



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

REINSPECTION SEPTEMBER 2000

North West Training Council

SUMMARY

North West Training Council provides satisfactory training for a wide range of engineering and construction programmes. Off-the-job training sessions are generally well planned, but some opportunities to gather and assess workplace evidence are not taken. Business administration training is satisfactory. Business administration and accountancy assessment is carefully planned. Gaps in trainees' knowledge are identified during assessment, and additional training is offered. At the time of the first inspection, customer service training was poor. Assessment evidence for customer service relied too heavily on witness statements and written summaries, and trainees' portfolios were poor. No check was made to ensure that job-specific training matched the standards required to achieve the NVQ for either business administration or customer service. The reinspection found customer service trainees had a full understanding of the NVQ requirements. North West Training Council promotes and monitors its activities to ensure that there is no bias against staff or trainees. Support for trainees is good. Trainees are visited regularly, and strong links have been built between staff at North West Training Council and trainees' employers. Management of training is satisfactory. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. At the time of the first inspection, quality assurance lacked rigour and there was inadequate control of on-the-job training. By the time of reinspection, systems introduced to monitor subcontractors and gather feedback on the quality of training from employers and trainees had rectified many weaknesses.

As a result of the reinspection of North West Training Council, the original published report text for retailing and customer service and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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	3
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	5

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training in construction
- ◆ well-planned and -structured engineering foundation training
- ◆ quick and sensitive response to complaints and grievances
- ◆ good induction to employment and qualification for trainees
- ◆ good communication with all stakeholders
- ◆ good approach to widening participation for disadvantaged and under-represented groups

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped key skills in construction, business administration and customer service programmes
- ◆ absence of work-based assessment for motor-vehicle training
- ◆ ineffective review process
- ◆ inadequate control of on-the-job training

INTRODUCTION

1. North West Training Council (NWTC) was formed in 1963. In 1961, a survey conducted by a Merseyside industrial association concluded that Merseyside school leavers had significantly less chance of obtaining an apprenticeship which would lead to skilled and stable employment than young people elsewhere in the country. A group of employers met to discuss and agree the introduction of a group training scheme. NWTC was established as a result of this initiative. At that time, a shortage of engineering apprentices existed, and NWTC was formed to provide this training service. Financial support came from local industrialists, and particularly from the engineering industry's existing industrial training board. NWTC identified a number of companies requiring training services. These companies formed the membership and provided the core business of NWTC. Initially focusing on the demand for engineering training, the organisation developed a reputation for the quality of its training. Member companies gradually widened their demands from engineering apprenticeships to a range of engineering skills programmes and training in other occupational areas, including construction, business administration and skills enhancement for adults. Equally, member companies sought consultancy from NWTC to assist with particular areas of difficulty. This led to the introduction of supervisory, management, and health and safety programmes. The organisation now has over 350 member companies. It operates through sites in Bootle, Chester, Holywell and Speke.

2. NWTC is a large, regional, private-sector training organisation employing around 80 full- and part-time staff. The organisation provides a wide range of programmes, including training in basic skills, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4, supervisory training and expert consultancy. At the time of the first inspection, there were 549 trainees. At the time of the reinspection, there were 486 trainees. The organisation provides programmes for five training and enterprise councils (TECs). They are Merseyside TEC (which acted as the co-ordinating TEC for the inspection process), Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral TEC (CEWTEC), Lancashire Area West TEC (LAWTEC), North and Mid Cheshire TEC (NORMID TEC), St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE), and one Welsh TEC. Current contracts cover modern apprenticeships, national traineeships, and other work-based training programmes for young people. The organisation also acts as a subcontractor, providing the training elements for the employment option of the New Deal for the Employment Service, as well as non-government-funded (industrial) programmes. In addition to the training and assessment carried out by its own staff, NWTC subcontracts training and assessment to 10 local further education colleges.

3. There are significant differences in the achievement rates for school leavers in the areas where NWTC has contracts. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 53 per cent in Cheshire, 47 per cent in Lancashire, 45.3 per cent in the Wirral, 44.4 per cent in Sefton, 39.5 per cent in St Helens, 30.9 per cent

in Liverpool and 22.9 per cent in Knowsley. The national average was 46.3 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above for those same areas was 54.5 per cent, 48 per cent, 46.9 per cent, 48.7 per cent, 43.4 per cent, 32.4 per cent and 23.6 per cent respectively, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

4. Unemployment varies across the geographic areas served by NWTC. There are areas of high unemployment. There is 10.9 per cent unemployment in some Liverpool boroughs. The proportion of the local population who are members of minority ethnic groups also varies across the districts served by NWTC. For example, members of minority ethnic groups make up less than 1 per cent of the population in St Helens, but account for a much larger proportion of the population in areas such as Merseyside.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Through its contracts with several TECs, NWTC took the opportunity to train a range of staff in the self-assessment process. This training led to the production of an initial self-assessment report in the summer of 1998. A number of initiatives have resulted from the action plan drawn up as part of this initial self-assessment. A further self-assessment process was undertaken prior to the first inspection, and an updated action plan was in the early stage of implementation. The completed action plan was used to address the issues raised at the first inspection. Following consultation with staff, a report to evaluate the action plan was compiled, which detailed progress to May 2000 against the action plan and gave revised grades for the two areas to be reinspected.

6. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 37 days at NWTC in June 1999. Inspectors visited five subcontracted training providers, including colleges, and 42 employers' premises. They interviewed 98 trainees, 42 of NWTC's staff and 60 staff of employers, including managers. Inspectors completed 17 observations of training and assessment activities. They reviewed trainees' records and paperwork, a wide range of scheme records, external audit reports and external verifiers' reports.

7. A team of two inspectors spent a total of four days in NWTC during September 2000. A total of four trainees were interviewed and their records and paperwork were inspected. Other trainees' files and records were inspected, as were awarding bodies' materials and NWTC's documents. The TECs' audits and contracts were also examined. Three employers were interviewed and three work placements were visited. Eight interviews were conducted with NWTC's staff.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2				2
Engineering			2	3		5
Business administration	2	4	3	1		10
Total	2	6	5	4	0	17

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. There are 94 trainees in this occupational area. A breakdown by occupational area shows trainees on programmes in the following trades: 39 in plumbing, 20 in carpentry and joinery, two in brickwork, two in plastering, one in painting and decorating, 14 in electrical installation, nine in gas installation, three in heating

and ventilating, and four in refrigeration. There are 61 modern apprentices, one national trainee, and 32 trainees on other youth training programmes. One trainee in carpentry and joinery is female, and three trainees are endorsed by the careers service as having learning difficulties. Those following the carpentry and joinery and plumbing programmes attend the provider's training centre in Bootle for the off-the-job part of their training. Attendance at the centre is on a day-release or block-release basis to suit the needs of employer and trainee. Trainees in other occupational areas attend one of six subcontracted FE colleges. One of the colleges is an approved centre for the plumbing NVQ level 3 qualification, and works in partnership with NWTC to assess and verify this award. Trainees are employed or on placement with a range of construction companies in north Liverpool. There are two large employers, including the local authority, but most trainees are placed with companies employing less than five people. In the self-assessment report, construction is graded within the engineering aspect of provision. Differences in the delivery and programme requirements of the respective programmes made validation of the proposed strengths and weaknesses difficult. Inspectors identified a balance of strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ carefully planned workplace activities include NVQ requirements
- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ additional qualifications achieved by trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped provision for key skills
- ◆ missed opportunities to gather evidence in the workplace
- ◆ no assessment by direct observation in the workplace

9. Trainees benefit from the high quality of off-the-job training. Practical sessions are carried out in a realistic working environment. Trainees in carpentry and joinery benefit from many maintenance and development projects carried out in NWTC's large training centre. Projects undertaken by trainees are carefully linked to the NVQ award criteria. Trainees' progress towards their target qualification is well monitored. All trainees interviewed during inspection were able to state their current achievements, and knew what was required of them to complete their qualification.

10. On-the-job training is organised so that trainees are able to gain a full range of experiences in the workplace. The provider works effectively with employers to ensure that trainees are able to access the full range of experiences necessary for the NVQ qualification. When necessary, trainees are moved temporarily to alternative employers, or change sections within large employers, to meet all the demands of the qualification. Staff involved in the training process are well qualified, and hold appropriate occupational and assessor qualifications.

Employers are committed to trainees' development, and many trainees benefit from the achievement of additional qualifications. Those on the plumbing programme gain the full range of gas-safety assessments, provided their workplace experience supports the qualification. This is done at no extra cost to trainees or employers. Trainees work to a high occupational standard, and are given responsibilities in the workplace. For example, one trainee near to completion of the plumbing modern apprenticeship was installing central heating in the home of an elderly person. He was assisted by an NVQ level 2 trainee. The work undertaken was of a high standard, and care was taken to observe the correct safety regulations. Progress on this job was monitored by the quality department of the local council, and the standard of work was said to be excellent.

11. All trainees, including those with particular learning needs, are well supported and able to work at their own pace. Tutors for off-the-job training at Bootle are well respected, and motivate trainees to achieve their maximum potential. Some trainees identified the supportive environment provided by NWTC as instrumental in assisting them to achieve their first-ever qualification. Some trainees who had previously received additional learning support were working towards NVQ level 2 and 3 qualifications.

12. Opportunities to gain evidence from activities carried out in the workplace are not maximised. Trainees undertaking valuable tasks are not always encouraged to present these activities as evidence towards the target qualification. Much of the assessment process is carried out by simulation when attending off-the-job training sessions. Opportunities are missed for the occupationally competent training officers to carry out assessments in the workplace. Low priority is given to encouraging trainees to present evidence for the key skills qualification. In many cases, trainees registered for over 17 months on the plumbing modern apprenticeship had not heard of key skills, or were unaware of their requirement as part of the programme. Trainees had received an introduction to key skills and been given books explaining key skills and assessment requirements in greater detail.

13. Combined achievement figures for the construction programmes for the year 1995-96 identify 18 per cent of trainees achieving their programme target, and 82 per cent early leavers. The year 1996-97 produced figures of 19 per cent achievement, and 81 per cent recorded as early leavers. In the year 1997-98, there was an improved achievement figure of 48 per cent, with early leavers accounting for 52 per cent of those leaving training. Although improving, there is clearly a considerable amount of work to be done to make achievement and retention levels to an acceptable standard.

Engineering

Grade 3

14. There are 402 engineering trainees through contracts with four TECs and one CCTE within the region (214 through Mersey TEC; 72 through CEWTEC; 36 through NORMID TEC; 14 through St Helens CCTE; and 66 through LAWTEC).

Of these trainees, 298 are modern apprentices, one is a national trainee and 103 are trainees on other youth training programmes. The automotive training programmes available include light-vehicle NVQ levels 2 and 3, heavy-vehicle NVQ level 3, vehicle-body NVQ levels 2 and 3, vehicle-refinishing NVQ level 3 and vehicle-parts NVQ level 2. Other engineering programmes include electrical, security installations (security industry training organisation, SITO), maintenance, mechanical/production and welding/fabrication NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Engineering trainees attend NWTC's main Bootle site, its Speke training centre, or one of 10 local FE colleges for their day-release off-the-job training. The organisation provides in-house training one day a week for engineering at its Speke premises, as well as First and National Certificates in engineering at the Bootle centre. First-year engineering trainees start their skills development by completing the NVQ level 2 engineering foundation programme. This programme is offered to employers, either as a block release of 26 weeks in year one, or on a day-release basis over two years. The provider's instructors in the Speke training centre undertake all assessment for the foundation programme. On completion of foundation skills training, trainees begin skills development at NVQ level 3 in the workplace. They are supported through visits to the workplace by one of the provider's training officers. The training officers also carry out assessment of trainees' NVQ level 3 evidence, plus assessment of key skills. Motor-vehicle trainees develop a portfolio of evidence at NVQ level 2 and level 3 through the use of 'job cards', supported by expert witness testimony from the workplace. The majority of motor-vehicle trainees attend an FE college for their day-release course; lecturers in the college assess their evidence. Some trainees attend day-release sessions at the motor-vehicle workshops in NWTC's main site. The motor vehicle training workshop has an integrated classroom facility, where trainees receive portfolio assessment, background knowledge and additional skills development. The self-assessment report identifies five strengths and three weaknesses for this aspect of provision. Inspectors considered some as normal practice; others relate to the quality of trainee support and other generic aspects. However, inspectors found the following strengths and weaknesses - some of which NWTC has begun to address in its self-assessment action plan - and awarded a lower grade than that given by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and structured engineering foundation training
- ◆ enthusiastic trainees who value their training
- ◆ good work-based assessment of key skills in engineering
- ◆ extensive range of learning opportunities from high-quality work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of workplace assessments in motor vehicle training
- ◆ lack of rigour in workplace evidence
- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills assessment in motor vehicle training

- ◆ some poor off-the-job training
- ◆ resources at NWTC not yet fully developed to support some theory

15. Recruitment of engineering trainees is often through personal recommendations from friends or relatives. This is reflected in trainees' comments during inspection about their enthusiasm and the value of their training. The good quality of engineering and motor-vehicle employers means that trainees have a wide range of opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge. In some cases, trainees who are unable to fulfil the performance criteria and range requirements of the NVQ are transferred to other engineering and motor-vehicle companies to gain hands-on experience.

16. The engineering foundation training is well structured and delivered, and assessment is carried out by competent and experienced staff. Trainees are enthusiastic about the opportunities provided for skills development over a range of engineering units at NVQ level 2. Trainees obviously enjoy their foundation training, and both they and their employers value this training as an effective means of ensuring that trainees are 'ready for the workplace' when they leave the centre. The programme in each of the specialist skill areas consists of a series of practical exercises designed to develop trainees' skill levels. Trainees are assessed on 'jobs' against specified criteria. Trainees clearly understand the assessment process, and the need for any remedial work is fully explained. Trainees are able to monitor their own progress by means of a variety of tracking documents used across the different skill areas within the centre. However, in some skill areas trainees are unable to identify clearly the NVQ elements and performance criteria relating to the 'jobs'. Some trainees display pride in their portfolio of graphical descriptions of jobs undertaken. At the request of employers, some block-release trainees continue their basic skills training beyond the 26-week full-time programme, which enables trainees to achieve up to eight more NVQ level 2 units. Engineering modern apprentices are encouraged and supported in obtaining work-based evidence for their key skills units once they have started their NVQ level 3 in the workplace. This good practice ensures that evidence for key skills is relevant to the engineering discipline, and gives 'added value' to the training programme.

17. NWTC provides its own accredited technician theory qualifications in mechanical and electrical engineering at the Bootle centre. In classes seen during inspection, trainees were passive observers and little use was made of different types of training methods to vary the pace of the session. Trainees copied diagrams from the whiteboard and wrote dictated notes, but were not actively involved in a learning process. The technician classes at Bootle have underdeveloped laboratory facilities for practical work. However, considerable amounts of money have recently been spent on new electrical and mechanical equipment, in compliance with action requested by the external verifier. While some efforts have been made in the provision of some electronic practical sessions, most of the equipment needed for electrical and mechanical experiments is not available to the standard required. It is anticipated that the new practical laboratories will be ready for use in September, one year after the courses have started. The amount of electrical test

equipment available is sparse. Day release trainees who take their NVQ level 2 engineering foundation programme at the Speke centre do not receive their theory training until after their practical training has been completed.

18. For motor-vehicle programmes, NWTC and the two colleges visited during inspection carry out insufficient workplace assessment by direct observation. Assessment documents fail to record the oral questions and trainees' responses, feedback on trainees' performance, clear details of assessment performance, or validating signatures of assessors and trainees. For both engineering and motor-vehicle programmes, there is an over-reliance on the use of job cards and/or logbook entries, and witness signatures from workplace supervisors. In some cases, no checks are made on the authenticity of signatures on witness statements for engineering programmes, and in motor-vehicle training there is a lack of rigorous monitoring of the trainees' ability to use all the equipment required by the NVQ performance criteria and range statements.

19. Motor-vehicle trainees' awareness of key skills is limited in most cases. Some motor-vehicle modern apprentices who attend college for their training have had no opportunity to use workplace evidence for assessment of their key skills. This is because the colleges concerned develop and assess key skills entirely within the college environment. Other trainees have been held up by NWTC, which did not have systems in place to start collecting evidence for key skills at the beginning of the training programme. Some mapping of key skills against the occupational programme has taken place, but has not yet been fully implemented in all cases. NWTC has organised a two-day information technology course for all of its modern apprentices and national trainees who do not attend any of the colleges. This programme is also offered to trainees in small engineering companies if they do not have access to computerised technology in the workplace.

20. In one motor-vehicle training session observed, trainees worked through student learning books. There was little interaction between tutor and trainees, with minimal stimulation and reinforcement of the learning process. The motor vehicle workshop has suitable training units for the size of groups, although equipment is outdated. Of the three training vehicles within the centre, only one is of current technology which meets the Motor Industry Training Council's guidelines. However, company and trainees' vehicles are used at times for skills development and simulated assessment purposes. There is an over-reliance on replication of the working environment, rather than using real work activity for assessment.

21. Achievement figures for engineering and motor-vehicle programmes are as follows: in 1995-96, 453 trainees started, 277 left training early and 49.8 per cent (138) achieved a qualification. In 1996-97, 431 trainees started, 208 left training early, and 49.5 per cent (103) achieved a qualification. In 1997-98, 373 trainees started, 311 left early, and 37.3 per cent (116) achieved a qualification. Figures for 1998-99 are: 432 trainees started, 205 left training early, and 215 NVQs were achieved, which is equivalent to 104.9 per cent achievement. These results show a trend of consolidated provision for engineering and motor-vehicle training, with a good standard of achievements. Some improvement this year in trainees'

attendance and achievement is due to NWTC's initiative of developing its own training provision for engineering technician and motor-vehicle programmes, but it is too early to see the results of the company starting its own provision in the area.

Business administration

Grade 3

22. There are 40 young people in training in business administration and accounting. Of these, 24 are modern apprentices and 16 are on other youth training programmes. Modern apprentices are employed in a variety of local companies in the professional, commercial and industrial sectors. Of the trainees on other youth programmes, 14 are employed and two are on placement with local employers. Trainees are following NVQs at levels 2 and 3. With two exceptions, modern apprentices are working towards NVQ level 3 in administration or accounting. The other two are working for NVQs at level 4. Trainees can start at any time. Employers carry out all business administration training on the job. Training officers from NWTC visit trainees regularly to provide assessment and carry out progress reviews. Employers carry out most accounting training on the job, and assessment and review are provided during workplace visits by NWTC staff. Some training and assessment in accounting are provided by local colleges. The self-assessment report claims many strengths; some were not confirmed, and some relate to the generic aspect of quality assurance. The self-assessment report recognises some weaknesses. Again, some were not confirmed, some represent no more than normal practice, and some relate to generic aspects. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent visits to trainees
- ◆ good personalised portfolios with wide range of evidence
- ◆ thorough and specific assessment planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not yet integrated into occupational training
- ◆ trainees' own achievement records not updated
- ◆ on-the-job training not informed by NVQ requirements

23. For some accounting trainees, training and assessment for vocational and theory training take place at college. Trainees are well supported by the use of open-learning material. In business administration, all vocational training is carried out by employers. Training officers from NWTC make regular visits to monitor trainees' well-being and carry out assessments. Visits are geared to individual trainees' needs. At each visit, the trainee and trainer agree on an action plan, and list specific tasks with target dates for completion. Visits take place every two or three weeks. One visit in every three months is a formal progress review.

Portfolios are good, well structured and contain a wide range of evidence from the workplace. The internal verification process is thorough and rigorous. Working relationships among trainees, trainers and employers are supportive and effective. Trainees are well motivated, particularly since a recent restructuring of NWTC merged the role of training officer with that of visiting assessor. Many trainees welcome this, saying that they find it helpful and less confusing to have only one point of contact with NWTC for both review and assessment.

24. Key skills are not yet fully implemented at NVQ level 3. Trainees have heard of key skills, but do not know what they are. Some have a key skills booklet, but no trainees have begun to work on them. The organisation has recognised this shortfall in its self-assessment action plan.

25. At induction, trainees, together with their training officer and their employer's representative, complete a 'skillscan' form to map the content of their job against the headings for NVQ units and elements. This form is not effective as a tracking system for trainees. Trainees do not keep it up to date, or do not keep it in their portfolios. They cannot easily point to the units already signed off, or to those almost ready for assessment. Completion of the 'skillscan' form does not ensure that the quality and content of the training provided by the employer will meet NVQ requirements. Training officers do not routinely give employers greater detail of NVQ requirements. Assessors rely on the assessment planning, assessment and review processes to identify any significant gaps in work experience as they occur. The organisation has a library of training materials which it supplies to trainees where a gap is identified in their knowledge. NWTC does not routinely ask for copies of employers' training plans for trainees, nor does it liaise with employers to establish plans which cover both vocational and theoretical knowledge.

26. Combined achievement figures for all training centres for the year 1995-96 identify 20 per cent of trainees as achieving their target qualification, and 80 per cent as early leavers. In 1996-97, 35 per cent achieved their target qualification, and 65 per cent were recorded as early leavers. In 1997-98, 21 per cent achieved their target qualification, and 79 per cent left training without completing their qualification.

Retailing & customer service (customer service)

Grade 3

27. NWTC has been an accredited centre to offer customer service NVQs since 1996. The programme was suspended late in 1996 because of a lack of suitably qualified staff, and was re-established in April 1999 with new staff. There are four trainees working towards customer service NVQs. They are national trainees who are all employed. Trainees work in a wet-fish shop, a pet shop, and at NWTC. Employers provide the training as part of their own training programmes. Assessment and progress reviews are carried out by NWTC's training officers. The company produced a report evaluating its progress against the action plan in

preparation for the reinspection. This showed the weaknesses identified at the first inspection and the actions taken to rectify these. This report detailed the actions taken and the target dates for their completion.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor assessment practice
- ◆ key skills not integrated
- ◆ no monitoring of trainees' skills and knowledge training
- ◆ no learning resources

28. On reinspection, the inspectors found that all but one of the weaknesses had been satisfactorily addressed. The remaining weakness concerned the slow integration of key skills into the national traineeship programme. This has been specified in the action plan and has not yet been fully addressed. An additional weakness was identified. There has been a re-allocation of staff in this area. A previous associate assessor has become a full-time employee and an existing internal verifier at NWTC has been appointed to the customer service programme. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in NWTC's report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ high level of understanding by trainees of the NVQ process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow integration of key skills
- ◆ low achievement and retention rates

29. There is a wide range of good work placements. Staff at NWTC are well qualified and occupationally experienced. A recently appointed assessor is currently working towards the key skills assessor's award. Employers and workplace supervisors are supportive, and take an interest in trainees' progress. There are good working relationships among NWTC's staff, trainees and employers. Training officers from NWTC visit trainees in their workplace every two weeks, for action-planning and reviews of portfolio evidence. The high frequency of these visits maintains trainees' interest and motivation. The internal verification process is satisfactory.

30. Training officers agree on action plans with each of the trainees to gather evidence for their portfolios. This is recorded on the assessors' reports and a target date for the next visit is agreed. Some assessment is based on direct observation of trainees in the workplace. Portfolios contain written storyboards, witness testimonies, work products and observation, which also indicate when there has been verbal questioning to test trainees' understanding. Trainees' knowledge and understanding of the NVQ process has increased. This is a result of clearer explanations of the standards by the new assessor. Trainees demonstrate a clear understanding of which training programme they are on, and what their training

programme includes. Trainees are encouraged to label the items of evidence in their portfolios to show which specific requirements of their NVQs they meet. Trainees then discuss the evidence with the assessor, who confirms that the evidence requirements have been met. The trainee completes the record of the evidence matching the relevant NVQ standard.

31. Training is the responsibility of employers. There are informal discussions with employers to continue the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Employers are now more involved in the analysis of trainees' job roles and activities which takes place at the beginning of training and at stages throughout the programme. Employers are now required to sign their agreement of the analysis of the match of the trainees' jobs to the skills the trainees need to learn to achieve the NVQ. In one company, where an assessment of the trainees' job roles has identified a need for additional training, arrangements have been made for the trainees to use the company's own computer to produce work-related documents for inclusion in their portfolios. Within NWTC itself there has been a similar discussion to assist trainees in collecting relevant evidence from work products by devising tasks suitable to collect evidence. Employers do have access to the trainees' portfolios to familiarise themselves with the qualifications trainees are pursuing. The organisation has invested in a range of structured learning resource materials to supplement gaps in trainees' knowledge. Trainees have access to a varied range of learning resources in the library at the training centre. These include computer packages and textbooks. Trainees are also given guides on identifying sources of evidence and choosing recording methods. A support pack is available for the assessor.

32. Key skills training and assessment have not yet started, owing to the recent reintroduction of the NVQ in customer service. However, trainees are fully aware of the key skills units. All trainees have copies in their portfolios of the standards they need to work towards, together with an overview of the units and what they entail. The trainees complete a key skills assessment to identify their training needs against the relevant units.

33. The NVQ in customer service which has been offered since April 1999 is too new for there to be any information on trainees' achievements. During the period since the first inspection, the numbers have dropped from 13 to four. Of the nine trainees who left the programme, six have progressed to jobs or are still employed with the same employer and have moved to higher-level training programmes. Their transitions have been carefully managed. This has obviously affected the statistics for retention. Three trainees achieved their intended qualifications. NWTC made a business decision to delay the recruitment of additional trainees to the customer service programme until the reinspection had taken place. The four trainees still on the programme have had a reintroduction into the customer service qualification together with the appropriate key skills. The two new members of staff have dealt with this reintroduction in a sensitive manner. These four trainees have been in training since the first inspection.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

34. The organisation has a clear commitment to equal opportunities, and has recently revised its equal opportunities policy. The policy meets the requirements of all the TECs and the CCTE with which the organisation has contracts. All staff and trainees are issued with a copy of the equal opportunities policy. All recruitment and selection activities are monitored for bias. There is a grievance and complaints procedure. The organisation monitors staff and trainees' applications for disability, ethnicity and gender. In addition, NWTC participates in a number of schemes aimed at targeting under-represented groups, widening participation, and helping young disaffected people in the areas in which it operates. Of the trainees, 1.2 per cent have specific learning support needs. There are 480 male and 26 female trainees registered with NWTC, of whom 0.6 per cent have physical disabilities. The self-assessment report identifies two strengths and three weaknesses for this aspect of provision. Rather than concentrating on the internal quality assurance of equal opportunities for staff and trainees, the self-assessment report focuses on external contacts. Inspectors identified four strengths and two weaknesses, and awarded a higher grade than that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ sensitive and quick response to complaints and grievances
- ◆ active approach to widening participation from under-represented and disadvantaged groups
- ◆ equal opportunities policy comprehensively reviewed
- ◆ recruitment and selection processes carefully monitored and evaluated

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some marketing materials do not promote equal opportunities
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities by trainees and employers

35. Commitment to equal opportunities starts at the top of NWTC, and the chief executive has recently revised and reissued the equal opportunities policy. Copies of the revised policy are displayed prominently around the training centres and offices, and each member of staff has been given a copy of the revised policy. Well-documented procedures are implemented to ensure that the selection and recruitment of both staff and trainees is free from bias. The training centre in Bootle is easily accessible to all. Specially adapted lavatory facilities are situated within easy reach of a fully accessible ground-floor training room. Wider doorways have been fitted to allow wheelchair access to lavatories and the training room.

36. The organisation has made positive efforts to target under-represented groups in recent recruitment campaigns. This has resulted in a higher proportion of

applications from minority ethnic groups, at 3.3 per cent. In the Liverpool area, 1.4 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. The organisation participates in a number of local projects, such as the Liverpool Compact and the Speke Garston Partnership, which aim to widen participation and help disaffected young people to develop to a level enabling them to join training programmes. The NWTC also works with local schools, actively encouraging young people to participate in work-based training, and helping them to prepare for the transition from school to work.

37. All trainees are given a laminated card, one side of which has details of the trainee's development officer and contact telephone number. On the reverse is a statement about fair treatment and bullying, with a free-phone number which trainees can call if they feel they are being treated badly. The named contacts are NWTC staff who are independent of the training process. A high profile is given to removing discrimination in all aspects of NWTC's activities. Fast action is taken to address all complaints in a sensitive way. There are several examples of complaints which have been received from trainees concerning harassment from other trainees. Full investigations have occurred, and swift action has been taken to counsel and/or discipline trainees to reform their behaviour.

38. Trainees and employers have low awareness of equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity is not vigorously promoted or checked by NWTC. Only three members of staff have taken part in equal opportunities awareness sessions within the past six years. The organisation's commitment to equality of opportunity is not detailed on all promotional materials. Some promotional images reinforce gender stereotyping. Contracts and agreements produced for trainees and employers are not consistent in recording recent legislation and NWTC's requirements in regard to equal opportunities because there are several versions in circulation. Many documents focus on discrimination rather than on opportunity or inclusion. There is no formal monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. Staff in the workplace are relied on to report and follow up issues which cause concern.

Trainee support

Grade 2

39. The organisation provides a supportive environment for trainees. Staff are committed to providing trainees with the skills and knowledge required to help them gain qualifications and obtain employment. Working relationships with both member companies and local employers are good, and are effective in securing placements and employment. Employers needing new trainees regularly contact NWTC. Each trainee has an individual training plan. Trainees' contact with NWTC training officers greatly exceeds the frequency for reviews required by TEC contracts. Training officers are occupationally experienced, and hold assessor awards. Recent reorganisation of the provision of trainee support has focused responsibilities onto the training officers. Trainees and employers now only have to deal with one person for both review and assessment. Managerial responsibility for trainee support is clear. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths claimed in the self-assessment report, which did not identify any weaknesses in trainee

support. Inspectors identified both additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good induction to employment and qualification
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ opportunities for temporary placements to extend trainees' experience
- ◆ provision of supported travel
- ◆ effective recruitment and selection

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective review process
- ◆ results of initial skill tests not used to identify support needs for basic or key skills
- ◆ no initial assessment in business administration or customer service

GOOD PRACTICE

Achievements are recognised and celebrated. The provider holds an annual 'apprentice of the year' night. The 12 winners go on a cultural and industrial visit to Hamburg, where they tour local companies, share in cultural and sporting events, and are received by civic dignitaries. The 12 runners-up go on a similar visit to Cologne. Awards are funded partly by member companies and partly by NWTC.

40. The induction process and accompanying documents are well designed, and induction is effectively carried out. Trainees are expected to receive induction in four stages: their employer's own induction for new employees in the workplace, the initial induction by NWTC for new trainees, the assessment induction when a 'skillscan' form is completed, and a review of the form during the first workplace visit after the programme begins.

41. Trainees are well supported in the workplace through regular visits from training officers. In addition, NWTC provides a wide range of other pastoral and training support for trainees. In conjunction with the Speke Garston Partnership and Merseyside TEC, NWTC provides pre-apprenticeship training in engineering to bring trainees up to a point where they can benefit from work-based training. To enable trainees from the wider Liverpool area to take advantage of this, NWTC provides a transport service from Burscough to Speke via Skelmersdale and St Helens, backed up by assisted travel from outlying areas.

42. The organisation provides training at its centres for disaffected young people in both mainstream and special schools. In conjunction with a special school, NWTC provides 'away-from-school' training in carpentry and joinery. Individual training has been arranged or provided in particular cases of need. Staff members have been trained to deal with drug abuse, and to provide support for trainees with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, counselling and sign language support.

43. Trainees, trainers and employers work well together. Some trainees are already employed at the start of training. If they are not, NWTC seeks to place them. The provider lists employers' requirements and matches trainees to them. Potential trainees are offered to employers for interview. Placement and employment success rates are high.

44. Where trainees cannot experience a particular area of vocational or knowledge training in their workplace, NWTC makes arrangements with another member company for the necessary training to take place there. In business administration, trainees are taken into NWTC's own centre.

GOOD PRACTICE

The provider uses money from a locally recognised charitable trust to support trainees who have lost their job while training. This funding is used to pay for trainees while they complete their training, so they can work in host companies, as additional members of staff, at no expense to the companies.

45. There is no systematic initial assessment to identify support needs for basic skills, or entry levels of key skills. Initial assessment takes place in engineering and construction through the use of skills tests. No planned initial assessment takes place for business administration or customer service trainees. The review process is ineffective. Trainees' files and portfolios show that, over the last year, quarterly reviews in business administration and accounting have not been carried out rigorously, or have not been recorded. In other vocational areas, review has been regular. There are at least four different review forms in use across the various vocational and TEC catchment areas. In some occupational areas, several of these forms are in use. Reviews are generally too brief and superficial in their content. There is no provision for involvement by employers. The review process is not used to identify specific personal targets and record them, nor is it used to review or update individual training plans.

Grade 3

Management of training

46. The organisation employs 80 staff, 62 of whom are full-time and the remainder part-time. It conducts its business through four sites at Bootle, Speke, Chester and Holywell. The Bootle site is the main administration centre and has off-the-job training facilities for the programmes in construction. There is also a series of classrooms at the Bootle centre where engineering technicians have sessions to acquire theoretical and subject knowledge. The Speke centre is a dedicated off-the-job training centre for engineering. Sessions in theory for security engineering and electrical installation courses are provided at this centre. Other trainees from the Speke centre attend either local colleges or the Bootle centre as part of their provision in theoretical knowledge. The Chester and Holywell sites are satellite administration offices, and provide an administration base for training officers who monitor trainees in the Chester and North Wales areas respectively. There is a clear management structure to NWTC. Seven managers report directly to the chief executive on different facets of the business. All staff have job descriptions and undergo annual appraisals, at which training needs are identified to meet the demands of the business plan and the personal development of staff. Regular meetings are held at management and staff levels within NWTC. The organisation achieved the Investors in People standard in 1996, and is currently preparing for reassessment. Inspectors agreed with some strengths and weaknesses from the self-assessment report, and identified others. The grade awarded was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good communications
- ◆ staff clear about their roles and responsibilities
- ◆ strategic development effectively managed

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate control of on-the-job training
- ◆ lack of rigour in health and safety reviews
- ◆ the organisation's policies and values not clearly communicated to workplace providers

47. Each member of NWTC's staff has a detailed job description. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and whom they report to. In conjunction with senior managers, the chief executive has produced a three-year strategic plan, from which detailed annual business plans have been prepared. The business plan's objectives have been broken down into action plans for dissemination to operation managers through team meetings, section meetings and one-to-one meetings. Meetings are well minuted, and actions are allocated to specific individuals. Annual staff appraisals are held, with six-monthly interim reviews. Recently, the timing of appraisals has changed within the business year. This has meant an 18-month gap between appraisals for some employees. From appraisals, staff training needs are identified to meet the development needs and direction of the organisation. Occasionally, staff development is sanctioned which does not have a direct bearing on a staff member's position. For instance, one member of staff has been encouraged to undertake an English literature degree, for which NWTC has given paid leave of absence.

48. Communications within the organisation are good. For general circulation of information, 'all-hands' meetings are held, to which all staff are invited. These meetings are held on Friday afternoons after trainees have finished their working week. To encourage the open-door policy, the chief executive periodically hosts informal meetings with small groups of staff who would not normally come into contact with him in the normal course of their duties. These meetings are informal, with no set agenda, and are used to discuss off-the-record issues. Minutes are not normally taken. Regular senior and management meetings take place, and are used to ensure that managers and staff at all the company's training centres are fully informed about business progress and contracts, and that systems and procedures are common to all sites.

49. An initial health and safety appraisal of employers' premises is carried out by the training officer whenever a new workplace is used for placements, or when an employer changes location. If necessary, the services of NWTC's health and safety officer can be called upon for assistance, or for referring issues to. Training officers complete reviews as part of their monitoring visits. Reviews of health and safety are accomplished by asking workplace supervisors and trainees if any changes have taken place in the workplace since the last review. No formal system

exists to ensure that action points identified at health and safety appraisal visits are followed up for compliance. There is no formal system to ensure that all employers' liability insurance is renewed on expiry. No system is in place to check that all reviews have taken place. While the NWTC has its own values and policies, it does not formally pass these on to those who undertake training on its behalf. For instance, workplace employers state that they are sure that NWTC has an equal opportunities policy, but they are not aware of it.

50. On-the-job training is carried out by employers. The content and quality of individual trainees' learning experience are not managed by NWTC. The organisation does not stress that an investment is being made in each trainee's training, or that an individual training plan is drawn up for each trainee, and that training must be managed to include the structure of the relevant NVQ. Employers responsible for training have not been issued with a copy of the NVQ standards.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

51. NWTC is the assessment centre for all of the NVQ programmes undertaken by its trainees. NWTC is responsible for all internal verification processes, and is subject to external verification from all relevant awarding bodies. The organisation meets the standards of the TECs and the awarding bodies with which it has contracts. A full-time, dedicated quality assurance manager was appointed in May 1998. Following the retirement of this person, a new quality assurance manager had been in post for one week at the time of the first inspection. The organisation has developed a range of quality assurance procedures, which were in draft format for consideration by staff, at the time of the first inspection. The organisation's objective is to achieve the ISO 9001 quality assurance standard.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ little monitoring of subcontracted provision
- ◆ lack of rigour in monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ poor internal verification process in engineering
- ◆ underdeveloped collection and evaluation of trainees and employers' views

52. On reinspection, inspectors found all the weaknesses identified in the first inspection had been addressed. However, the systems for quality assuring subcontracted training and obtaining feedback from trainees and employers were not yet used adequately within the continuous improvement process. NWTC is aware of this and is addressing these areas of concern. The report on the evaluation of progress outlined these areas of concern. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in this report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good involvement by all staff in continuous improvement
- ◆ good use of management information

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of established quality assurance systems for continuous improvement

53. The management and staff at NWTC have a clear commitment to provide good training for trainees and local employers. This commitment was evident at the first inspection from a range of individual initiatives which had been undertaken by staff attempting to establish improvements. In some cases, individual action resulted in variations in procedures and documents for key aspects of training. For example, a trainer introduced a variation in documents to monitor progress towards the NVQ. The management then harnessed some of this initiative by forming a number of working groups. For example, one group identifies the good practice evident in the engineering sector for developing and assessing key skills in the workplace. This group prepared a good practice guide for use across all the occupational sectors. Another initiative overseen by managers was to gather data on the value and use of initial assessment tests. The co-ordination of staff's ideas to improve training has continued since the first inspection and remains an effective method of bringing about improvements.

54. Managers have established an information system which is capable of producing reports which provide statistical information over a wide range of training issues. Analysis of data on trainees' application, selection and placement is currently being undertaken. The number of trainees recruited by each training officer and their achievements against their targets are used to guide the staff appraisal process. Overall, the management team is developing a methodology for the critical analysis of data. This will be used to set performance indicators. Analysis of trainees' achievement at local colleges, coupled with informal feedback from trainees and employers, led NWTC to establish its own alternative off-the-job training in engineering. Early performance indicators, after two academic years of training, indicate improvements in trainees' attendance and achievement rates.

55. At the time of the first inspection, arrangements for the internal verification of NVQ engineering programmes at levels 2 and 3 did not assure the quality of the assessment process. Internal verification was not continuous, and was commonly delayed until assessment of trainees' whole portfolio has been completed. There is now a comprehensive internal verification system in engineering, which has been shared throughout the organisation into all occupational areas. Internal verification is carried out throughout the assessment process and all trainees' portfolios are examined on completion by the internal verifiers in each occupational area. Each assessor has an assessment monitoring plan and the quality assurance manager or the training centre manager carries out a full observation of assessment practice on each assessor at least once each year. Full feedback is given and an action plan drawn up if appropriate. The quality assurance manager meets with all external verifiers following their site visits.

56. In-house training for theoretical knowledge is undertaken at both the Speke training centre and the main site in Bootle. These programmes, together with the

use of knowledge packs for motor vehicle training, were not subject to satisfactory quality assurance arrangements at the time of the first inspection. The quality of the teaching was not assessed through direct observation by qualified staff, and procedures for producing an annual course review and action plan were not established. NWTC now subcontracts a further education college to observe its trainers and provide them with feedback on their performance. The further education co-ordinator, who has recently achieved a formal teaching qualification, has established a system for quality assuring all direct training by NWTC's staff. Lessons are observed and feedback is given to trainers, with an action plan being completed if appropriate. Each trainer will be observed annually.

57. The organisation subcontracts training and assessment to a range of further education colleges, but did not have arrangements to ensure access to data from the colleges' quality assurance systems at the time of the first inspection. The quality assurance manager has established a system for monitoring the quality of subcontracted training with local colleges. The system includes a comprehensive service level agreement, site visits to carry out a quality assurance survey, and the requirement for all subcontractors to complete a quality assurance questionnaire. The supply to NWTC of the colleges' reports on trainees and external verification reports form part of the service level agreement. Trainees' college reports are monitored closely and issues arising are dealt with by direct communication between NWTC's staff and the college's staff. In some occupational areas, NWTC's staff are members of the college's teams which review programmes. A small number of colleges are reluctant to comply with the NWTC's requests and information has not been forthcoming. There is no written service level agreement with the subcontracted further education college which supplies lecturers to teach trainees when required and quality assurance systems by observing NWTC's trainers.

58. At the time of the first inspection, the views of trainees, employers and work-placement supervisors on the services provided by NWTC were not formally gathered. NWTC's monitoring system relied heavily on verbal feedback obtained by training officers during progress review visits to the workplace. A questionnaire system for obtaining formal feedback from both trainees and employers has been devised. Trainees' feedback is gathered after induction, three months into their programmes, on an annual basis while trainees are on their programmes, and on exit from the programmes. Employers' feedback is gathered annually. The gathering of annual feedback from trainees has enabled an analysis to be carried out from which improvements to facilities have been made. Not many of the questionnaires which are issued to trainees when they leave their programmes have been returned and NWTC is considering methods to encourage trainees to return the completed questionnaires. There has not yet been a new group of trainees to complete the initial questionnaires. The employers' response to feedback questionnaires allowed an analysis which resulted in the production of an employers' handbook. The feedback system is still too new to be able to fit properly into the continuous improvement process.

59. The self-assessment process before the first inspection involved all of the

management team, but many of the other staff did not actively contribute to the identification of strengths and weaknesses. The quality of that self-assessment report in clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses in the specific occupational areas was poor. The grades given at the end of the self-assessment process, with the exception of management of training and trainee support, were not accurate. All occupational aspects were given a higher grade by NWTC than by inspectors at the first inspection. The latest self-assessment process involved all staff, and the process was carried out in conjunction with the production of NWTC's latest business plan. The action plan produced after the first inspection was used as a working document, and was reviewed and updated at each monthly management meeting to assess progress against identified actions. This action plan was used as the basis for self-assessment for the reinspection, and is an accurate record of NWTC's progress over the past year.