



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

REINSPECTION SEPTEMBER 2000

North Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry

SUMMARY

North Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry offers a wide variety of training and many trainees are in excellent work placements. Training in health, care and public services is outstanding and trainees' examination results are considerably higher than the national average. The foundation for work programme is excellent. The model office is an excellent facility for business administration trainees. Construction and manufacturing training are also good and trainees often progress to higher qualifications. Training in engineering, retailing and customer service and hospitality are satisfactory, but some motor vehicle engineering trainees do not make sufficient progress. At the time of the first inspection, the management and professional programme was less than satisfactory and some trainees did not receive enough on-the-job training. Trainees are now closely monitored by training staff and employers are fully involved in the training process. Some trainees, however, make slow progress towards their qualification. North Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry's outstanding commitment to equal opportunities is evident throughout the organisation. Staff give trainees excellent support to help them achieve their qualifications. There is an open management style and all staff contribute to the planning of training. Quality assurance procedures are effective and ensure rising standards.

As a result of the reinspection of North Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry the original published report text for management and professional has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings section have been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	2
Management & professional	4
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	3
Hospitality	3
Health, care & public services	1
Foundation for work	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	1
Trainee support	1
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	2

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management & professional	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective sharing of good practice
- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ open and consultative management
- ◆ excellent support for trainees
- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ close links with schools
- ◆ many trainees' high achievements
- ◆ excellent promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ thorough self-assessment process

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some insufficiently thorough internal verification
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of some subcontractors' provision

INTRODUCTION

1. North Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NDCCI) is a company limited by guarantee with a head office and training centre situated in Chesterfield. The company was established in 1899, and has provided government-funded training programmes since 1983, when it first established a small youth training scheme. It now employs 67 full-time equivalent staff and offers training in construction, engineering, manufacturing, management, business administration, retailing, customer service, hospitality, healthcare and foundation for work. Most trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs). NDCCI subcontracts with the local college of further education and other training providers for some programme areas. NDCCI provides a wide range of training activities including youth training (young options), national traineeships, modern apprenticeships and project-training workshops and an adult training programme. Corporate training is also offered to both member companies of NDCCI and non-members. NDCCI offers training to people across the North Derbyshire area through a contract with North Derbyshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). At the time of the first inspection, there were 426 people in government-funded training. By the time of the reinspection this figure had decreased slightly to 394.

2. The unemployment rate in the North Derbyshire area at the time of the first inspection was 4.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. By August 2000, the national rate had fallen to 3.5 per cent, but unemployment in northeast Derbyshire stood at 6.3 per cent. Following the demise of the coal industry, 80 per cent of businesses in the area are small to medium in size, operating mainly in the service and manufacturing sectors. Sectors currently experiencing growth include construction, retailing and hotel and catering. The largest concentration of population is in Chesterfield and its immediate surrounding area. People from minority ethnic groups make up 1.2 per cent of the North Derbyshire population.

3. In 1998, the number of school leavers in Derbyshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 48 per cent compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, the national average was 47.9 per cent and the proportion in Derbyshire was 49.1 per cent. In North Derbyshire, 60 per cent of 16 year olds continue in full-time education and 23 per cent enter employment with training. NDCCI is in competition with many local schools with sixth forms, the local college of further education, and private training organisations.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. NDCCI started its self-assessment process in June 1998. All staff attended a one-day in-house briefing session organised by the TEC. This was followed by two half-day sessions designed to ensure that everyone understood the external inspection and self-assessment procedures. NDCCI established working groups to identify strengths and weaknesses within the occupational and generic areas. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report, but considered that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. They gave different grades to all the occupational areas except foundation for work and awarded higher grades to two of the generic areas. Following the first inspection, staff prepared an action plan to address the issues raised at inspection. This action plan has been reviewed at full staff meetings and monthly team meetings. Information from these reviews was used in the preparation of the most recent self-assessment report in May 2000. This report confirmed NDCCI's commitment to the self-assessment process.

5. For the first inspection, a team of 11 inspectors spent a total of 40 days at NDCCI during June 1999. Inspectors examined trainees' portfolios and personal files. They also examined details of trainees' achievement and retention rates, company paperwork, information from the awarding body, TEC contracts and audits and employers and subcontractors' agreements. Inspectors carried out 131 interviews with trainees, 71 interviews with employers and workplace supervisors and 54 interviews with NDCCI's staff. Inspectors observed off-the-job instruction sessions, NVQ assessments and trainees' induction sessions. The grades given to the instruction sessions are shown in a table below.

6. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors who spent a total of four days with NDCCI during September 2000. Inspectors interviewed eight trainees, four employers, five of NDCCI's staff and visited four legal practices. Company paperwork, trainees' personal files and portfolios were examined. Information from awarding bodies and the TEC was also examined. One training session was observed and awarded a grade 2.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Management & professional		1	1			2
Business administration	2					2
Health, care & public services		1				1
Foundation for work	1	1				2
Total	3	3	1	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

6. There are 21 young option trainees, of whom 16 are working towards level 3 and five towards level 4 qualifications. Local companies employ all trainees. The further education college undertakes the off-the-job training, assessment and internal verification in building studies and civil engineering. All trainees have a supervisor who is responsible for their development. Initial assessment and induction, with basic health and safety training are given to all trainees and they all have an individual training plan with agreed outcomes. Training officers who undertake regular visits to trainees in the workplace also give them individual support. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. The inspectors identified further strengths and awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ trainees' success in progressing to higher qualifications
- ◆ close involvement of employers in training
- ◆ trainees' high levels of competence
- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ subcontractors' lack of involvement in trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ failure to use individual training plans as working documents

GOOD PRACTICE

Health and safety is a priority for NDCCI. Where construction trainees are to work on site, all companies undertake risk assessments of their activities.

7. Some of the trainees have learning and prior experience identified at initial assessment. NDCCI has arrangements for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning. The training provided by companies is very good. Excellent relationships between the companies and the NDCCI training officer have been developed over many years. One company has consistently recruited trainees from this scheme for more than 10 years. Training is well planned and effectively organised. Each trainee is allocated a work-based supervisor who is responsible for his or her development. The companies value their trainees and some have rewarded their efforts with a pay rise. One company undertakes 'pathways to progress', which is an internal review initiative linked to training. This offers opportunities for progression within the company. NDCCI reviews take place between eight and 12 weeks on average. They are attended by the trainee, training officer and work-based supervisor. The review covers progress in meeting targets, activities undertaken on site, off-the-job progress and some forward planning. All trainees remember their induction, especially the health and safety aspect. Off-the-job training is well organised. Internal verification procedures are sound. Trainees' achievement rate in building studies is currently 89 per cent, which is well above the national average.

8. The subcontractor for off-the-job training provides reports on trainees twice a year as required by the service level agreement. These reports are not taken into account during the trainees' progress reviews. The tutors are not required to attend reviews and provide guidance. Individual training plans are not used as training documents but are drawn up to comply with contracts. They are not used in the review process. In most reviews, trainees are not given demanding goals such as long-term targets and dates by which these must be achieved.

Grade 3

Engineering

9. NDCCI has 69 trainees in engineering training, of which 33 are modern apprentices, and the remainder are young option trainees. Thirty-six of the trainees are on motor vehicle programmes, with the remainder following other mechanical and electrical engineering courses. Sixty-four trainees are employed. They gather evidence in the workplace for assessment, and receive regular visits from the training officer. Trainees undertake work-based skills training, and all trainees follow vocational courses at the local college. Level 3 assessment is carried out by college staff who are suitably qualified as assessors and trainers. Resources at the college are good. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report and with the grade awarded by NDCCI.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent relationships with employers
- ◆ trainees' success in progressing to higher qualifications
- ◆ thorough checking of employers' health and safety arrangements
- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no practical off-the-job training for some motor vehicle trainees
- ◆ lack of observation of assessment in the workplace
- ◆ little on-the-job training
- ◆ failure to set trainees demanding targets

10. All trainees undertake comprehensive initial assessment tests, and receive a comprehensive induction to the programme. Trainees receive further induction from their employer and from the college. Work placements give the trainees good opportunities to develop their skills. There are good relationships between NDCCI and the employers. In most cases, the courses being followed by the trainees fully meet their needs and those of their employers. All employers are subjected to thorough initial checks by the NDCCI's health and safety officer, who is

appropriately qualified. The officer makes regular visits to work placements to ensure a safe working environment for the trainees. Employers sign that they understand the NVQ process, their health and safety responsibilities, and their equal opportunities policy.

11. All trainees attend local college on day release. Much of the training provided by the college is of good quality. Assessments are carried out by college staff. Internal verification procedures are comprehensive, but these have only recently been introduced for motor vehicle training programmes. Most trainees achieve their initial qualification. Staff hold regular discussions with them about progression to a higher qualification. Trainees often receive training that is additional to the NVQ requirements, and meets their particular needs. Regular reviews of trainees' progress are carried out. Employers are involved in the reviews and they are carefully recorded. Individual training plans are regularly updated, and trainees are aware of their progress. Achievement rates are high.

12. Some motor vehicle mechanics trainees are not receiving any practical skills training either at college or at work. There is very little formal on-the-job training, and no attempt to link work experiences with college work. College staff rarely go into the workplace. The range of assessment methods is narrow. A great deal of evidence is gathered by witness testimony, but there is little assessment by direct observation in the workplace. Although employers are made aware of trainees' training programmes, few play any part in the training process or provide any formal plan for training. Most employers have poor knowledge of different assessment methods. Trainees are not set demanding targets. Progress reviews do not focus on NVQ progression routes and many are carried out with insufficient rigour.

Manufacturing

Grade 2

13. There are 34 trainees in this area following training leading to NVQs in the performing manufacturing operations (PMO) at levels 1 and 2. Nine trainees are employed, and the remainder are based in the company's own training centre. Until recently, the company provided training leading to the manufacturing and processing skills (MAPS) qualification, and during 1997-98, piloted training for the new PMO qualification. From 1998-99, all trainees are undertaking the PMO qualification. The course provides work-based training for trainees on the young options programme. Most trainees are endorsed as having learning difficulties, and these trainees are initially based in the NDCCI training centre. Some trainees are in 'taster' work placements, and these trainees come into the centre for one day per week to work for their NVQ. The inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ valuable work opportunities for level 1 trainees
- ◆ demanding work roles for trainees
- ◆ successful taster programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete level 2 course documentation
- ◆ poor retention rates

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are given the opportunity to undertake work 'tasters', where they can experience different trades and industries for a few weeks while still maintaining their strong links with the training centre.

14. Trainees undertake a comprehensive initial assessment, which is aimed at identifying their needs for help with literacy and numeracy. These needs are met by NDCCI's staff. The company has its own project workshops on site, which are fully equipped to industry standards and are subject to quality control. The work undertaken by the trainees is all contracted from a number of local companies, which gives trainees an opportunity to develop a range of skills and abilities. The work done is linked to units of the NVQ. Assessment in the project workshops is continuous and carried out by NDCCI staff. Trainee's progress is regularly reviewed on an individual basis at intervals determined by individual needs. In most cases, this is every four weeks, but reviews are carried out more frequently if necessary. In addition to working for the NVQ, trainees develop social skills. They are encouraged to use their own initiative by acting as supervisors, answering the telephone, and dealing with problems.

15. NDCCI has a strong relationship with local companies. Trainees who are employed are visited in the workplace for progress reviews at least monthly, and NDCCI staff carries out assessments. Assessments are carried out thoroughly, and both the trainees and the employers fully understand and support the process. The majority of trainees obtain the NVQ level 1 in PMO, and about half have progressed to level 2. The programme has not been running for long and no trainees have yet achieved NVQ level 2. The internal verification system is underdeveloped, and some of the course documentation for the level 2 NVQ is incomplete or has not yet been carried out. The retention rate is very poor and to date 72 per cent of trainees who started the programme have left it early.

Management & professional

Grade 3

16. NDCCI offers a training programme for legal executives leading to qualifications equivalent to NVQs at levels 3 and 4. There are currently 13 trainees on training programmes, a number significantly lower than the 36 who were in training during 1998-99. All the trainees are employed in solicitors' practices in the Chesterfield area. Seven trainees are employed by one large local practice.

Two trainees began their programme this year, two started in 1999-2000, four in 1998-99, three in 1997-98 and two in 1996-97. Ten of the trainees are working towards part one and three towards part two of a legal executives' qualification. The two trainees who began their programme this year are also taking an NVQ at level 2 in customer service. Over the past four years, 32 of the 57 trainees who started the programme have left the programme early without achieving a qualification. Over this period, four trainees transferred to other programmes and eight trainees achieved the whole of the legal executives' qualification. This represents an achievement rate of 57 per cent for the 14 trainees who were in training in 1996-97. Until three years ago, a local subcontractor provided training and assessment for the trainees. When this training programme closed, the work was subcontracted to a national company. This company provides training materials and employs tutors who provide a distance-learning service for the setting and marking of assignments. Trainees must satisfactorily complete four assignments before being allowed to enter for examinations in specific areas of the law or legal practice. The examinations are held in May or October. The trainees attend a weekly evening training session at NDCCI's premises. There are separate sessions covering part one and part two of the qualification. There are two new tutors for these sessions, of whom one teaches two-thirds of all the classes. Both of these tutors are qualified, practising solicitors although they do not have a training qualification.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ slow progress of some trainees
- ◆ poor action planning for trainees
- ◆ lack of structured training
- ◆ insufficient liaison with employers on the legal executive programme
- ◆ insufficient action to identify and meet trainees' specific needs

17. Following the first inspection report, NDCCI prepared and implemented an action plan to address the identified weaknesses. Significant progress has been made in remedying all of the weaknesses. The self-assessment report prepared for the reinspection identified five strengths and one weakness. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and regarded the other three as normal practice. One further strength and two additional weaknesses were identified. Inspectors agreed with the grade NDCCI gave in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ well-planned and presented off-the-job training
- ◆ good encouragement of trainees' progression

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress by some trainees
- ◆ poor retention rates

GOOD PRACTICE

NDCCI recognised that the trainees needed good course notes to support the training sessions. As the main tutor was new to training they provided her with a dictaphone and employed an audio-typist to type her course notes and present them in an appropriate style.

18. Following the first inspection, NDCCI adopted a systematic and well-managed approach to address the weaknesses inspectors had identified. In the first instance, employers were consulted in order to gain their views and to ensure their support for any proposed changes. Training officers, tutors and workplace supervisors now carefully monitor the progress of trainees as they complete their assignments and prepare for examinations. All these staff have a detailed knowledge of the trainees' overall progress, including how many assignments they have completed, the marks they have been awarded and their results in mock examinations. There is close liaison, on a regular basis, between the training officers and employers about the trainees' progress. Training officers carry out quarterly reviews with the trainees to formally review their progress and update their individual training plans. One partner in a legal practice has introduced an excellent computer system for monitoring the trainees' progress. The trainees complete on-screen templates to record their achievements and use a well-designed database to evaluate their own progress. The tutors use the weekly training sessions effectively to undertake action planning with trainees and make sure their progress is on target. There has been high attendance at the weekly evening training sessions, with 100 per cent of trainees attending classes covering part two of the qualification.

19. NDCCI has substantially improved the quality of its training over the past year. The two new tutors have arranged a structured schedule of off-the-job training sessions for trainees working towards part one and part two of their qualification. These training sessions comprehensively cover all the topics relevant to part one and part two of the qualification. All the trainees participate fully in the sessions and appreciate the way that practical examples are used to illustrate points of law. The two-hour sessions are well paced and the trainees' understanding and knowledge are tested verbally at the end of each topic. Trainees are asked to read through material before a session, but the topics they have studied are not always referred to in that particular session and the tutors do not recap on the work covered during the previous week's training session. The room used for these training sessions is pleasant, well equipped and conducive to learning. However, the tutors make insufficient use of the equipment available and largely rely upon giving information verbally. One tutor used a chart to record some details of discussions, but the key points of the session were not recorded visually for trainees. Trainees are, however, given useful course notes at the end of each session. All of the trainees are actively supported by their line managers at work. Managers give guidance and advice about the trainees' assignments and aspects of the law which trainees do not cover directly in their work. The structured approach of the two tutors and by the trainees' managers is particularly important as some trainees work in very specific areas of legal work such as personal injury or conveyancing and are not involved in broader aspects of legal practice.

20. Since the first inspection, there has been much more effective liaison between NDCCI's staff and the national company providing the distance-learning course. The national company now gives feedback directly to NDCCI's staff on trainees' progress. NDCCI's staff make contact with the company on a regular basis by telephone and in writing. The trainees' assignments are marked quickly and to a satisfactory standard by their correspondence-course tutors. Most of the written feedback given to trainees is detailed and appropriate. One trainee has, however, been given only brief comments on her work.

21. NDCCI's training officers and employers give good encouragement trainees to progress to full membership of the professional institute of legal executives. Two male legal executives, who have progressed from being receptionists and office juniors to become qualified legal executives, act as role models in advertising material for the programme. These men are now planning to train as solicitors and give talks to new trainees about the opportunities open to them and the advantages of work-based training. The success of female trainees is also celebrated but the use of male role models is important given that few men work as office juniors or receptionists in the legal profession. Other trainees have progressed from the legal executives' programme to take part-time law degrees at local universities.

22. In spite of the recent improvements and changes which NDCCI has made to the training programme, some trainees are still making slow progress. The nature of the training programme makes it difficult for trainees to catch up. As there are only two examination sittings each year, it will take most of the trainees a further two years to make up for lost time. All but one of the nine trainees who started their programme over two years ago are unlikely to complete their qualification on time. However, all of the trainees being entered for the examinations this autumn have successfully completed the necessary assignments and mock examinations. NDCCI are trying to help trainees to prepare for the examinations and to ensure that they succeed by providing a series of five Saturday morning revision and examination technique sessions. Trainees have responded positively to these sessions, which compensate for the poor quality of the distance-learning materials relating to preparation for examinations. The three trainees who have started their programme since the last inspection are making good progress towards their qualification. The two trainees who started this year are also making satisfactory progress towards achieving their NVQ at level 2 in customer service.

23. The process of ensuring that trainees and employers were informed of the proposed changes to the training programme, and that they agreed to them, was well managed. Trainees were clearly advised of the changes and what would be required of them. NDCCI's training officers had full and open discussions with the trainees and their employers. The training officers made sure that the trainees and their employers were fully aware that they faced the challenge of completing work to fixed deadlines and attending regular off-the-job training. Fifteen trainees, after consultation with their employers, decided to leave the programme at this point. This represents nearly half of all trainees who left the programme during the last four years. Of the fifteen trainees, all but one has remained in employment and the

other one has started a further education course. Four of the trainees moved to a different programme with NDCCI and others have embarked upon courses sponsored by their employers, including one who has started a part-time law degree. The retention rate of trainees on this programme has only been 44 per cent over the last four years. Overall, the retention rate is still unsatisfactory, although it is evident that those trainees who have remained on the programme have a new sense of commitment and ambition to achieve their qualification and are benefiting from the improvements that NDCCI has made.

Business administration

Grade 2

24. There are currently 159 trainees following programmes in business administration. Eighty-eight are working towards administration NVQs at levels 2, 3 and 4; 16 are working towards information technology NVQs at level 2 and 41 are on accounting programmes. There are 74 modern apprentices, 16 national trainees, and 67 on the young options programme. Trainees are encouraged to attend NDCCI's training centre for off-the-job training one day a week, particularly during their first year. An evening workshop is provided for trainees unable to attend during the day. A subcontractor provides material for the accountancy trainees, which they can study on their own, and this is complemented by additional learning packages from NDCCI. Trainees take examinations at an accredited centre in June and can re-sit them in December. Trainees are assessed at work or in the NDCCI model office by a team of experienced and qualified trainers with appropriate assessor qualifications. Evidence is generated from a range of sources and in different ways, including direct observation of trainees' performance in naturally occurring situations in the workplace and the model office. Quarterly reviews take place of trainees' progress. These involve the trainee, work-based supervisor and training officer and cover progress towards NVQ achievement and personal effectiveness in the workplace. Many trainees progress to the next level after achieving their NVQ. Work placements with employers are many and varied and are available in retail, administration, accounts offices and the service sector. In 1998-99, 68 per cent of young options trainees gained an NVQ at level 2, and 81 per cent obtained a job at the end of their training. Seventy-six per cent of modern apprentices achieved an NVQ at level 3 and all obtained jobs. Many trainees also achieved additional qualifications such as those in text processing, information technology and customer care. Inspectors agreed with three of the strengths and the one weakness cited in the self-assessment report. They awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ imaginative use of off-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ good progression by trainees
- ◆ rigorous assessment procedures
- ◆ excellent work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ employers' lack of detailed knowledge of training programmes

GOOD PRACTICE

A model office has been designed that handles real business from the organisation. It gives trainees opportunities, not available in the workplace, to extend their skills and fill gaps in their knowledge.

25. Off-the-job training is of high quality. It is carried out by company trainers, who are committed to helping the trainees to succeed. Sessions are run flexibly, using a variety of learning methods. One-to-one tutoring and advice are available to the trainees on demand. Resources are excellent. Trainees have access to networked and stand-alone personal computers, a wide range of up-to-date industry software, interactive videos, the Internet, and tailor-made learning packages to help them achieve information technology and administration units. A personal action plan for trainees is devised identifying workplace tasks and requisite NVQ competencies they cannot cover at their place of work.

26. Trainees are given the opportunity to take additional stand-alone qualifications where required. These include text processing and information technology qualifications. Some trainees also take an NVQ in customer care. Trainees who need to cover key skills are provided with key skill workshops. From July of this year, all new entrants will be introduced to key skills within the first month of their training. An excellent team approach from the organisation's staff ensures on- and off-the-job training are properly integrated and meet the needs of both trainee and employer.

27. On-the job training is of a high quality and trainees receive encouragement and support from their line managers. NDCCI's assessors regularly examine and discuss NVQ units and elements with trainees and set them realistic and demanding targets. Trainees appreciate this support and find the review process motivating. It helps them focus on what is required. Many trainees complete their NVQ level 2 in a shorter time than is normally expected and progress to training for a level 3 qualification. Assessment is continuous and trainees are visited in their workplace every four weeks. Trainees are encouraged to discuss their work and to reflect on how evidence of their skill attainment can be generated. Different methods of assessment are used to ensure all trainees' work is covered and include observation, witness testimony, product evidence and assessment of tasks undertaken in the model office provided by NDCCI. A T-card system is updated following every visit showing which units have been signed off.

28. The range and variety of work placements are excellent. Trainees are matched with appropriate employers who support and help them to develop their skills. Opportunities are available for trainees to study and build their portfolios during working hours. There are instances of employers offering a trainee the loan of a computer to work at home. Some employers provide financial support for courses. Other employers enable trainees to follow courses that are industry specific and provide detailed insight into the business they are working in. Many trainees are offered permanent employment at the end of their training.

29. Employers do not receive detailed information from the company on their trainees' progress. Some employers are unable to plan on-the-job training to help the trainees to achieve their goals and reach their targets.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

30. There were 44 trainees on the retailing and customer service programme at the time of inspection. Four are training at level 2 and 20 as modern apprentices in customer service. In distribution and warehousing, there are seven trainees working towards NVQ level 2, and one modern apprentice. In retailing, there are seven trainees working towards NVQ level 2 and five national traineeships. All young people who apply to NDCCI for training are interviewed and receive an initial assessment before they are matched with an employer placement. Training and assessment are currently provided on the job. Key skill workshops are offered on a Wednesday evening at NDCCI. There are no work-based assessors. Training materials for trainees to support the on-the-job training are currently being developed. Members of the training team are working on a key skill project with local schools to help the progression of young people from school to work placements in this occupational area. Some accreditation of prior learning took place during the inspection. Training officers and assessors meet regularly to discuss the progress of trainees. A card system is in use to keep track of trainee's achievements to date. Achievement rates for retail and distribution and warehousing are satisfactory. Data on trainees' achievements in customer service were not available at the time of inspection, as the modern apprenticeship programme has only been running for a few months. The inspectors did not agree with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. The inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality placement providers
- ◆ regular feedback and advice to trainees on their NVQs
- ◆ effective support for individual trainees by well qualified staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no long-term action-planning and target-setting for trainees
- ◆ employers' lack of involvement in the training and assessment process
- ◆ failure to make key skills integral to some trainees' programmes

31. Employers in the North Derbyshire area see NDCCI as a good source of trainees. Before sending trainees to employers on work placements, the company

checks the suitability of employers. Staff from the company hold full discussions with employers on their health and safety procedures and their promotion of equal opportunities. A health and safety officer visits the employer to carry out risk assessments of the trainees' working environment. The work that the trainee will be undertaking is checked to ensure it is relevant to the qualification for which the trainee is aiming. A range of different employers is used for placements, including distribution and manufacturing companies, high street retailers, solicitors and dental practices. The majority of placement companies are members of NDCCI and the company's link with them is strong.

32. Assessors visit trainees on a regular basis to ensure that opportunities to collect evidence towards qualifications are maximised. The assessors make sure that all trainees fully understand what they need to do to achieve their NVQ and how their progress will be monitored. Training officers support trainees by visiting employers' premises every eight weeks to carry out reviews of their progress. These reviews involve the training officers, trainees and workplace supervisors. During their visits, training officers give the trainees feedback on their performance and advice about the NVQ. They endeavour to help the trainee sustain progress towards achievement of the qualification.

33. Training and assessment are carried out well by experienced and qualified staff. All assessment staff and training officers are qualified as assessors. All assessors have attended training on key skills, health and safety and equal opportunities. Some staff have teaching and coaching qualifications. Their skills are evident during training and assessment sessions with trainees. NDCCI has a very low turnover among its training staff. There are long-established staff teams working to support trainees' progress in this occupational area.

34. Individual training plans for national traineeships and modern apprenticeships cover NVQ and key skill units but do not specify target dates for their completion. When assessors visit trainees they devise action plans for the current and next stage of their work towards the qualification. Trainees are not set demanding goals and do not have long-term action plans for the achievement of their qualifications. Trainees are unaware of their progress towards the achievement of whole qualifications and did not know when they were expected to complete their training.

35. Although employers are committed to helping the trainees progress, they have little understanding of the training and assessment processes and are not involved in them. They do not understand the timescales within which trainees must work to achieve their qualifications.

36. One assessor gave a new trainee a good induction to key skills. In the case of another trainee, this assessor had successfully integrated vocational content for an NVQ with key skill units. Such good practice was not found on the part of all assessors. Some assessors fail to make key skills an integral part of national traineeship and modern apprenticeship programmes. One trainee who started a

modern apprenticeship five months before inspection had not started on any of the key skill units and could not explain what they were. Another trainee on a national traineeship has had the key skills unit added after completing the NVQ. Key skills are explained during some induction sessions for national traineeship and modern apprenticeship programmes.

Hospitality

Grade 3

37. In hospitality, there are 10 young options trainees all taking NVQs at level 2; eight of these are following a food preparation route, one the food service route and one the bar service route. Three hospitality trainees have progressed from foundation training and have previously obtained NVQ level 1. Various training methods are used ranging from all training on the job to all training off the job, depending on the nature of the trainees' work placements. Two trainees do not have work placements at present. Hospitality training staff have appropriate vocational and training experience and assessor qualifications. There are no qualified assessors in the workplace and assessment and verification on and off the job is provided by NDCCI staff. Of the seven trainees who left the programme last year, four achieved the NVQ. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. The weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed prior to the inspection. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report and they awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent assessment in the workplace by observation
- ◆ high staff-to-trainee ratio in off-the-job training
- ◆ valuable experience of staff in giving support to individual trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ failure to set specific targets in some reviews
- ◆ narrow range of work placements.

38. In addition to the contractual training reviews, trainees are visited regularly in the workplace by an assessor from NDCCI who conducts planned assessments by observation and where appropriate, assesses trainees in naturally occurring situations. Practical sessions take place in 'The Commerce Café', an in-house training restaurant, and this provides a realistic working environment. It is used for off-the-job training and trainees are assessed there performing tasks they cannot carry out in the workplace. The kitchen sessions are attended by foundation

trainees and school pupils on a work taster programme, as well as hospitality trainees. There are often two members of training staff available for a group of up to 12 trainees in this kitchen. All trainees have the advantage of close individual contact with trainers. Training staff working with hospitality trainees have experience and qualifications in counselling, support and basic skills training. Trainees with learning or pastoral difficulties have access to appropriate levels of professional support.

39. Training in the workplace is not planned or structured. The extent to which it is provided depends on the menu, the customers' needs, and the availability in the establishment of staff with appropriate knowledge and experience to provide effective training. There are few links between any training provided and the qualification being taken. Some workplace supervisors are not aware of the requirements of the NVQ. Staff from NDCCI visiting a workplace discuss the trainees' on-the-job experience in general terms with the workplace supervisor but detailed planning meetings about training are not held. Where an assessment is planned for the next visit, this will be discussed with the trainee at the training review. At many reviews however, appropriate targets are not set for the trainee. Work placements do not provide trainees with a broad range of experience in the hospitality industry. Trainees usually obtain work experience of institutional or pub catering. Many individual trainees do not have an opportunity to appreciate a variety of menus, customers and culinary styles.

Health, care & public services

Grade 1

40. There are 18 trainees working towards the national certificate for dental nurses. All trainees are employed in dental surgeries in order to gain their practical experience. They cannot receive their full certificate until they have completed 24 months of practical experience, and have passed the national examinations. Trainees attend the dental school of nursing at the local hospital two evenings a week for a minimum of a year, for their off-the-job training. Some trainees are advised to attend for a further three months before sitting the examinations in order to improve their chances of success. The trainees' pass rate in the three most recent examinations has been about 90 per cent, compared with the national average of 54 per cent. Trainees who fail on the first attempt are given a further revision period in order to help them to pass on the second attempt. Inspectors agreed with the strengths cited in the self-assessment report and found additional strengths. They did not agree with the weakness the company had identified. They awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective and well-structured off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent work placements
- ◆ trainees' high levels of competence

- ◆ rigorous monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ excellent preparation for examinations
- ◆ trainees' outstanding achievement rates
- ◆ effective guidance on progression routes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are questioned about their off-the-job training each week by either a fully qualified dental nurse acting as a mentor, or the dentist they are working alongside. Trainees are therefore able to see the relevance of their off-the-job training. If there is a topic that they have found particularly difficult, one of their colleagues helps them to understand it.

41. Off-the-job training sessions are very well planned. Clear aims, objectives, and methods of delivery are recorded in the lesson plans. Trainees are given a copy of the year plan at the start of the course, and this is closely followed through the year. Trainees are tested about every third week to monitor their progress. All trainees show a steady improvement over time. Test results are a good indication of trainees' readiness for the examination. Trainees sit full internal examinations every six months. Staff use a variety of appropriate training methods and resources in training sessions, including video equipment and guest speakers.

42. Trainees are visited by NDCCI staff at least monthly during their first year, and bi-monthly in the second year. Trainees are questioned about both on- and off-job training as well as their personal development. NDCCI staff assist the trainee to identify areas of weakness and suggest ways to overcome these. The NDCCI, the dental school, the trainee and the employers all work very closely together to monitor all aspects of trainees' progress. The year plan provided by the nursing school is used as the basis for monitoring off-the-job progress. Trainees are advised as to when they are ready to attempt the examination. Most trainees are ready after one year but they still have to complete 24 months of 'chairside experience' before they are fully qualified. Some trainees are advised to continue their off-the-job training for a further year before they attempt the examination. Those who continue training complete their twenty-four months in practice at about the same time as they attempt the examination. All trainees are very appreciative of the training they receive and their relationships with staff are excellent. Trainees are given advice on additional professional courses to which they may progress. These include dental hygienist, radiography and sedation courses.

Foundation for work

Grade 1

43. NDCCI offers a range of foundation programmes aimed at specific client groups. There are 23 trainees on young options foundation programmes. There are 11 trainees on the Select programme. This is designed to help young people who have additional needs to make career choices and provide them with work

experience tasters. Six trainees are on the Best programme. This is intended to help rehabilitate adults who face specific barriers to employment. The foundation sector also provides work experience and specific training for local school children with learning difficulties in years 10 and 11 under two separate projects. Over 50 per cent of foundation trainees take part in one or more periods of work experience in selected local businesses and organisations. Two working environments are available for foundation trainees at NDCCI: a processing and packaging workshop and a commercial production kitchen. The workshop contracts to provide packaging services for a range of commercial products and undertakes some printing work. The kitchen supplies all the food for the in-house restaurant which is open to staff and trainees at NDCCI throughout the day, as well as providing buffets for special functions. Trainees may take a range of short specific courses including basic first aid, lifting and handling and interview skills. They may also take selected level 1 qualifications including wordpower, numberpower, NVQ food preparation, and NVQ performing manufacturing operations. Up to a third of the trainees on foundation programmes progress to level 2 qualifications. Thirty-three per cent of trainees who have attended foundation programmes enter employment and 25 per cent achieve recognised qualifications. Forty per cent of trainees on the select programme progress to further training programmes and 14 per cent enter full-time employment. Inspectors agreed with the judgements and grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive range of initial assessments of trainees' needs
- ◆ valuable experience of staff in motivating trainees to succeed
- ◆ good-quality work environments for trainees
- ◆ good arrangements with external agencies to ensure progression for trainees
- ◆ very high quality of individual support for trainees
- ◆ exceptionally wide range of learning experiences

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

44. During induction to their programme, foundation trainees are given a series of specialist initial tests and activities designed to assess their particular abilities and training needs. In addition to basic skills tests, trainees may also receive professionally designed assessments of spatial recognition, psycho-motor skills, cognitive ability and vocational aptitude. These assessments are used by appropriately experienced staff to determine the individual training plan of each trainee. Members of the staff team attached to the foundation programmes at NDCCI have a range of specialist qualifications related to the provision of basic learning support and pastoral support, as well as general qualifications as trainers, teachers and assessors. They have experience in youth work, counselling and

training those with specific learning difficulties and disabilities. The considerable ability of staff is evident and their commitment to helping the trainees to succeed is clear.

45. Both the NDCCI workshop and the kitchen provide work experience for trainees in a real but sheltered working environment, supervised by specialist members of staff. While trainees are working in these environments, they are also working towards a number of targets in their individual training plan. Many learning activities are an integral part of the trainees' work experience. The staff team fosters good relationships with other appropriate agencies. They liaise with the careers service, the Employment Service and special schools when drawing up appropriate programmes for trainees. Potential trainees experience a seamless path to the training programme. Some trainees are not aware which advisors belong to the careers service, and which belong to NDCCI. A great deal of individual support, both learning and pastoral, is provided on a one-to-one basis within and outside the work environments. There are examples of foundation trainees who after being supported through specific problems, have progressed to successful employment and have held positions of responsibility in local businesses. There is an outward bound course for foundation trainees which is residential. Through this course, the trainees build up their confidence, acquire skills of social interaction and team-building and develop a sense of responsibility for themselves and others.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 1

46. NDCCI has an equal opportunities policy, which is regularly updated. The policy is widely distributed to staff, trainees and employers. Trainees are informed of the company's commitment to equality of opportunity during their induction. The company has been awarded the 'positive about disability' mark for the past 4 years. As an organisation, NDCCI has been involved with equality initiatives within the local community for many years and there is a high awareness of equality of opportunity throughout the organisation. Equality of opportunity is an agenda item at all staff meetings. Information and developments are disseminated throughout the company through team meetings. Future projects and developments are raised by the company's equal opportunities sub group. Managers take full responsibility for promoting equality of opportunity and one manager sits on the North Derbyshire TEC's equal opportunities steering group. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds in the locality is low, at less than 1 per cent of the population. The company has a good record of recruiting trainees with disabilities and additional learning needs. At the time of inspection, 5 per cent of trainees had disabilities. The ratio of male to female trainees is 50 per cent although there is a majority of males in engineering and a majority of females in dental surgery. Accommodation is accessible to trainees with disabilities and there is a ramp for wheelchair users. The company has a properly documented

complaints procedure. The inspectors identified additional strengths to those in the self-assessment and awarded a higher grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff development programme on equal opportunities
- ◆ effective monitoring of equality issues
- ◆ extensive work with external agencies to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ innovative equal opportunities training for trainees
- ◆ rigorous complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little use of trainees' data in planning and decision-making

GOOD PRACTICE

A young person from a local school, on two weeks' work experience at the provider's premises, explained how difficult it was to get to the toilets in his electric wheelchair. The company responded instantly to this problem and allocated financial resources to alter the toilets to accommodate all wheelchair users.

47. The company's culture supports equality of opportunity strongly. Staff have a good understanding of the complexities which surround equal opportunity issues and provide a supportive environment where trainees are encouraged to express their views and feelings. The company has a well-planned and comprehensive staff development programme. All staff attend equal opportunity awareness raising sessions. The company also employs an external consultant to advise on training concerned with the understanding and promotion of equal opportunities. Ten members of staff have undertaken widely recognised qualifications related to equal opportunities. In their work for these, they have taken modules on: producing an equality framework, policy making, equal opportunities in practice, producing action plans, reducing discrimination and increasing understanding, and selection and recruitment procedures. Staff have also attended training on how to provide equal opportunities training for trainees. The views, experiences and perceptions of trainees are regularly and systematically monitored through twice yearly questionnaires called the 'feel good factor'. Trainees are asked to reflect on their experiences to enable staff to identify areas of concern or specific problems. There is a consistently high response rate from trainees to these questionnaires. For example, in March 1999, 223 or 58 per cent of trainees responded, and in October 1998, 179 or 48 per cent responded. A senior manager makes an analysis of responses to the questionnaires and produces a report. Trainees are informed of the findings of this report in writing. Managers are quick to act on any issues highlighted by trainees and demonstrate a high level of commitment to ensuring trainees are protected in the workplace.

48. Trainers make excellent use of videos and discussion to explore issues related to equal opportunities. Training sessions include both trainees and staff. The diversity of backgrounds and ages in the group brings depth to the sessions and trainees learn from one another's experience. Trainers encourage participation and debate and promote understanding of all issues by asking trainees to reflect on the materials used, and their own experiences. Trainees are given clear guidance on

their rights and responsibilities and those of the provider and employers. The company's commitment to equality of opportunity is reinforced through its training charter which clearly states what is expected from the trainee and what the trainee can expect from NDCCI.

49. There are excellent links with external agencies to promote and foster participation in training across the whole community. Joint projects include work with the probation service; support groups for different categories of ex-offenders; and local schools, which specialise in trainees with additional needs, and social services. In addition, the company also provides information, advice and training to pre-16 year olds. These projects include providing work experience opportunities, supporting trainees with additional needs into employment and sharing good practice between staff. NDCCI is also involved with higher education establishments in research projects that focus on the value of work experience and the funding of training for trainees with additional needs.

50. All complaints are recorded on a complaint record form. This form details the nature of the complaint, identifies the person responsible for investigating it and the corrective action taken. All complaints are logged with the quality manager who also checks that complaints have been dealt with and action on them has been completed. Complaints are dealt with promptly and senior managers take responsibility for ensuring issues are resolved. Where problems have arisen in the workplace, trainees have been moved to alternative employers. Employers who fail to recognise or resolve equality of opportunity problems are not allowed to take trainees on placement again.

51. The company has a good track record for training people from a wide range of backgrounds, especially those with additional learning difficulties and disabilities and disaffected learners. Little use is made of statistical data on these trainees, however, for the purposes of planning and decision making. The company collects information on trainees who commence and complete programmes successfully but this is not used systematically to identify trends in trainees' recruitment and achievements.

Trainee support

Grade 1

52. NDCCI operates an open access policy for recruitment. All applicants are interviewed. The interview is used as a fact-finding exercise, to identify trainees' additional learning needs, previous experience, prior achievements and occupational preferences. Induction takes place in-house or at the work placement. Trainees are given basic skills tests and aptitude tests. Their additional learning needs are carefully identified. Trainees receive support from staff with counselling qualifications throughout their programme. Numerous thank you letters are received from former trainees. The inspectors identified strengths additional to those cited in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ innovative approach to recruitment
- ◆ effective support and guidance for trainees
- ◆ strong partnerships with employers
- ◆ excellent support for trainees under 16
- ◆ good progress by trainees through clearly defined routes
- ◆ outstanding management of trainee support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little accreditation of prior learning.

53. Advertising campaigns are used creatively to market courses. The company is promoted through references to issues topical with young people. All applicants are interviewed carefully to identify training for them which meets their needs. Initial assessment is comprehensive. Where appropriate, trainees' previous achievements and experiences are taken into account when drawing up individual training programmes. All trainees receive a systematic induction to their programme. Induction is carried out through the use of learning packs. The trainees are able to recall the content of these and they cover health and safety, equal opportunities, the trainee agreement, the training charter, and an introduction to NVQ and key skills. NDCCI uses a variety of incentives to attract young people to training. For example, the company offers driving lessons, cinema tickets and a £10 voucher to those who undergo an initial assessment for the modern apprenticeship programme.

54. NDCCI has developed good working partnerships with employers, most of whom plan and support training for those on placements. In the early stages of training, NDCCI staff carry out more reviews of trainees' progress than are required contractually, with the aim of keeping the retention rate high. Some employers carry out their own reviews as a means of identifying individuals for promotion. All training staff are allocated a message book, which allows trainees to make contact with individual staff, who are then required to respond quickly. Flexible modes of attendance patterns are organised for trainees with special difficulties, and transport is arranged for them. Outward bound activities are provided for all foundation trainees. These activities are linked to the world of work and trainees draw on their experience of them when carrying out training exercises. Organised social events are planned and these include, ten pin bowling, go-karting and visits to local discos. Trainees are also encouraged to meet socially.

55. The company's links with schools on specific programmes are highly effective in helping staff to motivate disaffected individuals. Thirty-nine steps is a 39-week programme for year 10 and 11 students from schools. It is designed to help young people become more employable by giving them an understanding of the world of work. It covers health and safety, lifting and handling, first aid, fire safety and food hygiene. There are also opportunities for trainees to take part in team activities, practise interview techniques and compile a CV. A key skills work experience

initiative is being implemented for local secondary school students. This enables students to sample the working environment and produce a portfolio as evidence towards certification of key skills at level 1. This initiative is being implemented across all schools in North Derbyshire and NDCCI receives invitations to provide speakers on the initiative at conferences across the country.

56. Trainees receive good support to help them to progress in the business administration programme and four trainees have progressed from level 1 & 2 to level 4. Management arrangements and lines of accountability for trainee support are clear. The duties of those responsible for trainee support are clearly defined. All trainees know the training managers. The list of 10 qualified first-aiders, with their contact location, is displayed in prominent positions around the centre. Evacuation and emergency accident procedures are set out clearly and all staff are informed of them. These procedures are updated regularly.

57. Some of the company's staff are qualified in the accreditation of prior learning. In practice, however, little accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience is carried out. Trainees with appropriate prior achievements are not enabled to progress towards their qualification at a faster rate.

Management of training

Grade 2

58. NDCCI has 67 staff with 34 employed in the training division. The two senior managers report to the general manager and chief executive who operate across the company. Teams of project and training officers, along with tutors and assessors, report to the senior managers. This is a clear management structure understood by all staff. Management systems and procedures work well. NDCCI has achieved the Investors in People award. Staff are set annual objectives and monthly targets. The inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment and awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive staff development programme
- ◆ clear and measurable operating targets
- ◆ excellent communications system for staff
- ◆ good use of labour market intelligence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some insufficiently thorough monitoring of subcontractors' provision

59. All staff are involved in drawing up the company's business plan. The business planning process begins with all staff spending a day away from the office to discuss past performance and formulate the business plan for the forthcoming year. The plan is then drafted for consultation at the next team meeting where everyone has the opportunity to agree on its content. The business

plan contains strategic priorities, which are aligned with measurable operational aims and objectives. The staff development plan is contained within the business plan. All staff receive a hard copy of the business plan and have access to it electronically. The company intends to use the self-assessment process as part of the business planning process.

60. NDCCI operates a culture of open management. Senior managers are visible and accessible. Great emphasis is placed on teamwork at all levels. Staff are enthusiastic and well motivated. Staff turnover is very low. Recruitment procedures are fair and rigorous. A job application form has been introduced to ensure that equality of opportunity is upheld. New staff follow a comprehensive induction programme. Strong emphasis is placed on continuing staff development. Additional training courses are provided to extend staff knowledge and awareness, particularly in relation to certain client groups. These include ex-offenders and people with alcohol and drug dependency. The training needs of staff are identified through the staff appraisal system and they are taken into account when drawing up the staff development plan. The company gives financial and pastoral support to staff to help them meet their individual job-related training needs. Staff training is validated and evaluated by managers both verbally and by questionnaire. Annual targets and objectives are set for staff at their annual appraisal. Monthly objectives are agreed with staff at monthly team meetings. Their job descriptions are updated during their annual appraisal and they use them as working documents. The monthly staff meetings are complemented by weekly briefings from managers to ensure that all staff are fully informed of business developments and trends. Three full staff meetings per year are convened to discuss all aspects of the business.

61. Cross-departmental working groups develop working practices and review job roles. NDCCI has introduced a 'buddying' system to enable staff to work-shadow colleagues to gain appreciation of other job roles within the organisation. Staff procedures are clearly set down in writing. All staff receive the staff handbook, and this is updated annually. All staff have access to the NDCCI intranet which carries the staff procedures, the business plan and an update on all CCI activities both business and social. Staff also have access to the NVQ database and the Internet. All NDCCI systems are year 2,000 compliant. All staff interviewed thought very highly of NDCCI as an employer.

62. NDCCI management-information systems facilitate monitoring of performance against contract requirements. This information is easily accessible and current. Youth programmes are showing continuous improvement and are amply meeting the requirements of TEC contracts. NDCCI has a key skills co-ordinator and a key skills tutor to ensure development of key skills provision across all programme areas. A dedicated health and safety specialist is employed by NDCCI and a rigorous risk assessment is carried out on all work placements.

63. As a chamber of commerce and industry sharing premises with the Business Link, NDCCI is well placed to react to labour market intelligence. The company

has provided training programmes such as the legal executives programme, to meet identified market needs. NDCCI works in partnership with local businesses, secondary and further education and the careers and employment services to meet local needs. NDCCI staff act as mentors for young people in local schools as part of the pre-16 key skills project.

64. The company recognises the importance of co-ordinating training. A member of staff is designated to meet with each subcontractor at least three times a year. The quality of training and assessment provided by subcontractors is variable and in some instances, it is less than satisfactory. Service level agreements with subcontractors' departmental managers have recently been implemented but their impact is not yet measurable. Some subcontracted provision is poorly managed and some trainees on subcontracted programmes make insufficient progress.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

65. NDCCI meets the quality assurance standards of the TEC and the four awarding bodies with which it works. There is a part-time quality assurance manager whose main responsibility is the management of the ISO 9002 quality assurance system. NDCCI achieved the ISO 9002 quality assurance standard in 1992 and was re-accredited in 1995 and 1998. It has comprehensive policies and procedures that apply to the majority of its operations. Trained staff monitor compliance with these across departments. The procedures include the use of questionnaires to obtain trainees' evaluation of their induction and trainees' perceptions of their programmes, and surveys of trainees' destinations. Inspectors agreed with five of the seven strengths, and with the one weakness, cited in the self-assessment report. They found two additional strengths and two additional weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ linking of quality assurance to business planning
- ◆ extensive monitoring and evaluation of the company's performance
- ◆ effective use of feedback
- ◆ sharing of good practice
- ◆ prompt action to resolve problems
- ◆ thorough self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient formal evaluation of training
- ◆ some unsatisfactory internal verification practices

66. This is a self-critical company. By its policies and procedures, the company recognises that good quality assurance is fundamental to the achievement of the

continuous improvement in provision. Quality assurance is securely linked to business planning. The performance of staff is monitored and evaluated. The company takes effective action to address any problems that arise over the implementation of training courses. Under the company's procedures all complaints are analysed by the quality assurance manager and action is taken to address them within a specific timescale. The quality assurance manager also seeks to determine whether there are any emerging trends that require specific action. Feedback from trainees and employers through the use of questionnaires is analysed by the training manager. Trainees complete a "feel good" questionnaire and a questionnaire when they leave. Their responses to the latter provide information on their destinations. Any issues that arise are dealt with and the action is recorded. Training officers report back on issues that arise from trainees' responses to questionnaires. Action on these has led to radical changes in the training provided in some sectors. In one instance, trainees expressed concerns about their accountancy training. A well-designed questionnaire was issued to trainees seeking their views on the quality of the training and assessment they were receiving. Appropriate action was then taken to address the problems raised. Managers regularly attend training sessions provided by NDCCI staff and give informal feedback to staff.

67. NDCCI has introduced preferred supplier status for work placement providers and the employers it works with. It has also recently introduced service level agreements for its subcontractors. The service level agreements stipulate that there should be six-monthly formal reports on the trainees' progress and that the company should be notified of any changes of trainer or conditions. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of subcontractors are carried out indirectly through the regular reviews of trainees' progress on subcontracted provision, data on trainees' achievements and the regular contact the company's staff have with subcontractors. In three cases, action has been taken to resolve problems with subcontractors' provision. In one instance, the company took provision away from one local subcontractor who failed to meet the requisite standards. Over the last four years, some dental nursing and accountancy training have been moved to more responsive subcontractors. In the case of a subcontractor whose motor vehicle training was unsatisfactory, NDCCI arranged for the subcontractor's staff to visit another training provider in a different area to learn how they operated. A number of different approaches have been used to try to resolve issues in the area of legal executive training.

68. The training management team encourage the sharing of good practice through a number of different activities. NDCCI has a 'quality group' which evolved from cross-company customer care team meetings. The group looks at issues relating to the quality assurance system but also acts as a forum for sharing approaches and ideas between colleagues from different departments. The management team and the group have recently explored the use of benchmarks in the quality assurance system and the application of the business excellence model, a European quality award. Good practice is also shared through monthly team meetings and inter-departmental activities, such as staff work-shadowing colleagues for a day. NDCCI

has introduced annual meetings for assessors and six-monthly meetings for verifiers. Meetings to date have been mainly concerned with the dissemination of information and the standardisation of operations.

69. Internal verification is not included within the formal policies or procedures of the company's ISO system. There have been recent attempts to co-ordinate the operation of internal verification but there are major variations in the way the system operates across sectors. These variations are significant and range from no sampling plan and little or no recording of activities in one large sector, to excellent practice by one subcontractor providing construction training. NDCCI has appointed a co-ordinator who has issued a procedures document to all internal verifiers. A new auditing system is about to be introduced. The standard procedure does not, however, provide detailed guidance for internal verifiers. It does not indicate the format of an internal verification plan or provide guidance on the size of the sample to be used.

70. NDCCI's self-assessment process is rigorous and thorough. The self-assessment report is well written, concise and informative. It provides detailed judgements on the performance of the company and these are well supported with evidence. The company failed to identify some significant strengths and gave too much weight to some minor issues. Inspectors found a few additional weaknesses and considered some of the strengths to be no more than normal practice. Overall, however, the self-assessment report provided a clear and comprehensive assessment of the organisation's provision.