



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

Huntingdonshire Regional College

SUMMARY

Engineering and business administration programmes have good off-the-job training but there is insufficient assessment in the workplace and achievement rates are poor. In hair and beauty, the training salon is poorly managed and resourced, there is insufficient training and assessment in the workplace and achievement rates are poor. The equal opportunities policy is weak and there is little monitoring in the workplace. The college has a wide range of support services available to trainees, but progress reviews and individual training plans are poor. Communication with employers is ineffective and there is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. The college does not have a written quality assurance procedure for work-based training and the quality of training is not adequately monitored.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	4
Business administration	4
Hair & beauty	5

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	5
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training in engineering and business administration

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of the quality of work-based training
- ◆ failure of self-assessment to identify key weaknesses
- ◆ lack of formal management systems for work-based training
- ◆ little co-ordination of on- and off-the job training
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ poor individual training plans
- ◆ weak equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient assessment in the workplace
- ◆ poor achievement rates



INTRODUCTION

1. Huntingdonshire Regional College is a college of further education providing education and training in four occupational areas. The college employs 130 full-time and 230 part-time staff and is managed by a principal and three assistant principals. The college has contracts with Cambs Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Business Link Limited to provide work-based training for young people. The college has 115 trainees: 29 are advanced modern apprentices, 24 are foundation modern apprentices and 62 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. There are also four clients on the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. Sixty-five trainees are on engineering programmes, 27 are on hairdressing programmes, 16 are on business administration programmes and seven are on agricultural programmes. Owing to the low number of trainees, agriculture was not inspected. Most trainees receive off-the-job training and assessment at the college and are placed in local companies for on-the-job training. Trainees on motor-vehicle body repair programmes do not attend the college for off-the-job training. They are taught in the workplace by a trainer from the college. All trainees are employed.

2. Huntingdonshire Regional College serves a region of over 350 square miles around Huntingdon with a population of approximately 150,000. It is a prosperous area with low levels of unemployment. The 1991 census identified that 2.4 per cent of the population in Huntingdonshire is from minority ethnic groups. In August 2000, the unemployment rate was 1.6 per cent, compared with a national average of 3.5 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) was 52 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The college's training schemes manager, using information provided by staff working in the various curriculum areas, produced a self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report did not adequately describe how the training is provided and did not identify the key weaknesses for the occupational or the generic areas.

4. Four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with the college in November 2000. They visited 18 employers, interviewed 30 trainees and 19 workplace supervisors and carried out 27 interviews with the college's staff. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' portfolios, internal and external verifiers' reports and documents held by the TEC. Six training sessions were observed and graded as shown below.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		1	1			2
Business administration			2			2
Hair & beauty				2		2
Total	0	1	3	2	0	6

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 4

5. Huntingdonshire Regional College has 65 engineering trainees. Forty-eight trainees are on motor-vehicle training programmes and 17 are on electrical/electronic engineering programmes. Eight are advanced modern apprentices, 13 are foundation modern apprentices and 44 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. Forty of the trainees on motor-vehicle programmes are working towards NVQs in light vehicle repair at levels 2 and 3, and the motor-vehicle certificate at levels 1, 2 or 3. The other eight are working towards NVQs in vehicle body repair and refinishing at levels 2 and 3. Trainees on electrical/electronic engineering programmes are working towards a national or higher-national certificate in engineering. These trainees are not working towards an NVQ, although a recent intake of advanced modern apprentices will do so when the college has gained approval from the awarding body.

6. Trainees on the light vehicle repair programme attend off-the-job training sessions at the college one day each week for approximately 30 planned sessions, and six one-week block-release periods each year. Off-the-job training consists of

training in theory, practical training and assessment. Key skills development and portfolio-building sessions are provided during the block-release periods. Trainees on the vehicle body repair and refinishing programme do not attend off-the-job training. Instead, a trainer visits trainees in the workplace each month to teach the theoretical aspect of their programme. Trainees on electrical/electronic programmes attend the college one day each week for their national or higher-national certificate course. Trainers are occupationally experienced and have the required assessors and verifiers' awards. Assessments for NVQs are carried out in the college's training workshops and occasionally in the trainee's workplace. Trainees work in a variety of local companies including franchised and independent garages, small electronic design and production companies and companies providing building services, design and installation. All trainees are employed. Over the past three years, across all programmes, 36 per cent of trainees left their programmes early. In 1998, 56 per cent of trainees who left had achieved an NVQ, and in 1999, 48 per cent had achieved a NVQ. Of the 36 modern apprentices who have started since 1997, none has completed all of the requirements of the apprenticeship.

7. The self-assessment report accurately identified the additional qualifications and skills provided for motor-vehicle trainees as a strength and that some trainees are not working towards NVQs as a weakness. The other strengths identified were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good monitoring systems for motor-vehicle training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient assessment by observation in the workplace
- ◆ low achievement rates for foundation and advanced modern apprentices

8. The college carries out teaching of theory, practical instruction and assessment for motor-vehicle trainees in one of its three motor-vehicle training workshops or in technology classrooms. Workshops contain a range of garage equipment and a variety of training vehicles. One workshop also has a dedicated area for teaching practical welding skills. The off-the-job training is well planned and is taught to a good standard by dedicated, enthusiastic and experienced trainers. Practical training is enhanced by involvement in a low-cost racing-car project. Trainees carry out relevant work on the racing car and are able to attend race meetings. Trainees on electrical/electronic programmes are well taught by enthusiastic and competent trainers and classrooms are well equipped.

9. Trainees on programmes in light vehicle repair are also working towards an additional motor-vehicle award. This is studied in parallel with, and is complementary to, their NVQ. Trainees value this qualification and one trainee was proudly displaying his certificates in his employer's reception area. Trainees are also taught basic welding skills.

10. An effective monitoring system is used to record motor-vehicle trainees' progress through a range of training and assessment activities. Trainees are clear about how they are progressing through their course and the evidence which they are required to produce to achieve their NVQ.

11. There is insufficient assessment in the workplace by qualified assessors. Electrical/electronic engineering trainees are not on an NVQ programme and are therefore not assessed in the workplace. Most assessment for motor-vehicle trainees takes place in the college's workshops. Some trainees have been assessed in the workplace only once or twice in three years. The evidence sheets used for work-based assessment are poor and fail clearly to record candidates' feedback on assessment decisions. Motor-vehicle trainees registered with the awarding body from September 2000 will be working towards the new motor-vehicle NVQs. These require significantly more work-based assessment, and although the college is aware of this it has yet to make arrangements for it.

12. Achievement rates for foundation and advanced modern apprentices are poor. No modern apprentices have completed all of the requirements of their apprenticeship. This is primarily due to the late introduction of key skills to the programme. The achievement of NVQs across all programmes is also poor.

Business administration

Grade 4

13. Huntingdonshire Regional College has 16 business administration trainees. Seven are advanced modern apprentices in accounting and business administration, one is a foundation modern apprentice in administration, and eight are on other work-based training programmes for young people in accounting.

14. All trainees are employed with local employers, mostly within Huntingdon itself. Employers range from small businesses involved in transport, information-technology components distribution, financial consultants and accountants to large public service organisations. Employers ensure that trainees take additional qualifications and training while employed with them. All accounting trainees attend the college for training one afternoon and one evening each week. Those trainees taking key skills also attend college for additional key skills workshops. Trainees who need to resit an examination attend the college for revision sessions, which take place near the examination date. Business administration trainees attend college once each month. Trainees collect work-based evidence and bring it into college for assessment. Internal verification is frequent and is carried out on NVQ units as they are achieved. In accounts the internal verifier always has an individual discussion with the assessor as part of the feedback process. Over the

past three years, across all programmes the retention rate has been 57 per cent. The achievement of qualifications by trainees on other work-based training for young people has fallen from 50 per cent in 1997-98 to 33 per cent in 1999-2000. Of the eight advanced modern apprentices and two foundation modern apprentices who started in the past three years, only one has completed all of the requirements of the apprenticeship.

15. The self-assessment report accurately identified the lack of work-based assessment as a weakness. However, the strengths identified were no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well-structured off-the-job training in accounting
- ◆ good on-the-job training
- ◆ good range of additional professional qualifications provided by employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement of individual training plans
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment
- ◆ poor assessment practice in administration
- ◆ no integration of key skills within NVQ training and assessment

16. Training sessions are well structured and well taught. Each level of the accounting qualification is taught by small, discrete teams which specialise in the modules at that level. Trainees receive a timetable of attendance and a detailed training schedule, which shows which subjects they will be doing on each day of attendance. All internally and externally marked assessments are shown, together with practice assessments. Some employers have this information but many do not. All training sessions have clearly written lesson plans, which show the resources required and refer clearly to the learning materials which will be used. All trainees are required to purchase textbooks for their courses. The college holds a book fair at which they can be bought. Unfortunately, some of the books are unavailable and trainees have not been able to buy a full set yet. In training sessions trainees are tested on their understanding and use of new skills. Trainees find their understanding much improved because of the training at college and feel confident in applying it to their work activities.

17. All trainees get on-the-job training from their workplace supervisors. In some cases this training is formally linked to staff appraisal and to their NVQ, but in most cases it is informal and is linked only to the requirements of the job. Supervisors work with the trainees to help them gather evidence from the workplace. They work with trainees to interpret the NVQ standards, mark work,

guide trainees in the presentation of their evidence and provide witness statements to accompany evidence. Supervisors participate in progress reviews and readily comment on the progress of trainees at work and on their development of technical and interpersonal skills. One employer temporarily moves the trainee into other areas of work to ensure that the trainee gets experience in other tasks directly related to the NVQ. Another employer ensures that the trainee gets experience of sales ledger work even though her responsibility is for the purchase ledger.

18. All trainees work towards additional qualifications with their employers. Trainees participate in in-house training ranging from computer-software training to advanced accounting practices and time-management skills. Trainees also attend external training funded by their employer. One trainee is attending another local college for computer training. Trainees with one employer are attending professional accounting courses given by a specialist accounting training company. Other trainees are receiving computer training specific to the accountancy software they are using at work.

19. Success in achieving the targets in individual training plans is poor. Only one modern apprentice has achieved the complete framework in the past three years and only 16 per cent of trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people have achieved all the targets in their individual training plan. The college has only recently started to teach and assess key skills. Over the past three years two trainees have left after achieving their level 3 NVQ without taking key skills.

20. Little assessment of trainees takes place in the workplace. Some trainees have had only two assessors' visits in nearly two years. The visits were short and assessment was limited to a short observation. In accounting, there is no work-based assessment. At NVQ at level 3 in administration, trainees are observed at work for only their information technology unit in their use of software. One trainee started in July 1999 and completed the administration level 2 NVQ in May 2000. During that time only two workplace visits took place.

POOR PRACTICE

In administration a workplace observation was carried out by a college assessor. The assessor recorded the observation on the unit record sheet. The whole observation was recorded in one line of text and contained little about what the trainee had actually done or the assessment decision.

21. Within administration portfolios there is an over-reliance on personal statements and photocopies of information given to trainees by employers. This evidence is being inaccurately assessed as demonstrating competence. There is little evidence of work generated by trainees. In administration, workplace supervisors who are not qualified assessors are completing observations of trainees. Their observations are being accepted by assessors and the internal verifier as a valid assessment by observation.

22. Key skills assessment is not integrated to NVQ assessment. Separate portfolios are used and contain evidence of work specifically generated for key skills assessment. Two trainees have achieved application of number and in both cases all the work for the key skills is through exercises and assignments set at college. Key skills training and support programmes are not yet implemented in some areas and, where they are, trainees attend workshops which are not specific to the occupation. Assessors in administration and accounting lack sufficient

knowledge of key skills to be able to assess them within an NVQ. Accounting staff do not know how to accredit academic qualifications against the current key skills standards. No key skills assessment is occurring in the workplace. Advanced modern apprentices who started in accounting in July or September 2000 have not yet been registered for key skills.

Hair & beauty

Grade 5

23. Huntingdonshire Regional College has 27 trainees on hairdressing programmes. Fourteen are advanced modern apprentices, nine are foundation modern apprentices and four are on other work-based training programmes for young people. All of the foundation modern apprentices and 12 of the advanced modern apprentices are working towards the NVQ at level 2 in hairdressing. Two advanced modern apprentices are working towards the level 3 NVQ. Two trainees on other work-based training for young people are working towards an NVQ at level 3 and two towards an NVQ at level 2. All trainees are employed and work at 19 salons in and around Huntingdon. Most employers recruit their own trainees and then contact the college to organise the training.

24. Until April 2000, all hairdressing training was subcontracted to a local salon in Huntingdon. The college has since taken over the training and has employed the training staff. The college occupies the first and second floor of this town-centre property, for training purposes. The ground floor is a commercial salon and is still owned and run separately. All trainees working towards an NVQ at level 2 attend this training salon on one day each week to be taught theory and undergo practical training and assessment. Trainees working for the level 3 NVQ are required to attend on one evening each week in their own time. There are two classrooms on the first floor. On the second floor there is a small hairdressing salon where trainees do their practical work. All assessment for the hairdressing NVQs is undertaken at the training centre. Key skills are taught and assessed by staff from the college who are dedicated key skills trainers and do not work within the occupational area. The trainees who started in 2000 will not be attending key skills sessions until after Christmas. Internal verification takes place approximately three times each year. The internal verifier records what has been verified previously and then decides what the focus should be on future visits to ensure that a broad sample is seen. Over the past three years, across all programmes, the retention rate has been 61 per cent. Over the same period, 43 per cent of trainees have achieved an NVQ. None has completed all of the requirements of a modern apprenticeship.

25. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive hairdressing tool kit given to each trainee

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate on-the-job training
- ◆ poorly resourced and managed training salon
- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment
- ◆ poor achievement rates

26. The college supplies free of charge an extensive personal tool kit for all the trainees. Trainees who complete the programme and gain their NVQ are permitted to keep the equipment. This is an additional incentive to the trainees, as the tool kit is excellent. It contains all the equipment which the trainee will need at college and at work. Having their own equipment encourages trainees to take responsibility and look after it. The tool kit includes a training head which trainees can use to practise on when not at college. The trainees are also issued with a sweatshirt and tee-shirt with the college logo. This is also heavily subsidised by the college.

27. Some of the salons offer little opportunity for the trainees to have dedicated on-the-job training. Trainees are expected to learn by watching and many trainees spend too long working as shampooists and cleaners rather than developing the required practical skills. Some trainees' progress is slow owing to the lack of training. Many salons do not treat training as a priority and make little effort to encourage the trainees to develop their skills. Many trainees become discouraged. When they come to the end of the scheme, some have not developed their skills sufficiently well to work as a junior stylist and have difficulty in building a clientele.

POOR PRACTICE

One trainee has been on the programme for 14 months. Only one assessment has taken place throughout this period. This assessment was in the workplace but was not carried out by a qualified assessor. The trainee is very disappointed by this lack of progress.

28. The college's training salon is on the second floor of a listed building in the town centre. The training salon is unsuitable for teaching and practical work. There is insufficient space for the trainees to work and they often knock into each other. Trainers cannot get around the class to observe properly. There is not enough storage space. Trainees have nowhere to put their bags and folders and these cause obstructions on the floor. The chemicals are kept on open shelves in a cupboard which also contains a water boiler. Tests on electrical equipment are three months out of date. The fire extinguishers have fallen off the wall and are on the floor in the corridor. Some of the fluorescent tubes in the lights are missing, the covers to light fittings are missing and wires are exposed. There are only two hair dryers and clients have to wait to have their hair dried. One of the dryers is broken but remains in use. The equipment is outdated. Fixtures and fittings are in poor repair. The jars containing sterilisation chemicals for tools are not used and have not enough liquid in them for trainees to sterilise their hand tools. Trainees sit at tables to work on their portfolios next to the basins where clients are having their hair washed. The water pressure is poor and it is difficult to rinse hair properly. Trainees do not keep their work areas clean, tidy and free from waste, which is an essential requirement of the qualifications which they are undertaking.

The college has responded to many of the issues raised about the training salon. All electrical equipment was tested during the inspection and a risk assessment has been carried out. A lockable metal cupboard has now been installed for storing chemicals.

29. Trainers have produced a book for recording observations in the salon to encourage salon owners to become more involved in trainees' programmes. This is simply a copy of the national standards. It is intended that the trainee will take this to work and get three entries for each element signed by their supervisor at work. The entry is supposed to be made on competent performance and signed by a member of the salon's staff who is working towards the same qualification as the trainee being observed. There is no requirement for the person signing to have an assessor's qualification. Trainees and workplace supervisors are not clear how this should be used and in some cases it has few entries. The salons which do use it do not record competent activities but use it to record what the trainee did during a training session. This evidence is then transferred into the awarding body's assessment book as demonstrating competence. In many cases this is not valid evidence of competent performance, as the trainee was being assisted and it was not observed by a qualified assessor.

30. Assessors from the college rarely go out to the workplace to assess trainees. Only one salon has active work-based assessors. Very few trainees are observed by qualified assessors carrying out work. Some of the level 3 trainees are working on busy clientele columns at the salons where they work. Opportunities to be assessed doing this work are missed. Most assessment takes place in the training salon, where there is not always a sufficient variety of clients. Trainees often work on each other and this is poor use of the trainees' time when they are sitting as models and not training.

31. Achievement rates on all programmes are poor. Only 43 per cent of trainees have achieved an NVQ in the past three years, and none has completed all of the requirements of the modern apprenticeship. The main reason for trainees not completing the requirements of the modern apprenticeship is the slow introduction of key skills.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

32. Responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the principal and two assistant principals. The college has recently appointed an equal opportunities co-ordinator but she is yet to take up her role. The college has an equal opportunities policy, disability statement, complaints procedure and student charter. The equal opportunities policy was last updated in 1996 and is reproduced in the student charter, in the part-time and full-time students' prospectus in an abbreviated form

and within the part-time students' handbook. All trainees and employers are sent a copy of the equal opportunities statement. An agreement, signed by employers, requires them to have an equal opportunities policy or to abide by the college's policy. All trainees receive a pack of literature from the college which includes the complaints procedure and appeals procedure. Trainees are informed of their rights and responsibilities during induction to the training scheme, during their induction at the workplace and during their induction by the college to their occupational area. Ninety-eight per cent of engineering trainees are men, all hairdressing trainees are women and there are equal numbers of men and women in administration. Four per cent of engineering trainees, 7 per cent of hairdressing trainees and none of the business administration trainees are from minority ethnic groups. Just over 2 per cent of trainees are registered as having a disability.

33. The self-assessment report accurately identified as a weakness that the equal opportunities policy is not systematically reviewed, but the strengths identified were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified one strength and additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good progression for disadvantaged groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no systematic review or updating of policy
- ◆ no use of equal opportunities data to guide management actions
- ◆ lack of monitoring in the workplace
- ◆ poor awareness of equal opportunities among trainees

34. All full-time and part-time students at the college have access to the work-based training programmes. Students on appropriate courses are encouraged to contact the training schemes manager and are given information about opportunities on work-based training programmes. The manager also regularly meets staff within the college to advise them of programmes available to their students. In particular, the college has a unit for disaffected young people in years 10 and 11 of secondary school, many of whom have been permanently excluded from local schools. They attend a stand-alone unit within the college grounds and have access to some of the college's facilities. Several of these young people have joined the scheme and are successfully progressing with their NVQs in hairdressing and motor-vehicle. The college's basic skills unit also refers students whom it believes will benefit from work-based training schemes. Close links have been made with a local training provider which specialises in training young offenders up to NVQ at level 2 in motor-vehicle. If these trainees wish to pursue

further training they are referred to the college, where they can progress to NVQs at level 3.

35. The equal opportunities policy was last updated in 1996 and refers to current legislation. The policy refers to staff, college materials and student admissions and also covers the monitoring responsibilities of managers. However, the policy focuses on mainstream education in the college and not the needs of trainees and employers in the workplace. There is no reference to harassment or bullying, although work-based trainees do receive the college's disability statement and the student charter.

36. The training schemes manager reviewed the policy in 1999 within the self-assessment action plan, but the college has no recorded way of feeding this information into a college-wide review process. The human resources committee has some responsibility for equal opportunities issues but has not reviewed the policy. The policy itself exists in several forms within a variety of college materials issued to both trainees and employers and it is unclear which document is the policy and which is a statement of policy. Inconsistencies in documents which do not adhere to college policy are not being identified and rectified by the college.

37. The college collects a wide range of data relating to equal opportunities on students and staff, including the numbers of men and women and trainees from minority ethnic groups on programmes and their retention and achievement rates. In April of this year, the training schemes unit began using a software package to evaluate trainees and employers' experiences at the beginning of, during and at the end of training. A good response has been achieved but no analysis of this information has occurred yet. However, these data are not used by staff in the curriculum areas, the manager of the training schemes unit or the senior management team to deal with the issues raised. No marketing plan or specific action plan exists and no action is taken to tackle the gender imbalances which exist in some of the occupational areas or the poor take-up of training by people from minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities. Recruitment and selection of trainees are not monitored.

38. Although employers sign a training agreement which requires them to have an equal opportunities policy or adopt the college's policy, many have a poor awareness of their responsibilities. Those employers without their own policy have not taken any steps to implement the college's policy. The college does not monitor equal opportunities within the workplace either formally or informally. Employers are not aware of their involvement in the training process and so are unclear about their roles and responsibilities with regard to equal opportunities.

39. Trainees receive a statement of the equal opportunities policy within their part-time student handbook and equal opportunities forms part of both their induction by the training schemes unit and their induction to the curriculum areas. However, trainees are unaware of the wider issues such as harassment and bullying and their initial understanding has not been reinforced. The college has recently

surveyed the views of trainees about their training programmes and this has shown quite clearly, without the need for detailed analysis, that trainees do not understand equal opportunities. The manager of training schemes is currently in the process of purchasing a video which will be used during induction to support existing materials.

40. Most trainees are aware of their company's equal opportunities policy and are very clear on how to use the grievance and complaints procedures. However, trainees are less clear on how to use the complaints procedure within the college and in some cases have complained through informal routes. When the college receives complaints, they are quickly dealt with.

41. Within the motor-vehicle section of the college, sexually offensive material was displayed in the staff room. Trainees have access to this room to speak to their trainers and assessors. The college was made aware of this during inspection and the material was immediately removed.

42. Access to the main college building is good, with lifts, automatic doors and ramps. Access to the hairdressing training salon is restricted. The only access is up a narrow, steep stairway.

Trainee support

Grade 4

43. Trainees are recruited in a variety of different ways, including referrals by the careers service, promotion of work-based training at college information evenings, and by companies contacting the college directly. All applicants are interviewed and given careers guidance by either the training schemes manager or staff working in the curriculum area. Most applicants are required to sit a basic skills test and the results are kept with the trainee's file. There is no minimum pass mark for the test and poor performance does not prevent trainees from starting on their chosen career path. All trainees attend a brief initial induction with the training schemes unit's staff, at which they are given information about the college's equal opportunities policy, their training programme, the part-time student handbook, a guide to health and safety, and the college charter. The college charter includes information for students about complaints, learning programmes, aspects of college support for students and useful names and addresses. A training schemes guide for trainees and an introductory booklet on health and safety are also issued. Trainees also receive an induction to their qualification and the college facilities when they begin their off-the-job training programme. Additional induction exercises are issued to trainees to complete in the workplace. All trainees are regularly visited in the workplace. The college has a basic skills unit, with qualified staff, and a counselling service for students.

44. The self-assessment report failed to identify the key weaknesses in trainee support and the strengths identified were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified one strength and additional weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of available support services

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective use of the results of initial assessment
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ poor individual training plans
- ◆ lack of systematic arrangements for accreditation of prior learning

45. Additional learning support is available from college trainers, who give additional help and guidance during the trainees' day-release programme and through basic skills support sessions throughout the week. Drop-in key skills workshops are available during lunch breaks. Trainees who are referred to the basic skills unit have an initial interview with staff from the unit at which appropriate support is discussed. For motor-vehicle trainees there are some support materials for basic numeracy and communication skills related to their occupation. Hair and beauty trainees have additional help provided at the off-the-job training salon, which is away from the main college campus. Trainees who have difficulties with reading have assistants to help them during examinations. The college's student counselling service is available to all work-based trainees and can be accessed by telephone. There is good pastoral support in all areas.

46. The college does not routinely use the results from the basic skills tests to produce realistic individual training plans, and misses opportunities to specify within the plan the most appropriate learning programme for the individual. Additionally, the college does not systematically pass on results to trainers, or the basic skills support unit, whose staff are therefore often unaware of the learning support needs of trainees. The current initial assessment activities carried out by the training schemes unit do not focus on individual key skills abilities, although the motor-vehicle and accounting departments are in the process of introducing these types of assessment.

47. Motor-vehicle, electrical engineering and accounting trainees are reviewed in the workplace by the training schemes unit's staff. Trainees following hair and beauty programmes have their progress reviewed in the workplace by their trainers. The progress-review process concentrates mainly on pastoral and health and safety issues, and does not adequately cover trainees' progress at work or towards their qualification. Trainees are not set targets which guide them towards their NVQ. Those targets which are set are not normally measurable and so review and monitoring are not possible. Issues about equal opportunities, harassment at work and bullying are not routinely discussed.

48. Trainees' individual training plans do not always reflect the training which is being followed. Some show incorrect NVQ units or levels. In hair and beauty, the training plans specify only an NVQ at level 3, and individual units within that

qualification are not specified. The target achievement dates for units within qualifications are often the same, with no consideration for units being completed before the final qualification. In some cases, two or three levels of a qualification have the same completion date. Individual training plans do not always indicate additional learning needs for trainees or whether training has been provided. Training plans are not always updated. Few training plans identify how on-the-job training is to be provided, apart from specifying attendance times at work.

49. When potential trainees are first interviewed and training plans produced, the college has an inconsistent approach to accreditation of their prior learning and achievement. Accounting trainees benefit from occupationally competent staff advising on prior achievements before their individual training plan is completed. However, most other trainees are required to follow the same programme of learning and assessment regardless of their prior achievements. There is no systematic approach to accrediting prior learning on entry and many trainees do not meet occupationally qualified staff until after their individual training plans have been produced.

Management of training

Grade 5

50. The college employs 130 full-time and 230 part-time staff and is managed by a principal and three assistant principals. The college has six academic divisions. The training schemes manager, who reports to the assistant principal in charge of programmes, manages contracts for work-based training. The training schemes unit consists of a manager, an administrator and a work placement officer. Trainees are employed in local companies where they receive on-the-job training, and attend the college one day each week for off-the-job training. Trainers from the academic divisions teach trainees during off-the-job training and carry out assessment both at college and in the workplace. The training schemes unit recruits trainees, carries out initial assessments of basic skills, writes the individual training plan and, where required, helps trainees to find a work placement. Before a new work placement is used, the work-placement officer carries out a health and safety audit on the employer. The work-placement officer visits engineering and administration trainees in the workplace to review progress and to monitor health and safety. Trainees on hair and beauty programmes are visited by their trainers who review progress and monitor health and safety.

51. All staff have job descriptions and undergo an annual performance appraisal which results in an individual development programme. A college-wide staff development plan is produced from the individual development plans. New members of staff are allocated a mentor to guide them through the induction process. Induction includes a range of centrally organised courses and a checklist of activities, which the mentor helps with. All staff are issued with a comprehensive staff handbook. The college has been recognised as an Investor in People since June 1998. The contract for work-based training programmes has remained constant for the past three years with an intake of approximately 55 trainees each year.

52. Inspectors found many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice and did not agree with others. Some of the weaknesses were considered more appropriate to the occupational areas and inspectors found additional weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good communications and teamwork within curriculum areas

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of formal cross-college management systems for work-based training
- ◆ little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ ineffective communication with employers
- ◆ inflexible programmes for some trainees
- ◆ inappropriate programmes for some trainees

53. Staff within curriculum areas work well together to provide appropriate teaching and assessment for trainees. In most areas they share information about trainees' progress and have systems for recording progress and identifying which stage trainees are at on their programmes. Information about training programmes is shared at team meetings. Communications within the training schemes unit are also good; each member of the team knows where to find information and the administrative systems are sound.

54. Each of the academic divisions and the training schemes unit are cost centres with their own budgets. The training schemes unit buys training and assessment services from the academic divisions. There are no formal arrangements to control this. The communications and flow of information between the training schemes unit and the academic divisions are not effective. Staff do not routinely get copies of trainees' individual training plans and the training schemes unit does not know when, or if, trainees are registered with awarding bodies. The results of trainees' progress reviews are not routinely communicated to the academic divisions' staff. There are no formal procedures or systems for identifying what information should be provided to, or held by, staff or sections. For example, there is confusion between the training schemes unit and the key skills section as to which should register trainees on their key skills units. In engineering, trainees have been registered on an advanced modern apprenticeship by the training schemes unit, but the college is not yet approved to offer the required NVQ. Additionally, the trainers have identified a number of possible NVQs for these trainees and intend to visit employers to discuss which is most appropriate. The training schemes manager has already selected the required NVQ in consultation with the employer. It is not clear where the overall responsibility for the quality of the work-based training programmes lies. Performance data relate to all students and trainees

within curriculum areas and do not clearly identify trainees on work-based training programmes.

55. Although many employers provide on-the-job training and a range of work experience for trainees there is little attempt to co-ordinate this with the off-the-job training carried out at college. Few employers know what trainees do at college, apart from the titles of their qualifications, and employers are therefore unable to provide appropriate experience to reinforce and develop this. Very few trainees have agreed, written plans for on-the-job training. Where detailed training plans exist they have been provided by the employer with little or no support from the college and few link on-the-job training with the requirements of the NVQ. Employers are routinely provided with examination results and end-of-term reports from the college.

56. Employers lack an understanding of their responsibility to provide appropriate training and experience for trainees. They have little recollection of the contents of the agreement with the college and do not understand the significance, or content, of the individual training plans. The college sends them a copy of the trainee's individual training plan, but this contains only the titles of the qualifications and a list of units. Few employers understand the process of assessment or have details of the NVQ which trainees are following. The agreement signed by employers requires them to have an equal opportunities policy, or abide by the college's policy. Few recall this as a requirement or have taken any steps to satisfy it. The college has employers' consultative panels, but these do not always look at work-based training.

57. Although trainees can start their on-the-job programme at any time during the year some are unable to have access to off-the-job training until the start of the academic year. Programmes in electrical engineering and accounting have only one start date each year. Other programmes are more flexible: motor-vehicle and hairdressing trainees are able to start at any time throughout the year.

58. Some hairdressing trainees are on programmes where they are unlikely to achieve the required competencies, owing to their restricted roles at work. Some trainees are registered on modern apprenticeships and are unlikely to achieve the required NVQ or key skills level. Some trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people have the ability to achieve a modern apprenticeship but have not been given the opportunity. For example, one engineering trainee joined the programme with an advanced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in engineering and is currently in the final year on a higher national certificate course. He is clearly capable of achieving an advanced modern apprenticeship but is on other work-based training for young people.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

59. The quality assurance arrangements at Huntingdonshire Regional College are based on the process of self-assessment. Ultimate responsibility for quality

assurance lies with the principal and there is no designated quality assurance manager or co-ordinator. College managers are allocated authority and responsibility for systems and procedures within the college policies. There is no quality assurance manual. Some procedures exist in staff manuals and in divisional operational manuals. The strategic plan of the college contains statements on quality assurance management, which are supported in other college documents such as the college charter and staff manuals.

60. Self-assessment takes place every year and progress is reviewed at six-monthly intervals. The self-assessment process for work-based training runs separately from the college's other training and is managed by the training schemes unit. Information for the self-assessment of work-based training is gathered from the curriculum areas using a set of forms. Some curriculum areas do not always provide the required information.

61. The college consults work-based trainees on the quality of their training through a recently introduced questionnaire. The college also consults trainees at the end of each course on the quality of teaching within the college. Actions are taken as a result of the end-of-course feedback, but the results of the questionnaire have not yet been fully analysed. Trainers within the curriculum areas carry out internal verification. The college also has an internal verification co-ordinator who is responsible for producing the handbook for internal verification and developing the systems.

62. The self-assessment report accurately identified the system for monitoring progress in motor-vehicle as a strength and the need for more co-ordination of hairdressing training as a weakness, but inspectors considered these to be more appropriate to the occupational areas. The other strengths identified were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified an additional strength and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-established self-assessment process resulting in improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor recognition of key weaknesses in self-assessment
- ◆ lack of procedures for quality assurance
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of the quality of work-based training
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice

63. The college has carried out self-assessment of work-based training for two and a half years. Information is gathered from all curriculum areas and is collated by the training schemes unit. The college produces an action plan to address any identified weaknesses. This action plan is regularly monitored by the training schemes manager, who also takes responsibility for its implementation. The self-assessment and action-planning process has resulted in several significant

improvements in work-based training. For example, the form for recording reviews of trainees' progress has been amended to include comments from employers and trainees. In addition, trainees who start after the traditional enrolment time in September now receive a full induction programme.

64. Although there have been some significant improvements as a result of self-assessment, the self-assessment report was inaccurate and did not recognise the key weaknesses of work-based training. There was little involvement from the appropriate senior staff. The training schemes manager encourages all the curriculum areas to contribute to defining their strengths and weaknesses. The individual academic divisions can gather feedback for this process from any interested parties to enable them to reach a conclusion, but some provide little with which accurate judgements can be made. Where areas do provide sufficient information, judgements are clearer and effective action plans are produced.

65. Little is done systematically to monitor the quality of work-based training. Monitoring is limited to contract compliance and there is some confusion in this area. For example, very few trainees have completed a modern apprenticeship framework, yet this is not highlighted within the monitoring carried out. There is confusion as to what completion of an individual training plan means and data provided for the inspection could not be validated. Retention and achievement are not routinely monitored for work-based programmes. Little is done to monitor the quality of training in the workplace. The college is over-reliant on audits by external bodies. When problems arise they are dealt with promptly, but the college does not actively assure the quality of its training.

66. From recruitment through to the end of the programmes, procedures to ensure that activities are carried out to a given standard are insufficient. Other than those relating to contractual obligations there are few procedures in place. There are some basic work instructions which were developed some time ago for financial arrangements, recruitment and reviews of trainees' progress. However, some staff involved are not aware of these procedures and how they relate to their area of responsibility. Owing to the lack of procedures in many areas staff carry out their duties as they see appropriate with little guidance.

67. There are some pockets of good practice in work-based training across the curriculum areas. Staff do not have the opportunity to share good practice. The motor-vehicle section was congratulated for its strong internal verification process but the other curriculum areas have not had the opportunity to share this. The other occupational areas have weaknesses in assessment practice which could have been rectified through a robust internal verification system. The hairdressing department has worked hard to integrate key skills but there are weaknesses in the other curriculum areas. The motor-vehicle department has a good NVQ monitoring system which could be of benefit to trainees in other occupational areas.