



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 2000

North East Lincolnshire Council Employment Development Service

SUMMARY

Training in transportation and foundation for work is well designed, and of a good standard. Training in construction and business administration is satisfactory. The organisation encourages different social groups to participate in training programmes, but equal opportunities is not effectively promoted among employers. Support for trainees is flexible and well managed, with comprehensive initial assessment. Management communications with staff are good. Management-information systems are under-used. All staff have been involved in the development of new quality assurance procedures. The quality assurance system is not firmly established and is incomplete.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Transportation	2
Business administration	3
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-designed training in foundation for work and transportation
- ◆ effective strategies to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ highly effective individual support for trainees
- ◆ open, supportive management
- ◆ effective staff involvement in new quality assurance initiatives

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective promotion of equal opportunities to employers
- ◆ underdeveloped management-information systems
- ◆ inconsistent management of subcontractors
- ◆ under-developed quality assurance system

INTRODUCTION

1. North East Lincolnshire Council's Employment Development Services (NELC EDS) is part of the council's Economic Development department. NELC EDS has a contract with Humberside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to offer training towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in construction, motor vehicle technology, management and professional, business administration, transportation and agriculture. It also provides foundation for work training programmes for young people and adults. At the time of inspection, the organisation had 236 trainees: 28 modern apprentices, three national trainees, 95 trainees following the local youth training programme known as 'Way Ahead', 64 people following work-based learning for adults programmes, and 46 youth trainees following a foundation for work programme known as 'Career Choices'. There were other trainees in occupational areas not inspected on this occasion. NELC EDS has just under 100 New Deal clients following the 25+ option, not subject to this inspection. Because of low numbers of trainees, training provision in management and professional, agriculture and motor vehicle technology was not inspected.

2. The organisation moved into its current premises, a purpose-built community resource centre in Grimsby, in February 2000. The premises comprise training rooms, computer rooms, construction workshops, administrative offices, a cafeteria, and recreational areas for trainees' use. The community resource centre is shared with other council departments. NELC EDS employs 56 full-time and four part-time staff, led by the Deputy Director of Economic and Community Development, and including a management team of six who take day-to-day responsibility for key functions, each leading a team of five or more people.

3. Training arrangements vary. Most trainees attend regular off-the-job training, but some are visited in the workplace by tutor/assessors. In some occupational areas, off-the-job training takes place at NELC EDS; in others, it is subcontracted to one of three local colleges, or to a college in Leeds.

4. North East Lincolnshire is a varied region, combining the urban area of Grimsby, the holiday resort of Cleethorpes and the major industrial complex of Immingham. Cleethorpes is a traditional seaside resort which attracts over one million visitors each year. Grimsby is a shopping, administrative and commercial centre. There have been changes in the local economy. Historically, Grimsby has focused on fishing and associated activities. The decline of the fishing industry meant that many of the traditional skilled jobs in ship repair and maintenance were lost. However, as a result of major private-sector investment, the Grimsby and Immingham port complex has grown considerably over the past few years, and now houses new industries, including chemical and petro-chemical processing plants. Over 25 per cent of the region's workforce are employed in manufacturing, with a further 22.7 per cent working in hotels, restaurants and the distribution trade. Seven per cent of the local population are unemployed. This compares with



the United Kingdom average of 4 per cent. The proportion of residents coming from minority ethnic backgrounds is less than 1 per cent, as compared with the national average of 5.5 per cent.

5. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 35.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. NELC EDS prepared its first self-assessment report in 1997 for a Training Standards Council (TSC) pilot inspection. The report was updated in December 1999, and again in May 2000, this time in preparation for the regular TSC inspection. The report was written by the contracts manager in discussion with the management team, which reached agreement about the grades proposed. Other staff members were consulted during team meetings and workshops. External training events were attended by the contracts manager.

7. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 24 days at NELC EDS' premises in August 2000. They visited 27 work placements and 3 subcontractors, and interviewed 71 trainees and 21 work-based supervisors. They held 39 interviews with members of NELC EDS' staff. They observed 11 training sessions, one of which was not graded, and six trainees' progress reviews. They examined trainees' portfolios of work and administrative files, contractual information, policies and procedures, and feedback from trainees and employers, internal and external verification records.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction			2	1		3
Business administration		1				1
Foundation for work		5	1			6
Total	0	6	3	1	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. NELC EDS has 30 trainees in construction, 13 in wood occupations, nine in bricklaying, three in general construction occupations, three in electrical installation and two in plumbing. Three trainees are on modern apprenticeships, 21 on the youth training programme known locally as 'Way Ahead', and six on work-based learning for adults. Those on modern apprenticeships are taking NVQs up to level 3 with those on the 'Way Ahead' programme taking NVQs at levels 1 and 2. Four trainees are employed. The remaining trainees have work placements with small construction companies or with council projects, or are on local community projects run by NELC EDS. Achievement of NVQs in construction fell from 67 per cent in 1996-97 to 28 per cent in the following year, but has since improved. Fifty per cent of the 1998-99 intake have achieved qualifications, with a further 15 per cent still on the programme. Trainees in employment or on placement attend

off-the-job training once a week. For most occupations, this takes place in the provider's own facilities; plumbing and electrical installation training is subcontracted to a local college. Assessments take place off the job. Trainees' portfolios of work contain additional evidence from the workplace. Regular monitoring of trainees' progress is carried out by the vocational tutor in the workplace and off the job. All tutors are vocationally qualified. Of the seven staff, three have assessor awards and four have teacher-training certificates. The senior manager has an internal verifier award and carries out internal verification with assistance from a member of staff who is working towards the qualification. Some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report are more appropriate to generic aspects of provision. Inspectors confirmed some of the strengths and weaknesses stated by the training provider and identified a number of additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed in the organisation's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good specialist equipment
- ◆ effective reinforcement of health and safety practice
- ◆ innovative community projects

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient resources in brickwork and joinery
- ◆ low numbers of employed trainees
- ◆ uninteresting theoretical training

9. Off-the-job training for wood occupations, bricklaying and general construction occupations takes place in well-equipped, purpose-built workshops at NELC EDS' premises. A range of specialist equipment has been purchased, including a theodolite for use by the bricklaying trainees and a spindle moulder for the carpentry and joinery trainees. The purchase of this equipment emphasises the organisation's determination to offer trainees a broad range of experience, and to develop their awareness of health and safety at work. Instructors consider, for example, that if joiners receive training and experience on spindle moulders, they will learn safe working practices which they can then use in an employer's workshop.

10. Instructors and trainees are extremely conscientious in their approach to health and safety. Instructors regularly question trainees about health and safety practice. During every site visit, the instructor asks trainees to make an evaluation of the safety of their work areas and to say whether the tasks that they are undertaking involve personal protective equipment. They give guidance when necessary. If trainees fail to wear appropriate protective equipment, they are not allowed to enter a site environment. All safety equipment, including steel toe-capped boots, is

supplied by the organisation. Safety posters are displayed in all construction workshops as well as in the trainees' canteen. The workshops have clearly marked work areas, hard-hat sections and a stores area from which hand and power tools are issued. Power tools are regularly inspected and clearly marked with the date of their most recent safety check.

11. NELC EDS has many placement opportunities on community projects through its link with other council departments. The projects are used to give the high proportion of trainees without employment or a regular work placement the opportunity to gain industrial experience. Trainees are proud of their work in their community, and appreciate the opportunity to extend their experience and to contribute towards providing facilities for local groups. Projects include a patio area in a sheltered housing complex, huts for a scout troop, a staircase and storage areas for a church, and renovation of houses which will become low-cost rented properties for the homeless. NELC EDS' staff promote the projects through official openings, press releases, and events such as barbecues for the team of trainees involved. The organisation's new premises have a reception desk in the shape of a boat, which was constructed by two carpentry and joinery trainees. The area was opened by a member of parliament and a plaque featuring the names of the trainees involved is prominently displayed. The community projects allow trainees to gather different kinds of evidence for their NVQ portfolios.

12. The floor area for brickwork in the construction workshop is too small for the number of trainees on the programme. Models erected during one session have to be demolished in preparation for the next. The working space around each model is limited, and trainees have to walk around or over a number of other models to carry out their work. The carpentry and joinery area is sufficient for bench work and wood machining but there is not enough space to erect the training and assessment rigs required for such activities as door hanging, making kitchen units and door frames, and pipe-boxing. The lack of space means that some assessments are delayed, as many have to wait until the tasks occur in a placement or project. Assessment is not available on demand for those trainees who feel that they are ready.

13. Only four of the 30 trainees following construction programmes are employed. Few of the trainees who complete their programme progress into employment. Trainees are dissatisfied with the lack of employment opportunities. They consider that work placements would improve their job prospects and enhance their confidence. One adult trainee, having previously gained an NVQ level 2, has been unable to get work in the industry, despite trying for over a year. He has now returned to NELC EDS to gain a level 3 qualification, although he would prefer to be in employment.

14. Theoretical training in brickwork and carpentry is monotonous and unimaginative. It mainly involves trainees in copying out notes from textbooks. The construction classroom does not have a television or video, or a computer with CD-ROM for trainees. Trainees find the teaching of theory boring. The materials supplied for copying are often badly produced, and sometimes illegible. Instructors

realise that some materials are poor, and are planning to purchase learning packs for numeracy and communications key skills. However, this has not yet been done. Plumbing and electrical trainees' off-the-job training is subcontracted to a local college, premises and equipment are adequate and the theoretical training is satisfactory.

Transportation

Grade 2

15. Twenty trainees are following the transport training programme. All of them are engaged on large goods vehicle (LGV) category 'C' driver training, and one is also taking the commercial driver training NVQ, at level 1. Since it started in 1999, 44 trainees have been enrolled on this programme. Of these, 20 are currently in training, 12 have left without gaining their qualification, and 12 have achieved LGV category 'C' entitlement and have obtained employment. Three of those 12 have also gained an NVQ at level 1. Training is managed by two subcontractors, who operate from sites in Grimsby and Immingham. Each subcontractor has a manager responsible for driver training, who provides off-the-job training. This takes the form of theoretical knowledge for the required LGV theory and NVQ knowledge tests. Both subcontractors also provide on-the-job training, where drivers acquire skills and knowledge in the course of actual driving and delivery work. Each subcontractor contracts out additional practical training in driver skills to a firm specialising in driver training. That firm employs two qualified commercial driving instructors. All LGV driver training is externally assessed. Written theory tests are completed and marked. LGV driving tests are taken by trainees at area test centres, and are, again, assessed. The self-assessment report for this area provides detailed background information, although some of the strengths claimed represent no more than normal practice. The grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good practice in the use of training materials. Good-quality instruction booklets provided by manufacturers are used as training aids on subjects such as vehicle systems and correct and legal tachograph operation. These are professionally printed and contain clear technical illustrations and explanatory text. They provide accurate, up-to-date information which has particular credibility with trainees because it has come from the manufacturer.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ creative training methods
- ◆ well-structured training programme
- ◆ good employment opportunities

WEAKNESS

- ◆ ineffective target-setting

16. Training is creative and well planned. Off-the-job training in theory regularly includes the use of information technology and audio-visual materials. Computer tests are used to develop trainees' knowledge for LGV theory tests. Manufacturers' training videos, featuring new vehicle types and their control systems, are used to develop drivers' familiarisation and knowledge. Training

accommodation and facilities are good, with suitable visual aids in well-designed training rooms. On-the-job training comprises a wide variety of actual driving and delivery work. Trainees gain experience of a range of delivery journeys and destinations, and of different vehicle types.

17. All trainees who achieve their qualification are guaranteed employment with one of the two subcontractors. For many of them, their training represents a new career, after lengthy periods of unemployment. The probability of gaining employment is a strong motivating factor for trainees. A supply of appropriately trained and qualified employees also benefits the industry, which has suffered recruitment problems locally.

18. Transport programmes have a thorough, two-tier initial assessment process. The initial assessment and interviewing of trainees is carried out by NELC EDS. A more detailed technical assessment is then carried out by the subcontractors, to determine the level of the trainee's driving proficiency and aptitude. Training is well planned. Trainees are slowly introduced to working procedures and smaller vehicle work, before working independently on larger vehicles. They must pass their theory tests before practical LGV driver training. Trainees spend time accompanying experienced drivers and being followed and monitored by instructors, to ensure that their skill and experience are of a satisfactory standard before they work on their own. They receive regular, detailed oral feedback from trainers on all aspects of their performance and progress. Flexibility is also built into the training, to enable the period of practical LGV driver training to be modified to meet each trainee's needs.

19. The vehicles used for practical training are appropriate to the needs of the trainees, and suitable for the tests they have to take. One is only three months old, and possesses many of the operating features that trainees will encounter when employed as drivers. The other is an older vehicle, which has recently been substantially overhauled and refurbished. On either training vehicle, trainees gain good experience in basic commercial driving skills. Training in health and safety is thorough. Trainees' attendance and attitudes to on- and off-the-job training are monitored and recorded by the training provider for the first three weeks of the training period, and are generally very good.

20. Monthly progress reviews are held, involving a member of NELC EDS' staff, a member of the subcontractor's staff and the trainee. Training activities and the trainee's progress are discussed, and agreement is reached about what activities the trainee will undertake before the next review. However, the targets set during these reviews are often weak. Achievement milestones, which might give trainees a better sense of their progress through the qualification, are not set. The review process does not provide trainees with an overall picture of their progress, or set timescales for each aspect of the training to be completed.

Business administration

Grade 3

21. NELC EDS has 94 trainees working towards NVQs in business administration and information technology. Of these, 15 are business administration modern apprentices and one is an information technology modern apprentice. There is one business administration national trainee and one information technology national trainee. There are 63 trainees following other training programmes, 52 at NVQ level 2 and 11 at NVQ level 3. There are 13 adult trainees, five of whom are working towards NVQ at level 2, two at NVQ level 3 and six on prevocational programmes. There are five business administration instructors who visit the trainees in the workplace for assessment and review purposes. In addition, trainees have the opportunity to visit the training centre for off-the-job training sessions by arrangement with their employers. Trainees have access to a range of additional qualifications and courses, including information technology and word-processing courses. Some of the strengths claimed in the organisation's self-assessment report were confirmed by inspectors. Others refer to generic aspects, or represent no more than normal practice. One of the weaknesses identified by NELC EDS was confirmed. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that given by the training provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive range of placements
- ◆ good progression into employment
- ◆ well-respected and professional assessors
- ◆ effective initial training period

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient opportunities for off-the-job training and assessment
- ◆ lack of time for employed trainees' portfolio building
- ◆ lack of key skills integration to programme

22. At the end of the induction programme, most trainees have a placement arranged for them to start their NVQ training. Staff have developed a wide range of placements within council departments and in industry. They match placements as closely as possible to trainees' aspirations and ability. Some employers conduct recruitment interviews to select trainees and others rely on the judgement of training staff to match a trainee to the placement. Seventy-three per cent of trainees are employed or on placement in council departments. The remaining 27 per cent of trainees are in placements which include a housing association, an insurance company, a shipping company and a women's refuge community centre. These placements offer good opportunities for evidence gathering and provide

trainees with the range of experience that they need to achieve their NVQ qualifications.

23. Seventy-five per cent of the 73 per cent of trainees on placement within the council gain employment. They are able to apply for internal vacancies as they arise and those obtaining jobs are able to continue to work towards gaining their qualifications. Some local employers use NELC EDS for recruitment. Suitable applicants are selected for interview and the successful trainee is usually offered full-time employment after a short period of placement. In the period 1999-2000, 55 per cent of modern apprentices achieved their qualification. Eighty-seven per cent are still in training. Sixty-five per cent of national trainees achieved qualifications in 1997-98, 47 per cent in 1998-99, and 50 per cent in 1999-2000. The retention rate for occupational training is approximately 70 per cent.

24. Instructors are professional and have developed good working relationships with employers. They have extensive training experience with additional experience in commerce and industry and hold associated qualifications. Each instructor operates as an internal verifier and holds the assessor and verifier awards. Two instructors have obtained their accreditation of prior learning unit. They provide excellent role models for trainees and are clearly well respected by trainees and their employers.

25. Before starting their work placements, trainees undertake an induction lasting at least two weeks, and often longer. During this period they undergo a series of occupational assessments which enable staff to match them to suitable placements. They also help to identify training needs and improve trainees' confidence. Trainees have access to very good resources and are able to use a range of computer packages to prepare them for placement and to gather evidence to contribute to key skill portfolios. They attend sessions on interview skills and CV preparation, basic health and safety and substance misuse. Most trainees begin their placements at the end of a two-week period but there is provision for trainees to remain at NELC EDS' training centre if necessary.

26. NELC EDS has recently changed its arrangements for off-the-job training. Instead of offering weekly off-the-job training sessions for groups of trainees, instructors now visit individual trainees in the workplace at an average of six-weekly intervals. At each visit they undertake a progress review involving the trainee and the workplace supervisor. At the same time, they prepare an assessment plan based on evidence that the trainee has gathered since the previous meeting, and they carry out assessments. Each session lasts for approximately one hour. Sometimes, trainees are visited informally between these sessions, and they can attend NELC EDS' training centre for additional training if necessary. However, many consider that they have insufficient contact with their instructor, and that this is hindering their progress. There are no work-based assessors on business administration programmes, so trainees are dependent for assessment on the availability of the provider's assessor. Despite trainees' concerns about access to training and assessment, their portfolios are good and contain an appropriate range of evidence. Trainees display skills and knowledge appropriate to their

qualifications and work experience.

27. Some trainees have workplace supervisors who are very supportive and, in some cases, have been through the NVQ process themselves. Others, however, especially some employed trainees, are not given time in the workplace to gather evidence for their NVQ, or to build their portfolios. These trainees sometimes feel isolated, and would prefer structured off-the-job training on NELC EDS' premises.

28. NELC EDS has been slow to introduce key skills training into the programmes and therefore, second-year trainees have concentrated on NVQ achievement, with key skills assessment left to the end of the programme. Opportunities for the collection of key skills evidence earlier in the programme have therefore been missed. Some trainees have little understanding of how key skills are linked to their NVQ portfolios. Additional training sessions have now been arranged at NELC EDS' training centre to help trainees gather evidence towards application of number. Trainees who have recently joined the programme have collected evidence for communication and information technology key skills during their induction. However, it is too early to say how effective these strategies will be.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

29. NELC EDS has 78 foundation for work trainees. Fifty-four of these are following the 'Careers Choices' route. This is a programme for youth trainees who are either unsure of their career goal or have personal problems. Its objective is to enable trainees to progress to a mainstream programme. Trainees try out different types of occupational areas, mainly within NELC EDS' training centre. Career Choices trainees may work towards the general certificate in basic skills. A further 24 trainees are adults attending foundation for work, a programme designed to help them to become more employable. Trainees are placed mainly on NELC EDS' projects. They are working towards individual milestones, a vocational access certificate or NVQ level 1 awards. The self-assessment report separated the report for 'Career Choices' and foundation for work and identified a total of 19 strengths and eight weaknesses. Some of the strengths identified were normal practice and some strengths and weaknesses were duplicated or located in other aspects of training provision. Inspectors identified five strengths and two weaknesses, all of which had been identified in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-equipped training environment
- ◆ highly qualified staff
- ◆ well-designed training
- ◆ effective integration of trainees into occupational areas
- ◆ good progression into mainstream training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some achievement not formally accredited
- ◆ little access to work placements

GOOD PRACTICE

The organisation found that many 'Careers Choices' trainees who were offered places left before they started their training. It was decided to run a pre-induction programme before trainees begin their formal training. This enables them to familiarise themselves with the staff and surroundings at NELC EDS, and to develop confidence. Since the pre-induction programme started, retention rates on the 'Careers Choices' programme have significantly improved.

30. The training rooms at NELC EDS are light, spacious and attractive. Additional rooms are available for individual interviews when needed. Carefully arranged posters, pictures and wall displays are used to reinforce key messages and to remind trainees of the standard of behaviour expected of them. They have good access to computers and a range of software, which includes a screening toolkit for basic skills, a dyslexia-assessment suite, and careers-search software, as well as standard office software. Trainees also have access to good resources in their occupational areas. Handouts, course materials and training assignments are well organised and of good quality. Trainees confirm that the training environment makes them feel welcome and increases their willingness to attend training.

31. Staff have a good range of qualifications and experience enabling them to design and provide training, assess competence and adapt their training and support to the individual needs of the trainees. Qualifications include training awards, counselling qualifications, teaching certificates and relevant degrees. Staff have also attended short courses on subjects such as understanding and managing conflict, drugs awareness and counselling. Tutors understand trainees' needs and are able to anticipate problems and adapt their behaviour to help trainees overcome them. Trainees respect tutors, and value their sympathetic approach. Staff work well together and support one another.

32. Training is well planned and flexible. There is a detailed initial assessment, which identifies literacy or numeracy training needs, previous achievements, support needs, and aspirations. The information is compiled and used to form a training plan which is individual to each trainee and can be changed if necessary. Trainees who are unsure about their occupational aims are encouraged to sample different occupational areas and make a career choice. Trainees who lack motivation or have personal difficulties remain on the programme longer and can choose from a range of activities, which includes awaydays, sports activities, outward-bound activities, cookery, arts and crafts and other training, as well as attending occupational tasters. Adult trainees work towards agreed individual milestone targets and they also work towards vocational access certificate, NVQ level 1 and a range of short courses including health and safety, manual handling and first aid. Teaching is good, with a variety of content, materials and techniques. Staff work hard to maintain the interest of the group. They respond promptly when trainees become bored by changing the style or content or working with an individual.

33. Adult trainees are all integrated into their occupational areas and work alongside trainees on other programmes. Youth trainees try out training in different occupational areas, sometimes in separate groups and sometimes with trainees on other programmes. Mainstream training staff are aware of foundation

trainees' additional needs, goals and milestones. Foundation trainees are not treated differently from trainees on other programmes and are encouraged to become part of a group. There is good informal contact between foundation and occupational trainers, which helps to maintain continuity for trainees.

34. There is good progression from Career Choices into mainstream training either within NELC EDS or with other training providers. Forty per cent of trainees who started their programme in 1999 and 45 per cent of trainees who joined in 2000 have progressed to further training. Individuals on adult foundation for work achieve a good range of qualifications and personal goals but progression to employment is lower, at 21 per cent. In 1997-98, it was 25 per cent.

35. The skills developed by trainees are not formally recognised. Careers Choices trainees take part in a range of activities that develop their personal social and employability skills. Trainees develop their ability to communicate with others through group work and team-building activities, they develop their numeracy and computer skills and they begin to develop occupational skills. Some of this work is accredited through the general certificate in basic skills, but there is a great deal of naturally occurring evidence which could be used towards subsequent key skills qualifications and NVQs that is not collected or accredited.

36. Some adult trainees are keen to embark on a work placement, a move which they consider would improve their confidence and employability. However, NELC EDS finds it difficult to meet this demand, and no adult trainees are currently on placement. This hinders trainees' opportunities to progress to employment, and encourages some trainees to see training as an end in itself rather than a route to employment.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

37. NELC EDS has an equal opportunities policy which is given to all trainees as part of their induction. The deputy director takes responsibility for managing equal opportunities. There is an equal opportunities officer whose role is to support trainees and ensure equality of opportunity. She takes part in induction sessions, and trainees are told how to contact her later, if necessary. Equal opportunities is included as an agenda item at all management meetings, and NELC EDS' commitment to equal opportunities is stated in the introduction to all new procedures. Less than 1 per cent of the local population is from a minority ethnic group. This proportion is the same among NELC EDS' trainees. The self-assessment report was mainly accurate in its assessment of weaknesses. The inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective strategies to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ effective responses to trainees' complaints
- ◆ regular sharing of equal opportunities information
- ◆ effective promotion of training to minority ethnic groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no written procedures in support of policy
- ◆ gender stereotyping in marketing and training materials
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of employers and subcontractors' equal opportunities practices

GOOD PRACTICE

NELC EDS has had a number of trainees with impaired hearing, and provides a minicom link to assist them. One trainee was also provided with a 'hearing dog', who alerted them to noises such as the ringing of a telephone or a doorbell.

38. NELC EDS' new premises have been deliberately sited in an area of the town which has many disadvantaged people and a high level of unemployment. The building houses community-development workers who work within local housing estates to support people looking for work. Two members of NELC EDS' staff work alongside the community development workers, and other specialist council staff, to offer advice and support about issues such as in-work benefits, training opportunities and interview techniques. There is access to the building and parking for people with disabilities.

39. NELC EDS liaises closely with other organisations working with homeless young people, and uses these contacts for the benefit of trainees. For example, a young woman with a disability was supported by NELC EDS, a homeless organisation and a local housing association to obtain accommodation, which she was able to partially design. NELC EDS has also supported a local group working with people with hearing impairments, and recently organised a conference to publicise issues affecting deaf people. People with disabilities are encouraged to enter mainstream programmes. This raises a general awareness of issues concerning disability, and encourages mutual support.

40. Individual files are kept for all trainees who make equal opportunities complaints. Complaints are handled confidentially, quickly and effectively. Staff who are approached by trainees with complaints deal with them immediately and, when necessary, refer to other colleagues for advice. The deputy director involves himself with all serious cases, and dealt personally with a recent complaint involving a trainee's allegation of sexual harassment. He immediately removed the trainee from the work placement, and instructed staff not to place trainees with the company in future.

41. The equal opportunities officer attends workshops and conferences held by the TEC to maintain awareness of equal opportunities issues. Topics dealt with have included working with disabled people, and minority ethnic group issues. She shares information from these events and from other sources with other staff and managers. Internal training sessions have been provided for staff. This has

encouraged debate on equal opportunities issues, such as how to deal with bullying and harassment, and has raised staff's awareness. Equal opportunities data are collected and analysed.

42. Less than one per cent of the local population comes from a minority ethnic background. However, NELC EDS has established links with an Asian community group, in order to be more aware of the training needs of members of minority ethnic groups and to improve such groups' involvement in work-based training opportunities. After consultation, NELC EDS has identified catering and retailing as occupational areas likely to attract members of the local minority ethnic community. Potential training needs have also been identified in literacy, numeracy, presentation skills, and business administration. Key contacts in the minority ethnic community have been identified so that NELC EDS can develop suitable training and market effectively to this group.

43. NELC EDS' equal opportunities policy was produced in 1997 and there are no set procedures to update it. Some of the statements contained in the policy, such as those about monitoring equal opportunities data at staff meetings, and the wording used in advertising, have not been monitored to ensure that they are being used. The policy contains no reference to strategies against bullying or harassment, and there are no written procedures to support the policy.

44. Recruitment advertisements state that NELC EDS is an equal opportunities employer, but none of the publicity material distributed to trainees refers to the commitment to equal opportunities and the photographs used in some publicity and training materials reinforce gender stereotypes. However, the organisation has made attempts to address the gender imbalance in some of the occupational areas. NELC EDS has run construction industry days with local schools, and has stressed during these events that the opportunities are available to both men and women. The organisation has also been involved with Launchpad, an initiative aimed at pupils in Years 10 and 11 in school who are facing potential exclusion. Both boys and girls have taken part in work experience in the construction industry. Within the 'Career Choices' programme, trainees have discussion exercises which encourage them to consider various job roles and social responsibilities, such as childcare and paying bills. This generates discussions about possible opportunities for men and women,

45. Basic checks are made of employers' commitment to equal opportunities when placements are established, but there is no continued monitoring of employers. Equal opportunities issues are covered when trainees and their workplace supervisors take part in trainees' reviews, but this only amounts to asking trainees two standard questions about the number of problems they have experienced with regard to equality of opportunity, and their opinion of their treatment in their work placement. The questions do not encourage open discussion about equal opportunities. Subcontractors' equal opportunities policies are checked by NELC EDS. Further monitoring is on an informal basis.

Trainee support

Grade 2

46. NELC EDS' premises are centrally located and easily accessible. Trainees are referred via the Employment Service and the Careers Service. Some trainees apply as a result of recommendation by others. They are interviewed by NELC EDS' staff responsible for recruitment of trainees and arranging placements, and who have a range of background experience in industry or commerce. Once a trainee has been offered a place he or she is invited to an induction. The induction lasts for half a day at NELC EDS' training centre. It is structured according to the trainee's occupational area. All trainees undertake an initial assessment of their learning needs. Help with literacy and numeracy skills is offered to trainees on an individual basis. After induction, trainees are found work placements or attend NELC EDS' own in-house provision. A recruitment officer visits those on placement during their second week. Reviews are held regularly and involve the workplace supervisor or instructor and NELC EDS' training officer. Trainees are offered an eight-week programme to prepare them for leaving, during which they can choose from a range of job-search workshops. A review is held before trainees leave, to confirm that their needs have been met and to identify any actions required by NELC EDS' staff before the trainee leaves. The self-assessment report for this aspect gives little contextual information and has little to say on the support systems but gives examples of extra support given to trainees. Inspectors identified additional strengths. Weaknesses were accurately identified, one of which was not considered to be significant. Inspectors identified a further weakness.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective individual support for trainees
- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ frequent, well-structured progress reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective induction in some cases
- ◆ some unrecorded trainee support actions

47. The support given to trainees is highly individualised and has a direct impact on their progress and achievements. For example, adult foundation trainees who have basic skills needs are given support during their on-the-job training on matters such as development of measurement skills. Their instructors stay with them, along with the training officer, during their classroom-based training. Instructors can then give direct help with any activities requiring literacy and numeracy skills.

48. Trainees with literacy needs or specific learning difficulties have access to methods of assessment which are sympathetic to their needs. These trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee was identified as having emotional and behavioural problems. Regular meetings were held over nine months, and close contacts were established between the trainees' workplace supervisor, careers officer and parents. This contact was well recorded, and had a positive impact on the trainee's confidence. Eventually funding was secured for a sheltered placement.

receive support from a NELC EDS' tutor who specialises in work preparation and rehabilitation training. A business administration trainee was given intensive individual coaching in job-search skills, and received further training in interview skills when she was unsuccessful at a job interview. She eventually secured a job. Another trainee had intensive individual support to develop the numeracy skills required for his occupational areas. Trainees are allowed flexible attendance at off-the-job training if they have, for example, care responsibilities. Counselling by qualified staff is available for trainees with personal problems. NELC EDS has formed effective links with local support agencies and refers trainees to them where necessary. A clothing bank has been set up to provide outfits for trainees who attend interviews.

49. NELC EDS offers a detailed initial assessment to identify trainees' individual learning needs. All potential trainees are interviewed at the recruitment stage to assess their suitability for their choice of programme. For foundation trainees this includes a two-week period during which attendance and ability to work in a group are observed and graded, and an assessment is made of practical skills. The information collected determines trainees' choice of activity and rate of progress. Other occupational areas also have extended periods of initial assessment in the form of tests and observations which contribute to the trainees' learning plan.

50. Reviews are held every six to eight weeks. They are structured to cover progress between reviews, targets achieved, new targets set and any issues arising. In most areas, reviews are well managed and effective. Plenty of time is allowed to discuss issues fully. Health and safety issues are checked, and trainees are asked if they feel that they are being treated fairly. The workplace supervisor is always present at reviews. The training officer passes on information about action to be taken to the training manager, who oversees the completion of these actions. Training officers have a checklist to ensure that reviews are completed promptly. A database is maintained to ensure that reviews are carried out at the required intervals. A review is held when the trainee is due to leave, to record achievements and what the trainee is progressing to, and to identify any actions which need to be taken before they leave.

51. The half-day induction for all trainees at the start of their programmes consists of information relating to NELC EDS, including a comprehensive handbook, and the completion of paperwork. There are no activities to encourage trainees' interest and understanding of how to get the most from their programme. They remember the experience as being largely administrative, and do not generally remember a great deal of the content. They have only a vague recollection of the kind of support on offer and how to use it. There is an induction checklist but no evaluation of the process. Written information is provided, but it is not well presented.

52. Most support given to trainees is recorded, but there are some gaps in this process. Sometimes, trainees receive support crucial to their development which is not recorded on their individual training plan, or in any other document. Some trainees' individual training plans are not complete. The absence of systematic

recording means that there is no accurate overview of a trainee's needs or progress, and no formal way of passing on important issues in the event of a change of trainer or supervisor.

Management of training

Grade 3

53. The deputy director of economic and community development has overall responsibility for NELC EDS and is supported by a staff of 60. This is organised into six sections: training, contracts and financial administration, marketing, project operations, the New Deal, and assessment centre, each with a manager. All sections hold regular meetings with standing agenda items such as self-assessment and equal opportunities. The organisation has recently moved into a purpose-built resource centre which has brought together staff from two sites. The centre also houses a range of community support services. NELC EDS holds contracts with the TEC and the employment service, and has bid successfully for money under the Social Regeneration Budget and the European Social Fund, as well as private-sector and council initiatives. Arrangements for staff appraisal and review are established and a bid for Investor in People status is underway. The self-assessment report identifies a number of strengths, most of which represent no more than contractual compliance. The weaknesses identified were either not confirmed by inspectors, or were not considered to be significant. The inspection team identified other strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear strategic planning
- ◆ open, supportive management strategies
- ◆ good procedures for staff recruitment and induction
- ◆ effective staff appraisal and development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent management of subcontractors
- ◆ inadequate management-information systems
- ◆ ineffective integration of some elements of training

54. The service provided by NELC EDS is central to the council's strategy to develop the district's workforce. NELC EDS has a number of clearly expressed strategic objectives. These include training unemployed people in new skills and assisting them to get work, assisting young people through the transition from school to work, and motivating them. Staff have a clear understanding of the organisation's values and beliefs, and share them. Trainees feel involved with their training organisation.

55. The management structure of NELC EDS is clearly understood by staff. Lines of communication are straightforward. The organisation encourages open communication at all levels. The communication strategy includes informal meetings of teams each week, minuted meetings of operational managers every month, and full staff meetings two or three times a year. Records of meetings are maintained, and standard agendas are used to ensure that key issues are considered systematically. Staff have a high regard for the open style of management within the organisation, and value the opportunities to express their views.

56. Arrangements for the recruitment of staff follow procedures laid down by the council and meet current legal requirements in terms of equal opportunities and disability. Detailed job descriptions and person specifications are prepared for all posts, and three senior managers carry out short-listing. Interview checklists are used to measure applicants' abilities following appropriate criteria. New staff have an induction process which takes place over several weeks, according to the past experience and needs of the employee. This is overseen by the training manager. An induction portfolio is used to record all aspects of the process, and to reinforce key messages.

57. Staff appraisal follows a system developed by the council. An annual formal review involves the completion of an appraisal form by the line manager and the staff member. Actions are agreed on and a plan produced. The deputy director checks all reviews and ensures that actions are taken as appropriate. Records of staff qualifications, qualifications being taken and planned staff development are comprehensive. Employees are able to attend a wide range of NELC EDS' training events such as customer care, telephone techniques and use of computers. A training budget is used for external training activities. Staff have undertaken a range of external training programmes, ranging from specialist courses in supporting substance abusers, to NVQ level 5 in management. Surveys of managers and staff's views of their training and support are being used as part of the organisation's bid for Investors in People status.

58. NELC EDS uses subcontractors to give training in transportation, plumbing, electrical installation and printing. There are no formal agreements with the two local further education colleges used as subcontractors. Trainees join established programmes offered by the college and their training is based on the traditional academic year rather than the individual requirements of NELC EDS. There are good informal links between the college tutor and NELC EDS' staff. However, there are delays in informing employers of trainees' attendance and progress. The quality of subcontractor agreements varies between occupational areas. In transportation, precise subcontractual agreements exist for each trainee. The subcontractor must provide evidence of liability insurance and health and safety induction. There is continuous monitoring of subcontracted activity in driver training.

59. The organisation collects data about some aspects of training, but not systematically. Information about trainees' gender, disability and ethnicity is recorded on a database. Data extracted from funding claims to the TEC are

discussed at monthly management meetings as a means of examining contractual performance. Data on trainees' destinations are collected, and some analysis is undertaken. However, data relating to employers and trainees' perceptions of training are not methodically collected, nor are data relating to trainees' perceptions of equal opportunities. There are no central records of trainees' progress and achievement. The data collected are not routinely used to inform training provision. The organisation plans to improve its use of data, but this has not yet been achieved.

60. The integration of some aspects of the training process is incomplete. The marketing section is responsible for recruitment, placement, initial induction, organising the training programme and preparing individual training plans. Communication between staff in this section and training staff is not always effective. One trainee in administration is employed on a two-year contract and will complete NVQ level 3 and key skills six months before the end of the allocated training period. There is no formal system to ensure that the trainee is transferred to the modern apprenticeship. Not all trainees are aware of job search arrangements. Trainees are unsure as to career progression opportunities after the completion of their training programme. Staff miss opportunities to link on- and off-the-job training for some trainees. Where training is on a day-release basis, there is little attempt to relate training to work activities and no off-the-job training takes place for three months during the summer induction period.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

61. Quality assurance at NELC EDS is managed by the contracts, financial and administration manager, who also co-ordinates the self-assessment process. The organisation is developing a new written policy and procedures for quality assurance, as well as an internal audit system. NELC EDS meets the quality standards of its TEC, and of awarding bodies. It gathers feedback from trainees at various stages of their programmes, and from employers. The self-assessment report was written by the contracts manager, in consultation with the rest of the management team, who discussed key issues with the staff in their areas. The views of trainees and employers were used in the report. The management team decided upon the grades, and reported back to the whole staff group during workshop sessions. Staff were given access to the report if they required it. The self-assessment report identifies a key strength and a key weakness for quality assurance. Two other weaknesses identified by the organisation were being dealt with at the time of the inspection. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective staff involvement in the development of new quality assurance procedures
- ◆ trainees and employers' feedback used to improve provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped quality assurance system
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice

62. NELC EDS' contract manager has responsibility for quality assurance, and is developing new procedures. Until recently, the organisation was divided into two sections, based on two sites, with staff in each section operating different systems and procedures for aspects of training and assessment. NELC EDS moves into new, single-site premises in February 2000 was seen by managers as the opportunity to develop new, common procedures. Since April 2000, the contract manager has run a series of weekly, half-day workshops, each one of which focuses on a different aspect of training or assessment, such as recruitment and selection, trainees' induction, and progress review. Staff from different occupational areas discuss their different approaches to the issue, identify common themes, and share operational problems. The discussion is recorded and fed back to the management team. A working group of representatives from different areas design a new procedure, based on the findings from the workshop. The weekly workshops are well attended by employees, who value the opportunity for discussion. Staff demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of quality assurance, and their responsibility for implementing the procedures. The workshops also provide an opportunity for wider issues, such as self-assessment, to be discussed.

63. NELC EDS has a well-established system for the collection of feedback from trainees and employers. Evaluation questionnaires are sent out annually to employers and to each trainee on completion of his or her programme. The marketing manager collates responses and discusses any negative comments made, with the appropriate manager, and initiates changes where necessary. For example, a trainee on the Career Choices programme made the point that job options for women on this programme were limited. More options have now been made available for female trainees. Some employers offering business administration placements questioned the structure and value of the off-the-job training in this area. A meeting was held for all employers with administration trainees, and their views were used in revising off-the-job training arrangements. The methods used to gather feedback are regularly reviewed. The questionnaire for trainees has been revised, and the order and wording of some questions changed to make them clearer. NELC EDS has also recognised that by collecting information from trainees at the end of their programme, trainees are unable to see any improvements resulting from their feedback. There are plans to collect trainees' views at regular stages throughout their programme, although these have not been implemented yet. However, as an interim measure, suggestions boxes have been placed at key points in the organisation's new premises, such as the canteen.

64. The quality assurance system is not yet fully established, and some aspects of it are incomplete. New procedures have been written for several key aspects of training and assessment, but not all. The new procedures are clearly set out, but some of them lack detail. They have been written to include training practice from

a number of occupational areas, and are not precise enough to ensure consistency across all areas of training provision. For example, the procedure for trainees' recruitment and selection specifies the need for applicants to be contacted and invited for interview after their application. However, it does not state a timescale within which this should take place, nor does it provide clear guidelines about the way in which contact should be made. The procedure for trainees' induction does not specify a timescale for or location of the induction. The contracts manager has drawn up a sampling plan to ensure that all members of staff are observed when carrying out the new procedures, and that their completion of the new documentation is audited. Only one observation has so far taken place, however, and it is too early to say how effective the monitoring will be.

65. The team leaders for administration and construction share responsibility for internal verification. Other members of staff are taking their internal verifier's award. Internal verification systems are thorough, with detailed recording. A 10 per cent sampling strategy is used, based on a sampling plan. Written and oral feedback is given, regarding the internal verification of portfolios and the observation of assessments. However, if internal verifiers find a lack of evidence, there is no system to record when, or if, this has been rectified and a satisfactory standard achieved.

66. NELC EDS has no strategy for the sharing of good practice across occupational teams, and the effectiveness of some aspects of training varies between areas. For example, in business administration, trainees' induction is lengthy, well managed, and valued by trainees, while in other areas it is brief and ineffective. Internal verifiers for construction use systems and paperwork from those used in business administration. The quality workshops provide an opportunity for staff to learn from one another, and to discuss different approaches, and some key members of staff are making conscious efforts to improve consistency. The organisation's two principal internal verifiers, for example, are working together to develop a common internal verification system, taking the best elements from each approach. However, these initiatives have only just been started, and many areas of inconsistency remain.

67. The self-assessment report was analytical and objective in style. Most of the grades were accurate, as were many of the judgements on areas of weakness. However, a number of the strengths claimed represent no more than contractual compliance. The organisation was very well prepared for inspection, and staff were efficient in providing evidence, and constructive in their response to feedback. Self-assessment within NELC EDS is supported by detailed action planning. However, in action plans the aims and objectives are not sufficiently clear or specific enough to ensure effective evaluation of the actions taken.