



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

REINSPECTION SEPTEMBER 2000

Commercial Education Training Services

SUMMARY

Commercial Education Training Services offers good training in customer service, direct care and childcare, and satisfactory training in business administration, leisure and sport. The organisation promotes equal opportunities effectively. Trainee support is effectively managed and management of training in general is satisfactory. Quality assurance was unsatisfactory at the time of the initial inspection, with no structured quality assurance procedures for the training process. Since then, the company has made considerable improvement and established a good quality assurance system with rigorous internal verification.

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of the reinspection of Commercial Education Training Services, the original report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	2
Leisure, sport & travel	3
Health, care & public services	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good progression rates by trainees
- ◆ well-designed work packs in care and childcare
- ◆ successful action to counter gender stereotyping in occupational areas
- ◆ effective management of trainee support by co-ordinators
- ◆ flexibly arranged training to meet employers and trainees' work schedules
- ◆ robust management information system
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ rigorous internal verification

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in some assessment practice
- ◆ lack of well-established initial assessment procedures
- ◆ ineffective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

INTRODUCTION

1. Commercial Education Training Services (CETS) is a privately owned training provider. It offers work-based youth training, modern apprenticeships and national traineeships in hospitality, customer care, care of adults and childcare, management, business administration, information technology, accountancy and leisure and sport. The organisation is currently providing training towards 27 different national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4. It also provides training for the assessor awards, key skills at levels 1 to 5 and single subject qualifications, such as word processing. All the occupational areas were inspected at the first inspection, except hospitality and management where the numbers of trainees were two and five respectively. CETS contracts with PROSPER, the training and enterprise council (TEC) for Devon and Cornwall, to provide these programmes as well as the New Deal full-time education and training option. CETS also offers training for adults through a franchise with a local further education college, and for sixth-form pupils through a school and college consortium. At the time of the first inspection, there were 285 trainees undertaking training funded through the PROSPER contract and 17 through the New Deal. CETS employs 41 staff. At the reinspection, there were 276 trainees, no New Deal clients and 43 staff. The management team comprises the manager and five training co-ordinators. Most of the trainer/assessors and internal verifiers are part-time staff. CETS is based in Plymouth and half the training is carried out off the job at its training centre; the other half is mainly provided on the job. The organisation has links with a large network of over 500 employers. This includes large and small employers, with an emphasis on service industries. While most of the trainees come from the Plymouth travel-to-work area, CETS also has trainees from the area bordered by Exmouth, Okehampton, Newquay and Torpoint.

2. Plymouth is the main commercial centre south of Bristol, with a population of approximately 250,000. Traditionally, the city relied on the civilian dockyards and naval base as the main employers. Over recent years, the number working in the docks has reduced from 20,000 to 4,000. Currently, there are as many people employed in leisure activities as there are in the docks and there is now a growing number of call centres employing staff in marketing and telesales. Plymouth attracts donations from the European Social Fund (ESF) because of its urban economic deprivation. The proportion of those from minority ethnic groups in the local population is less than 1 per cent. In 1999, unemployment in Devon for August was the same as the national average at 3.9 per cent. In 2000, the unemployment rate was 4.4 per cent in Devon and 5.2 per cent nationally.

3. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Plymouth was 47.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, the figures had risen to 48 per cent and 49.2 per cent respectively.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. CETS began its self-assessment process in February 1998 when the manager attended a training session organised by PROSPER. The first report was written in August and it was submitted to the TEC. In November 1998, the manager attended additional training run by the TEC National Council on action-planning. This prompted the writing of a second report, including an action plan, with the help of a consultant. The views of trainees, employers and staff were collected for this purpose. Some quantitative data were used as evidence for the judgements given in the self-assessment report. At the first inspection, inspectors considered that many of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found some strengths and several significant weaknesses which the company had not identified. They agreed with three of the grades given by the organisation but awarded lower grades for five areas of training. Following the inspection, an action plan was produced which addressed the strengths and weaknesses identified. CETS produced its second self-assessment report in January 2000 for the reinspection. This was drafted by the manager and shared with training managers for comment before publication. A two-page update report on quality assurance was submitted immediately prior to the inspection. Inspectors considered a number of strengths to be no more than normal practice, but agreed with others. Inspectors, who identified another, also found the identified weakness. The report is sufficiently critical and inspectors agreed with the grade give by CETS.

5. During the first inspection, five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at CETS' premises in Plymouth and visiting trainees at their work placements. They interviewed 84 trainees, 22 of the organisation's staff members and 29 employers or workplace supervisors. They observed seven training sessions. They examined the portfolios of 69 trainees, assessment and review records, individual training plans, contract documents, audit reports, minutes of meetings, management files and policies.

6. Reinspection was carried out in September 2000 by a team of two inspectors for a total of four days. They interviewed four trainees, carried out nine interviews with staff and visited four work placements where employers were interviewed. They examined documents relating to quality assurance, including procedures, internal and external verification reports, and other relevant information.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions during the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		1	1			2
Retailing & customer service			1			1
Leisure, sport & travel			1			1
Health, care & public services		1	2			3
Total	0	2	5	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

7. CETS has 87 trainees following programmes in business administration, accounting and information technology at levels 1 to 4. There are 23 modern apprentices, 13 national trainees, 45 work-based training youth trainees and six New Deal clients on the subsidised employment and full-time and education options. Most business administration and information technology trainees are employed. The majority of trainees on administration and information technology programmes attend workshops one day a week or fortnight at the centre. Flexible arrangements are made with employers as required. An assessor from CETS visits work-based trainees in the workplace once every three to four weeks. Accounting trainees usually attend training at the centre one day a week or fortnight as required. Ten staff provide training and assessment for business administration and information technology NVQs. Seven have assessor awards and three are working towards them. Three staff have teaching or training qualifications. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment but considered that others represented no more than contractual compliance. They agreed with the weaknesses but found some strengths which the organisation had not identified. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of well-qualified specialist staff
- ◆ trainees' good progression rates
- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates in accounting
- ◆ good tracking of trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to plan and structure training effectively
- ◆ no direct observation of trainees' performance in the workplace
- ◆ failure to make key skills integral to the accounting programme

8. Administration and information technology trainees follow training leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Accounting trainees are able to take an NVQ at the appropriate level or the examinations of the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT).

9. Staff in administration, information technology and accounting are well qualified and have relevant occupational competence with a range of qualifications in information technology, administration and accounting. Some accountancy staff currently work in the profession. Other staff have prior accounting experience and updated knowledge and skills, for example, relating to the preparation of accounts. Specialists are also used to provide training for particular accountancy units such as taxation and audit work and costing at level 4. The achievement rates for trainees at NVQ level 4 are high. The national average for a central assessment in planning and allocation of resources for December 1998 was 69 per cent and the pass rate for trainees at the centre was 87 per cent. The success rate in another central assessment for that period was 8 per cent above the national average. In previous central assessments, such as cost analysis and control, trainees achieved 100 per cent pass rate. In accounting, 85 per cent of trainees progressed from level 2 to level 3 in 1997-98 and 44 per cent progressed from level 3 to level 4. In administration, there is a 64 per cent progression rate from level 2 to level 3 and to other qualifications at level 2. Administration trainees can also take a computer literacy and information technology award and other business qualifications. Trainees also progress to jobs and a number of accounting trainees have gone on to achieve professional accountancy qualifications in the industry. Over 90 per cent of administration trainees are employed.

10. Trainees' progress is effectively monitored. After each session, tutors complete a chart to show units or elements completed. This information is then entered on individual trainee cards kept alphabetically. Progress is also effectively tracked on charts in the training rooms where trainees and assessors can tick off completed units. Details about trainees' on progress are then entered on a database that gives comprehensive information on each trainee, such as dates for the beginning and end of training, progress review dates and the units completed and those outstanding.

11. There is no structured off-the-job training for administration and information technology, and no formal training plan is used to ensure the systematic teaching of knowledge and understanding. Administration and information technology trainees liaise individually with assessors, work at their own pace and receive coaching and advice to solve problems. Accounting trainees attend sessions for the teaching of knowledge and understanding at the appropriate level, but there are no formal arrangements for specifying objectives and expected outcomes and training and assessment methods. No accounting trainees, and only some administration trainees, are observed in the workplace for assessment purposes. There is no formal assessment planning. Assessors mark work packs and provide written comments about the quality of evidence produced. Trainees on administration programmes who do not come into the centre are visited in their workplace every three to four weeks by an assessor, who examines the evidence they have

collected, helps them build their portfolios, and sets them appropriate work-based tasks. Assessors also complete review documents that give details of the professional skills, personal skills and knowledge trainees have achieved since the last review. The trainee, supervisor and the assessor sign these documents. Trainees have to rely on their workplace supervisors or managers to observe individual units at work. Supervisors sign and date statements for units where the performance criteria have been met. The statements do not provide details about the background and experience of the witness, or of the circumstances under which the activity was carried out. The list of witnesses in portfolios does not include information about the supervisors' own competence to comment authoritatively on the trainees' performance. Accounting trainees are assessed on work-based evidence that is brought into the centre and on case studies and assignments completed in-house.

12. In all three areas, assessors use a bank of work packs produced by the company. Accounting trainees on levels 2 and 3 are also given textbooks free of charge for each unit that they can use throughout the course. Most of the evidence for the level 2 administration and information technology qualifications is gathered from the centre. There is over-reliance on the gathering of evidence for the NVQ in administration at level 2 on assignments and exercises, which test the trainees' knowledge of theory but are not carried out in the workplace. For example, some trainees have completed more than three units relating to computer work, letters and mail handling in the centre. There is insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training activities. Some trainees have provided evidence in relation to health and safety elements through activities in the centre and have missed opportunities to gather such evidence at work. Several portfolios contain a large amount of photocopied evidence such as blank health and safety documents and information relating to the Data Protection Act. There are no structured training programmes in administration and no systematic evaluation of training. There are missed opportunities to plan work-based assessments in all three areas. Key skills are not an integral part of training for accounting qualifications. A number of trainees, who began their programme prior to the appointment of the key skills co-ordinator, only start key skills training when they have completed their NVQ. They then cross-reference key skills evidence retrospectively to the specifications in the appropriate unit.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

13. All of the trainees within this occupational sector, including national trainee, are undertaking the customer service NVQ. Approximately two-thirds of the trainees are working towards a level 3 qualification. Of the total of 35 trainees, 25 are employed within one large organisation in an office environment. The others are spread between six other employers including a bank, leisure clubs and retail environments. All the trainees' workplaces provide the trainees with the opportunity to develop skills relevant to the NVQ in customer service. The customer service programme was introduced in 1996 and numbers on it have increased from 13 to the current total of 35 in March of this year. In 1998-99, three

trainees have left the programme. Of these, three achieved their NVQ and two left early without gaining a qualification. Within the large organisation there is a work-based assessor, whilst other trainees have access to a roving assessor. All staff are qualified as assessors or verifiers and have suitable occupational qualifications. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They found both strengths and weaknesses which the organisation had not identified. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good teamwork among trainees, trainers, assessors and employers
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of the NVQ process
- ◆ good progress by trainees towards achieving their NVQ
- ◆ effective system for tracking trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in some assessment practice
- ◆ no recording or monitoring of on-the-job training

14. Most trainees on the customer service programme have well-presented, good-quality portfolios and take the initiative in collecting and referencing evidence. They have good understanding and awareness of assessment requirements. Trainees receive good support and advice from the assessor, and also from their workplace supervisors. The internal verifier and co-ordinator have clearly defined roles. They work closely with other staff involved with training to provide the trainees with help and support. Various methods of assessment are used. These include observation of trainees' performance, trainees' own statements supported by evidence from the workplace, and some testimony from authoritative witnesses. Evidence of trainees' previous workplace experience, in the form of witness testimony, is also taken into account. Most portfolios indicate that internal verification is a continuous process. Verification is appropriately recorded and feedback on the quality of work is given to both the assessor and the trainee.

15. The largest group of trainees has the opportunity to attend a monthly workshop where advice and guidance are available to help trainees draw up an action plan for making progress towards achieving the qualification. The trainees also have frequent opportunities to be assessed in the workplace. The trainees are making very good progress towards successful attainment of their qualification, and most are ahead of their targets. A few experienced trainees have been able to complete all NVQ units within four months. A computerised system has recently been introduced for tracking trainees' progress. The system also facilitates the recording of: all relevant details about trainees; the dates trainees commence training; the dates by which they must attain their qualification; progress review dates; information about workplaces; details of assessors; and details of the units

completed. In addition to this, the assessor and internal verifier keep their own summary records.

16. Some assessment practice lacks rigour. Occasionally, some evidence recorded is not clearly verifiable. Other evidence of trainees' performance cannot be clearly authenticated. For example, some trainees' statements of activities are not signed or dated and have no supporting evidence. Some trainees' performance is not observed as part of the assessment process. Some action-planning is not always recorded. Most trainees receive some training from their employer. Although the prime purpose of this training is to help trainees carry out their tasks in the workplace effectively, the training is also relevant to the NVQ in customer care and it furthers the trainees' overall development. This training, however, is neither monitored nor recorded on individual training plans. Trainees do not gather evidence, through training tasks, of their competencies for the purposes of NVQ assessment.

Leisure, sport & travel

Grade 3

17. There are currently 15 trainees on a sport and recreation programme, comprising one modern apprentice, nine national trainees and five other youth trainees. The programme was introduced in 1995. The numbers in training have remained more or less the same for the last three years. Ninety-five per cent of the trainees have employed status and are spread across eight work placements. The provider has, as a matter of policy, trained and used a number of work-based assessors, some of whom have yet to achieve assessor qualifications, supported by a roving assessor. In addition, there is a tutor/internal verifier who is closely involved in the trainees' NVQ programme. Inspectors agreed with a number of strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some strengths and weaknesses were more relevant to generic aspects of provision. They found one weakness which the organisation had not identified and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ good and readily available resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ insufficiently systematic progress review and target-setting process for trainees

18. In 1998-99, all the leavers achieved NVQ qualifications, No trainees dropped out of the programme and there the high achievement rate was similar to that of previous years. Trainees receive good support throughout their training and high achievement rates are a significant strength of the programme. At the beginning of the training programme, CETS provides trainees with an NVQ logbook, prior to

registration, and information sheets which are relevant to the NVQ units and help them to acquire knowledge and understanding. In addition, trainers make monthly visits to trainees in the workplace to provide them and their work-based assessors with help and support; the frequency of these visits is increased in response to trainees' needs. During these visits, trainees are given guidance on ways of generating evidence of their competence for the purposes of NVQ assessment. The trainers also monitor the trainees' progress and help the trainees to draw up an action plan with targets, for the achievement of their qualification. This monitoring process is not sufficiently systematic, however, and it is not properly recorded.

19. There are some weaknesses in assessment and verification practices. In some cases, there is an over-reliance on the trainee to record assessment. Trainees often write witness testimonies on behalf of the witness. The witness signs the testimonies without making any written comment. The trainees' portfolios contain few observations from the assessor about the trainees' performance. There are no records of continuous assessment. In some cases, the assessor has made a brief statement about the trainees' work at a particular stage in the programme. In many instances, the recording of internal verification consists of no more than a signature and there is no significant feedback for the assessor. At one work placement, there are no plans for the systematic sampling of portfolios for the purposes of internal verification.

20. The pressures of the workplace determine the extent to which employers are able to provide training. Opportunities are missed to record and monitor the training employers organise to help the trainees achieve their NVQ. The organisation has introduced some workshops on key skills. Hitherto, progress in making key skills an integral part of training in the workplace has been slow. For example, one trainee who achieved an NVQ in sport and recreation at level 3 in March 1998, has not been able to complete a modern apprenticeship 15 months later because the key skills assessment is still outstanding.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

21. There are currently 169 trainees in this sector. Of these, 140 are on work-based training: nine modern apprentices, 13 national trainees, six clients on the New Deal subsidised employment option and five on the full-time education and training option. The majority of trainees have employed status and all are in work placements. Off-the-job training is arranged flexibly according to trainees' needs. The tutors who provide the training are also internal verifiers. Some trainees attend the training centre, while others receive tutorial support in the workplace. Trainees who working some distance away are provided with specially arranged training sessions in their workplace. Tutorials are also organised on a one-to-one basis for some trainees. Each trainee has a work pack based on the NVQ units which helps them to gather the requisite evidence gathering for assessment purposes. Trainees are also given the opportunity to achieve qualifications in addition to the NVQ, such as those in first aid and food hygiene. Employers provide on-the-job training. There is a network of work-based assessors who either have, or are working

towards, their assessor award. Suitably qualified tutors and internal verifiers support them. Across the sector in 1998-99, 45 trainees gained NVQs at level 2, and 21 at level 3. This represents an average of 58 per 100 leavers. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report but they considered that many were no more than normal practice. Four of the weaknesses were more relevant to the generic areas of trainee support or management of training. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report. They agreed with the grade given by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effectiveness of training in meeting individual trainees' needs
- ◆ well-designed work packs
- ◆ effective planning of assessment in childcare

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no overview of trainees' progress towards NVQ
- ◆ some unsatisfactory assessment practices

22. Trainees work at their own pace towards their achievement of NVQs. They negotiate clear targets with assessors, tutors and verifiers. Trainees are fully supported by their assessor and tutor. Some trainees have made rapid progress towards achieving their qualification. For example, they have achieved their NVQ level 2 in five months and their NVQ level 3 in 10 months. When additional support has been needed this has been provided by the tutor/verifier. For example, trainees with dyslexia are encouraged to present tape and video recordings of their work for assessment. Assessors also observe their work and question them on it. If there is no assessor in the workplace, CETS will provide one. Trainees are aware of their progress and achievements and know which units have yet to be completed. This information is recorded in the trainees' personal files, using review documents. Standardised documentation for this has recently been introduced and files contain this information. The co-ordinator for the occupational area also has a database giving information on when tutors visit trainees and when internal verification takes place. However, the tracking information kept centrally by CETS is not easy to obtain as the database does not record units completed and the records in personal files can be difficult to find. The system for identifying the units that trainees have completed is unduly complex.

23. The work packs used by trainees are well designed. They provide a structured approach to off-the-job training and help the trainees to collect evidence for their portfolios in a systematic way. The work packs are unit based and consist of an easy guide to the NVQ requirements in jargon-free language. They specify the knowledge required and include assignments and questions that enable the trainees to generate evidence of their competence for assessment purposes. The packs are used as a teaching aid in off-the-job training. Trainees work through the activities in them and identify how these relate to their work practice. The packs also include

reference material, handouts and journal articles and direct trainees to other sources of information. For example, two care trainees have visited the resource centre at the local hospital to gather information about the long-term implications of the medical condition which their residents have been diagnosed as having. Also, a large number of care trainees have attended, or are planning to attend, a special course on death and bereavement organised by one of the funeral directors in the city.

24. The key skills co-ordinator is currently working with tutors to identify how the trainees can develop key skills through all aspects of their work for the NVQ in care and childcare. It is planned to introduce key skills as an integral part of the childcare programme in September 1999. Some trainees on the care programme have already developed their key skills through all their work for the NVQ units and by attendance at key skills workshops. Workshops have been arranged specifically for the information technology and application of number key skills. Trainees comment that the information technology unit, in particular, has given them a new perspective on their work and has raised their awareness of how they may use the skills in future work. The childcare team uses a skills match form at the beginning of every NVQ unit. This enables the assessor and trainee to identify the activities that need to be covered for the unit. Trainees are able to identify their current skill levels against the unit requirements and any further training they need. They themselves agree when they are ready for assessment. Assessment is recorded in a simple, one-page format. The clear recording of assessment aids the structured planning of training and assessment.

25. Almost all workplaces have work-based assessors who lead the assessment process in the workplace. Tutors and internal verifiers help the assessors. There are a number of inconsistencies in assessment practices. For example, in two nursing homes there is no recording of observations undertaken by the assessor, although direct observation is ticked as a method on the unit summary information. In another home, the assessor writes witness testimonies for trainees instead of observation records. There is a lack of direct observation of trainees' performance and a general lack of evidence of judgements made by the assessor. In some instances, the assessors have unrealistic and unreasonable expectations of the trainees and assess to standards higher than those specified for the NVQ. In other workplaces, the recording and documentation of assessment are good. There is no formal system to ensure consistency of assessment practice by the different assessors and workplaces. Assessors do not meet to standardise assessment. Internal verifiers standardise assessment, but they do not do so through any formal or structured system.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

26. The company has an equal opportunities policy and this complies with the TEC contract and current legislation. The policy includes a code of practice with

grievance and disciplinary procedures. There is also a description of how the policy works in practice. Overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy rests with the manager. The training co-ordinators are responsible for ensuring equal opportunities in training and employment practice. They give advice and guidance to employers involved in the programme. Employers and placement providers are required to have a policy with procedures to ensure equality in the workplace. All trainees are advised to read the policy and identify how it affects them during their time with the company. The proportion of persons from minority ethnic groups in the local population is less than one per cent and proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is about the same. The provider interviews all eligible trainees and seeks to find them appropriate work placements. Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but they considered some of the strengths to be no more than normal practice. They found some strengths and weaknesses which the organisation had not identified and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good understanding by trainees of grievance procedures
- ◆ teaching on equal opportunities issues an integral part of care and childcare programmes
- ◆ appropriate gender balance among trainees in occupational area

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ no staff training on issues related to equal opportunities
- ◆ no facilities and equipment provided for those with physical disabilities

27. Trainees from all the occupational sectors have a thorough understanding of the grievance procedures, how they operate and why they are important. In their NVQ training, trainees on care and childcare programmes are made aware of the importance of equal opportunities in their occupational areas. All trainees are aware of their responsibilities towards clients, colleagues and themselves. The commitment to equality is demonstrated in training and there is a strong focus on ensuring equality of opportunity in work practice. The organisation has been successful in attracting female trainees in occupational areas where males have traditionally been in the majority. For example, 12 of the 15 trainees working towards an NVQ in accounting at level 4 are women. Similarly, male trainees have been recruited in occupational areas where women usually work. In business administration, 14 per cent of trainees are men and there are small numbers of trainees on care and childcare programmes. All trainees eligible for government-funded training are interviewed and CETS endeavours to find work for them.

28. The organisation has a comprehensive database of equal opportunities information. This is required for their TEC contract and by NVQ awarding bodies.

However, there is no formal procedure for analysing this data and dealing with any issues arising. The management team meets regularly but does not discuss issues related to equal opportunities or carry out action-planning to promote equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy states that all staff will receive training to deal with discrimination in their work practice. To date this has not happened. Staff are, however, committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity. The training centre has no toilet facilities for wheelchair users and those with physical disabilities. The ground floor training rooms is accessible to persons in wheelchairs but the men's toilet is on the lower ground floor and can only be reached by stairs.

Trainee support

Grade 3

29. The co-ordinators at CETS have a defined role and responsibility for trainee support. They are available for trainees to contact during office hours and respond to requests for personal support quickly. There are good working relationships between trainees and CETS staff. The company informs potential trainees of the opportunities open to them whilst they are still at school through open days and evenings, local school visits and joint project work. CETS interviews all applicable potential trainees who apply for positions. If they are unsuccessful in their application then CETS assists them in finding an alternative appropriate work placement. Inspectors agreed with all the weaknesses and some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report. They considered that many of the strengths, however, were no more than normal practice and that some were more relevant to the occupational areas. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses which the organisation had not identified. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good personal advice and support for trainees
- ◆ co-ordinators' effective management of trainee support
- ◆ good external links to further the recruitment of potential trainees
- ◆ frequent celebration of trainees' achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no well-established initial assessment procedure
- ◆ inconsistency in the use and updating of individual training plans
- ◆ inadequate recording of trainee support
- ◆ no formal procedures for accreditation of prior learning

30. All trainees are assessed on entry to their programme. They receive a basic numeracy and literacy assessment that is matched to the level of the programme the trainee intends to enter. A new form for recording the outcomes of initial assessment was introduced in March 1999 and its use is not yet fully established.

The company also provides trainees with advice and support to ensure that they follow the programme most appropriate to their skills and aspirations. For example, a trainee can achieve accountancy technician status by achieving an NVQ or passing the AAT examinations. The trainee and the provider come to a decision on which qualification route to take in the light of the trainees' abilities and career aspirations. All trainees attend an induction programme at the beginning of their training. This provides an outline of their training programme and its requirements, orientation to CETS, its policies and practice, equal opportunities and safe working practices. An induction checklist is completed to ensure that all areas are covered and the trainee and staff from CETS sign this. Trainees' achievements are celebrated at award ceremonies. These are held throughout the year to coincide with the attainment of awards. Local dignitaries are invited to present the certificates and these events are well publicised in the local media and in professional publications.

31. All trainees have individual training plans. These give personal details and outline the trainees' training plan, but they are not regularly updated and amended to reflect the trainees' progress. Trainees receive both personal and professional support from CETS staff. The co-ordinators respond quickly to any problems raised by trainees, and they do their best to resolve them so that the trainees can continue with their programme. For example, when a trainee changes employer to a company where training has never been utilised, staff from CETS visit the employer explain the benefits of training and the programmes on offer. CETS co-ordinators act as a mediator between trainee and employer when there are problems. If government funding for a trainee ceases, CETS has allowed the trainee to continue the programme to ensure that he or she obtains the qualification. In addition, trainees have the telephone numbers of CETS assessors and internal verifiers. This support is provided across all occupational areas, although it is not systematically recorded. There is some accreditation of trainees' prior learning, for example, in information technology. However, there are no formal procedures for the accreditation of prior learning and no staff member at present holds the requisite assessor qualification, although two employees are working towards achieving it.

Management of training

Grade 3

32. CETS has a clearly defined management structure which all staff understand. The manager has line management responsibility for five full-time training co-ordinators and a financial administrator. Four of the training co-ordinators are responsible for the organisation and administration of the training offered by the company. They manage teams of tutors and assessors, the majority of whom are part-time staff, as well as administrative assistants who deal with TEC contractual requirements. The fifth co-ordinator is responsible for key skills across all the occupational sectors. All employees have up-to-date job descriptions and understand their roles and responsibilities. There are policies and procedures covering the recruitment, selection and induction of staff. The staff handbook is comprehensive but has not been updated since January 1997. Staff take part in

staff development and professional activities training and this reflects organisational objectives outlined in the business plan. There is a quarterly review of new staff by their managers, which is incorporated into the annual appraisal system. The company has been recognised as an Investor in People. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report. They considered that four of the strengths were no more than normal practice and that two were relevant to other generic areas. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses the organisation had not identified and they awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ long-standing and valuable links with employers
- ◆ flexibly arranged training to suit employers and trainees' work schedules
- ◆ robust management-information system
- ◆ clear and measurable targets for staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic sharing of good practice among vocational teams
- ◆ no focus on training methods in staff development plans
- ◆ no systematic review and updating of some policies
- ◆ insufficiently effective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

33. CETS has a network of over 500 employers with whom it works. When an employer has a vacancy, CETS provides, on request, a service to recruit an appropriate employee. Once a new employee is recruited, his or her training requirements are discussed and CETS negotiates an appropriate training programme with the parties involved. CETS helps unsuccessful candidates to find employment or a work placement. Again, the provider negotiates a training programme with the employer and the new employee. This role as an employment broker benefits the trainees. They have contact with a broad range of employers and receive training that improves their future employment prospects. In general, training is well organised by the occupational sector co-ordinators. They provide training in a variety of ways to ensure that it fits into the work schedules of employers and trainees and trainees derive maximum benefit from it. For example, one employer has agreed for theoretical knowledge training to take place on a regular basis at their premises so that trainees do not have to take time out from work making a 70-mile round trip.

34. The company has a well-developed management-information system which is effectively used to inform the co-ordinators whether they are meeting the TEC contract. The financial administrator produces a position statement for each section each month. The co-ordinator takes financial performance against targets into account in future planning. The manager holds a monthly target review meeting with the co-ordinators. Trainers, assessors and internal verifiers are briefed on these targets at team meetings. In addition, trainees' achievement of

NVQ units is monitored on a monthly basis and co-ordinators are informed which trainees are projected to achieve the full NVQ, and at what time. Where it is clear that a trainee can achieve the award before the end of the financial year with extra support, he or she receives additional tutorials or visits from assessors. A database on trainees' retention details the NVQs gained by trainees over a three-year period and is used to monitor trends across the occupational areas.

35. CETS' written policies and procedures have been developed in response to external demands, but some of these are only regularly reviewed or updated in response to contractual requirements. There is no formal system for disseminating the good practice that exists in the occupational sections. For example, the integration of equal opportunities issues with the vocational content of care and childcare programmes is not used as a model for the other sectors. The sections operate as separate units, with different procedures for assessment and recording trainees' progress. There is a lack of cohesion across the company's operations. Staff are well supported by managers and all staff have gained NVQs to ensure that they understand the NVQ process themselves. However, staff training has not focused on training methods. There is a lack of co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training across and within occupational areas. The effectiveness of on- and off-the-job training is not regularly evaluated by CETS, and there is little action-planning for improving the training process. The company is well managed from the point of view of the TEC contract, but management of the trainees' learning experience lacks focus and depth.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

36. Since the first inspection, CETS has changed the structure of the organisation with the managing partner and administration manager now sharing responsibility for quality assurance. The administration function has been centralised and staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Training managers and staff have taken action to rectify the deficiencies identified during the first inspection of the quality assurance of work-based training. CETS has developed and introduced a comprehensive quality assurance manual which covers all aspects of the training and assessment framework. It regularly seeks feedback from trainees, employers and staff. Standardisation meetings are held among training managers to share good practice.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no quality assurance manual
- ◆ no structured quality assurance procedures for training
- ◆ no monitoring of trainees' destinations

37. Many of the improvements detailed in the organisation's action plan had been carried out before reinspection. Inspectors found some of the strengths contained in the revised self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice.

Inspectors found some additional strengths and another weakness. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ rigorous internal verification standardised across occupational areas
- ◆ strong focus on continuous improvement
- ◆ effective use of feedback on training from staff, trainees and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no written internal audit processes
- ◆ little use of data collected from leavers

38. At the time of the first inspection, there were no recorded quality assurance procedures. After consultation with staff through questionnaires and standardisation meetings, CETS has developed a comprehensive quality assurance policy and procedures manual which covers all aspects of work-based training. The quality assurance system is clearly written in easy to understand language. Staff are issued with their own copy of the quality assurance manual and have a good awareness of the procedures which relate to their work. They are involved in the process and contribute to the development of the quality assurance system. An abridged copy of the manual containing relevant sections is given to workplace supervisors. The quality assurance system is developing and the manual is regularly updated to reflect changes. There is a good system of document control, with all new editions of documents numbered and dated. There is also an annual review process for the manual. There is good monitoring of training and managers discuss results. The use of the new standardised methods is closely monitored.

39. Since the first inspection, CETS has introduced a clearly defined internal verification policy with responsibilities detailed in the quality assurance manual. One member of staff from each team, with the appropriate qualification, is identified as the sole internal verifier for a particular occupational area. Internal verification procedures are comprehensive, with standardised documents used across all occupational areas. Sampling and monitoring is ongoing throughout the duration of all training programmes. Records of all decisions are maintained which allow an audit trail to be established. Internal verification sampling plans are good. The plans include the monitoring of every assessor and every different NVQ unit. New assessors are monitored continually until they achieve the assessor qualification. All assessors are observed assessing trainees by their internal verifier at least once a year. Assessors are given written feedback on their performance and this forms part of the staff annual appraisal process. There are regular meetings between internal verifiers and assessors, which provide the opportunity for issues relating to assessment and verification to be raised.

GOOD PRACTICE

To evaluate a wide range of questionnaires, the task of analysing the responses was given to a trainee taking an NVQ at level 2 in information technology. This provided interesting real work for the trainee, who produced good graphical results which could easily be evaluated at management meetings and were used to improve quality in training.

40. The setting up of the new system required significant organisational change within CETS. All staff are involved in the changes and understand why new methods are adopted. There has been good progress in implementing the action plan following the first inspection. There are good systems to encourage communication among staff, to allow them to make suggestions for improvement and to share good practice. Communication systems include standardisation, management and staff meetings.

41. Annual questionnaires are sent to trainees, staff and employers. In addition, trainees receive a questionnaire after induction and on leaving their programmes. All responses are evaluated and discussed at staff team meetings. A number of improvements have taken place as a result of this process. For example, evening classes were put on for a group of trainees unable to be released from employment during the day, and a bonus scheme was developed for work-based assessors who were not being rewarded for taking on this extra role.

42. The new quality assurance manual lays down standards, such as for the collection of monitoring information, the implementation of internal verification procedures and the frequency of meetings. Currently there is no formal method of ensuring that these standards are adhered to, although there is discussion among staff about the standards. There is no published internal audit process to ensure that the new processes are being followed.

43. Information on those leaving programmes is collected by the administration manager and analysed to establish trainees' reason for leaving. The data are not evaluated with a view to identifying any improvements which could be made to training.