship. No trainees started in 1998-99. Four of the 14 starters in 1999-2000 have completed their modern apprenticeship and six are still in training. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found others. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good achievement rates
- ◆ effective use of work-based projects in portfolios

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor awareness of modern apprenticeship framework by trainees
- ◆ poor recording of some assessments
- ◆ ineffective progress reviews

18. Trainees are employed in a diverse range of organisations including telephone call-centres and computer wholesalers. The organisations give trainees a wide breadth of customer service experience and also some good career progression opportunities. Employers and the ITeC work together to ensure that trainees can gather evidence for all aspects of their NVQ. Employers encourage trainees to achieve their NVQs, allowing them to gather evidence for their portfolios in working hours and providing coaching and training in the workplace. Employers value the contribution that NVQs make to the competence of trainees. Some employers have used projects undertaken by trainees as part of their NVQ to improve their approach to customer service.

19. Trainees make good progress towards their qualifications and there are high achievement rates. The average time which trainees take to complete their modern apprenticeship is 13 months. The trainer/assessor works closely with trainees to ensure that demanding but realistic targets are set at each assessment visit. Trainees are highly motivated to complete their NVQs and value the fortnightly contact they have with the trainer/assessor. They can also make contact by e-mail and telephone at other times.

20. Trainees produce portfolios which are based on projects they undertake in the workplace. Each project is negotiated with the trainee and reflects the work that they undertake on a day-to-day basis. This structured approach to gathering evidence helps trainees to understand how the NVQ links to their job roles, and to



make good progress. The projects allow trainees to show their competence across a range of customer service NVQ units as well as in key skills and other units required by their modern apprenticeship.

21. Although trainees have a good understanding of the NVQ they are working towards, few understand that they are modern apprentices. The requirements of the modern apprenticeship are not discussed in depth with many trainees until their NVQ is almost complete. Many trainees do not know that they are required to complete key skills and additional units for their modern apprenticeship. Trainees do not have a clear understanding of how long their training programme will take. Trainees who cross-reference their own evidence in their NVQ portfolios are not making full use of it across all the components of the modern apprenticeship.

22. Trainees' portfolios do not clearly demonstrate that trainees have the levels of knowledge and understanding required by the customer service NVQ. The ITeC issues its own paperwork for portfolios and does not use the awarding body's handbooks for candidates. The ITeC's paperwork does not set out the evidence requirements of the NVQ. It does not tell trainees how to appeal against assessment decisions, nor does it offer trainees advice and guidance. It does not allow the trainer/assessor to record that trainees have the knowledge and understanding required for the NVQ. The trainer/assessor tests trainees' knowledge and understanding through observation and verbal questioning, but makes no written record of this.

23. Trainees are not set targets at their quarterly progress reviews and information from these reviews is not used to update trainees' individual training plans. Health and safety and equal opportunities issues are not discussed. Progress reviews fail to address any additional learning or pastoral needs. The same member of staff is responsible for conducting assessment visits and quarterly reviews. The distinction between visits and reviews is unclear. The same paperwork is used for both purposes.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 3**

24. The manager of the ITeC has overall responsibility for equal opportunities and for ensuring that the ITeC's staff are aware of their responsibilities. The ITeC has an equal opportunities policy which is supported by an anti-harassment policy, a grievance procedure and a disciplinary policy. A copy of the policies is given to trainees, staff and work-placement providers. The policies are also incorporated into the main policy document for the ITeC. This is issued to trainees and employers and displayed in the ITeC's premises. The ITeC considers equal opportunities when preparing literature and advertisements. There is access to the training centre for people with disabilities. Numbers of trainees from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities are recorded and regularly monitored. The

percentage of the local population who are from minority ethnic groups is 1.7 per cent. In 1998-99, 3.5 per cent of trainees were from minority ethnic groups, in 1999-2000, 2 per cent, and at the time of inspection, 5.3 per cent. Sixty-five per cent of trainees are men and 35 per cent are women. Seven of the eight members of staff are women. Inspectors judged the one strength in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice, but identified other strengths. They agreed with the weaknesses and the grade given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and well-written equal opportunities policies
- ◆ active publicity for equal opportunities

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate reinforcement of equal opportunities with trainees and employers
- ◆ insufficient analysis and use of data

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*The manager keeps an equal opportunities logbook. He records everything that happens which is linked to equal opportunities. This includes meetings, information received, staff training and reviews of the policies. This gives an overall picture of equal opportunities in the ITeC and supports the review of this aspect.*

25. The ITeC's equal opportunities policy has recently been updated and improved. The manager collected the policies of several other organisations to identify good practice, and worked with a consultant from Hampshire TEC. The new policy refers to relevant equal opportunities legislation and outlines key areas in language which is easy to understand. The anti-harassment policy describes in plain language what is meant by harassment and gives more information on the ways harassment can take place, including bullying. It helps both staff and trainees to identify and deal with harassment, whether in the training centre or the workplace. The investigation procedure is clearly outlined. One trainee who had been bullied at school talked openly about how safe she felt in the ITeC and what a difference it made to her enjoyment and progress on her training programme. The grievance and disciplinary procedures are well written and explain each step of the procedure in good detail. All staff are fully aware of the policies and how to implement them. The training manager has recently attended a course on cultural awareness and another member of staff has attended a course on dyslexia.

26. The ITeC takes every opportunity to publicise its commitment to equality of opportunity. Its information leaflet for trainees contains an equal opportunities statement, and this statement is also set out on a separate, brightly coloured sheet of paper included with the leaflet. All staff application forms and contracts have the equal opportunities policy attached to them. The ITeC has just reprinted its headed notepaper to include its equal opportunities statement.

27. Equal opportunities is included in the induction programme for trainees. This used to last half a day, and equal opportunities was mentioned as one of the policies of the ITeC. Trainees who had this induction cannot remember much about it. The most recent induction took place over three half days, and the training officer tried a new technique to encourage discussion about equal



opportunities. The new trainees remember this induction and the discussion which took place. Equal opportunities is not included in the trainees' progress-review process, and trainees in the workplace cannot remember the subject being discussed with them. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report, and equal opportunities is due to be included on the agenda for meetings of the trainees' committee. Employers receive copies of all the policies relating to equal opportunities, but there is no monitoring or reinforcement of equal opportunities in the workplace.

28. The manager collects statistics about equal opportunities for the TEC, but there is no analysis of recruitment, selection, retention and achievement data to establish any trends. The ITeC's new database is being used to record and analyse data, and reports will be produced which will help it to monitor equal opportunities.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

29. Most prospective trainees are referred by the careers service, or apply directly to the ITeC following recommendations from schools, colleges or previous trainees. The ITeC's staff attend schools' careers events and make presentations to school leavers. Prospective trainees are interviewed by the ITeC's placement officer, and sit a series of tests in spelling, mathematics and problem-solving. Trainees who are to receive their initial training in the training centre attend a group induction. This is followed by a separate induction to their NVQ. Trainees who are to be based in the workplace for the whole of their programme receive an individual induction. An individual training plan is prepared and agreed with each trainee. A training officer visits trainees in the workplace at three-monthly intervals to review their progress and update their individual training plan. Staff are experienced in supporting trainees, and have attended courses on how to identify and support specific needs. The inspectors found the same strengths and weaknesses as the self-assessment report and identified additional weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

#### ***STRENGTHS***

- ◆ effective motivation of trainees
- ◆ good individual support for trainees
- ◆ good staff training to support specific needs
- ◆ good preparation of trainees for their work placements or employment

#### ***WEAKNESSES***

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment
- ◆ inadequate induction
- ◆ poor recording of trainee support



30. The ITeC takes effective steps to motivate its trainees to succeed. An annual awards ceremony is held in the local council chamber, attended by speakers and guests with a high local profile. Head teachers from local schools, employers and parents or guardians are invited. The chairman of the ITeC presents certificates to the trainees, offering a public recognition of their achievement. Photographic displays at the training centre show successful former trainees. Each group of trainees elects a 'captain' who is responsible for maintaining a tidy training centre. A 'captain of captains', nominated by the manager, organises this activity and receives training in leadership skills. This responsibility is recognised and, if it is carried out well, the trainee receives a certificate for his or her national record of achievement.

31. All the ITeC's staff see supporting trainees as one of their main roles. They maintain close contact with trainees by telephone and e-mail. They make extra visits to trainees in their workplaces to support them with work-related or personal problems.

32. Trainees with additional learning needs spend longer on their programme, and are given additional support according to their need, such as teaching in numeracy or literacy, or support for a deaf trainee. When necessary, referrals for external support are made through the careers service. Staff have attended training events and spent time researching specific areas of disability so that they can support trainees. These areas include dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficient disorder. Information is then shared with other staff at regular team meetings.

33. The ITeC prepares its trainees particularly well for starting work. A written dress code which requires a business-like appearance is issued to all trainees before they join. Trainees attend life skills sessions. They prepare a well-presented curriculum vitae, and are trained in interview techniques and telephone skills. The placement officer discusses employment opportunities with each trainee. Personal preferences are considered, and interviews arranged accordingly. Every trainee who is about to start work experience or employment has a personal interview with the manager, and is given a letter emphasising the importance of punctuality, smartness and co-operation. The placement officer also writes to the trainees' parents or guardians stressing the importance of their support and encouragement.

34. An initial assessment test is given to trainees who join the ITeC from school, but not to those already in jobs. It tests numeracy and problem solving at key skills level 2 and gives staff an indication of a trainee's skill in writing and spelling. The ineffectiveness of these tests can delay recognition of trainees' individual strengths and weaknesses or learning difficulties. Trainees are not given the results of these tests. Trainees referred by the careers service, or identified through the interview, as having additional learning needs are allocated to a group where they receive extra support. The individual training plans do not take account of achievements gained before a trainee joins a programme, such as key skills gained within a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ).



35. Only trainees who join the ITeC from school, not those already in jobs, receive a formal induction. It lasts half a day, and consists of a tour of the building and an introduction to the ITeC's policies and to trainees' roles and responsibilities as set out in the handbook for trainees. Trainees recall little of their induction. The ITeC has recognised this weakness, and the most recent induction was extended to three half days, spread out so that key issues could be reinforced. New trainees remember this induction and what it covered.

36. Although staff support the individual needs of trainees well, there is poor recording of how these needs are met or how effective the support is. There is little recording of personal development issues or problems on the trainees' progress-review paperwork. An instance where an employer expressed concern about the accuracy of a trainee's work was not effectively recorded and linked back to previous reports on the trainee or to the trainees' initial assessment. The lack of records means that the effectiveness of trainee support cannot be systematically monitored or reviewed.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

37. The ITeC has a board of management with overall responsibility for its strategic direction, and the ITeC's manager is responsible for its operational management. Day-to-day responsibility for training and assessment is held by the training officer, who supervises the trainer/assessors and also co-ordinates internal verification across all programmes. Six other staff are employed, one of whom is part time. A new information technology trainer/assessor is due to start at the beginning of September. There is an administrator/finance officer. The training contract with the TEC and the ITeC's budget forecast are the main influences on its annual strategy. Staff meet regularly to discuss operational matters. The staff appraisal system has recently been revised. The ITeC became an Investor in People in 1993 and was re-accredited in 1996 and 1999. Inspectors did not find the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report but found others. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

#### ***STRENGTHS***

- ◆ open management style
- ◆ effective external links
- ◆ good staff development arrangements

#### ***WEAKNESSES***

- ◆ ineffective use of management systems
- ◆ no systematic use of information in decision-making

38. The ITeC has a clear and appropriate structure for its size. Staff have a good understanding of their own roles and the roles of others. Managers adopt an open style, which allows staff to understand the operational and financial targets and



how they, as individuals, can contribute to the ITeC's success. An informal approach to communication within the ITeC means that information is shared quickly and decisions are taken promptly. Managers welcome new ideas, and ensure that individuals' efforts and achievements are recognised. Staff feel confident in approaching managers for support, guidance and advice on both professional and personal issues.

39. The ITeC has developed strong and effective links with a range of external organisations including the local council, the chamber of commerce and the careers service. There is a written agreement with the careers service covering both organisations' roles and responsibilities. The ITeC makes effective use of these links to keep up to date with local economic activity and to identify placement and job opportunities for trainees. A number of local companies prefer placements and job opportunities to be filled by the ITeC's trainees. The ITeC also uses these links to attract prominent local figures to events which raise the profile of the ITeC and its trainees.

40. The ITeC provides good opportunities for staff development. Staff development needs are identified through a staff appraisal process which has recently been revised and improved. Staff are encouraged to undertake training which both contributes to their professional development and enables the ITeC to improve the quality of its services to trainees. One member of staff has recently gained an award which will enable the ITeC to improve the quality of its initial assessment of trainees. A number of staff have completed courses on supporting trainees with diverse needs. The ITeC is taking an innovative approach to developing staff's understanding of equal opportunities in association with the local council.

41. Staff make extensive use of the ITeC's small size to exchange information and discuss issues. The outcomes of such discussions, and any decisions which are made, are rarely recorded. There are monthly team meetings but there is no systematic review of the action points agreed at previous meetings. Action points are rarely given timescales for their achievement. The actions taken are frequently managed informally, and the results are not recorded. There is a procedures manual but it does not provide clear and full guidance to new or existing staff. Procedures are not systematically updated to reflect changes in actual working practice made by staff.

42. The ITeC has used management-information systems provided by the TEC for a number of years. It is now developing its own management-information system, and has partially implemented it. The information held in the system is not yet complete. It is limited to those trainees currently in training and does not yet allow the ITeC to identify trends over time. The ITeC's management decisions are based to a considerable extent on informal information. The only information recorded and shared systematically is that required for financial purposes or by the TEC.





## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

43. The ITeC has a quality assurance policy which is set out in a mission statement and policy document. All staff, trainees, work-placement providers and employers receive a copy of the policy. There is a procedures manual which covers all areas of training and meets the TEC's requirements. The ITeC was the first training provider to gain its TEC's quality award at gold level in 1994 and was re-accredited in 1998. The ITeC produces an annual report which updates the local community on its work and achievements. There is ongoing internal verification, and the ITeC meets all the requirements of the awarding body. There is a new feedback system. It includes annual feedback from employers, and three separate feedback forms from trainees. The manager reviews the results. Self-assessment started in 1998 and was supported by a consultant from the TEC. The first self-assessment report in its present format was produced in May 2000 and was reviewed by a consultant from the TEC. The report was written by the manager and did not involve staff or trainees. An action plan was produced and some action points have been implemented. Inspectors did not agree with the one strength in the self-assessment report but identified others. One of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report had already been rectified. Inspectors agreed with the other weakness found by the self-assessment, and found one other. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good involvement of staff and trainees in making improvements
- ◆ good setting and monitoring of individual staff targets

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poorly defined performance standards
- ◆ poor integration of self-assessment into quality assurance processes

44. There are formal and informal meetings of staff and trainees. Notes and minutes of these meetings show that areas of concern are discussed and actions identified to improve the operation of the company. The manager regularly meets a committee of trainees' elected representatives. The trainees influence the agenda and take it in turns to write the minutes. Trainees use this committee to raise concerns with the manager. Trainees made known their worries about the training methods of one member of staff. The situation was already being dealt with by the training officer, and the staff member has since left. Trainees also proposed changing the lunch hour to coincide with the sandwich van's round. There are detailed and frank discussions and actions are agreed on. There is no procedure for ensuring that these actions are implemented, or for reviewing their effectiveness, but it is obvious from the recollections of staff and trainees, and from later notes and minutes, that points have been dealt with effectively.



45. Action points raised by the external verifier are fully implemented, and are often used as a basis for further improvements. These developments are not always recorded, or reviewed, to ensure that they are steadily improving the performance of trainees and trainers.

46. Staff are set targets which are linked to their everyday work and to new developments within the organisation. These targets have measurable outcomes and deadlines, and are monitored by the training officer. Targets may include attendance at training events before taking over a new responsibility or area of development. The change in the information technology NVQ resulted in a staff-development plan being drawn up to implement the new standards and to fully integrate the key skills and additional units into the ITeC's training. Staff know how many NVQs the TEC expects the trainees to gain. The manager uses these numbers to set targets for staff in a given period. The ITeC has found that target-setting has improved ways of working and that the organisation is better able to work within timescales for training set by external bodies.

47. Staff work to high standards, but these are individual and not part of the quality assurance process. There is a procedures manual, but it describes procedures rather than setting standards for them. This leads to a lack of consistency in the quality of activities across the ITeC. For example, the policy for reviewing trainees' progress states how often reviews should take place, distinguishes between reviews at the ITeC and reviews in the workplace, and refers to the review form. But it does not specify what should be recorded on the form and how much detail there should be. This results in a lack of consistency in the recording of progress reviews and of the action points which come out of them.

48. The self-assessment process is not thorough and is not fully integrated into the other quality assurance activities of the ITeC. The content of the report was influenced by the external consultant rather than by involving staff, trainees and employers. The manager wrote the report, and staff were not aware of its details. Inspectors did not agree with many of the judgements in the report. It was not always clear what evidence was available to support the judgements. The action plan was detailed, and covered all the strengths and weaknesses. Not all the action points in the plan had specific time targets. There is no formal procedure for reviewing the action plan, or for ensuring that all the action points are implemented.