



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

Middlesbrough College

SUMMARY

Middlesbrough College offers training in business administration and hairdressing. In business administration, good training is provided both in the workplace and at college, and regular visits are made by the college staff to trainees at work. However, some business administration trainees are progressing through their NVQs slowly, and too many trainees leave the programme early. In hairdressing, the practical training provided by employers is good, and theory sessions in college are well planned and competently delivered. Too little assessment evidence is generated at work, however, and the college's salon does not provide a sufficient number or variety of clients for trainees. Equality of opportunity is well promoted in college, but little monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace takes place. Trainee support is good and trainees benefit from a wide range of support services provided by the college. However, progress reviews in hairdressing are poor. Training programmes are managed satisfactorily. Work has recently been done to develop centralised systems for recording and monitoring work-based training. The college regularly reviews the quality of its training programmes and carries out improvement plans successfully. However, quality procedures for work-based training are incomplete.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Hair & beauty	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good workplace training
- ◆ well-planned and effective off-the-job training
- ◆ well-established working groups to promote equal opportunities
- ◆ wide range of support services for trainees
- ◆ effective arrangement for staff development
- ◆ good use made of trainee and employer feedback

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to set trainees challenging targets
- ◆ key skills training and assessment not fully integrated with the NVQ
- ◆ little use made of work-based assessment evidence in hairdressing
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ lack of success in securing employed status for trainees
- ◆ separate quality procedures for work-based training not fully established

INTRODUCTION

1. Middlesbrough College was established as a tertiary college in 1995 as the result of a merger between a general further education college and a sixth form college. The college is based on two sites: the Kirby Campus, which is the centre for vocational courses, is located one mile south of the centre of Middlesbrough, and the Acklam Campus, which is a designated sixth form centre, is one mile further south.

2. Most of MC's work is funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). There are currently 6,302 students, 30 per cent of whom are full time. The college has a contract with Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide work-based training for young people, and is also subcontracted to provide the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. At the time of inspection, there were 43 TEC-funded trainees and 53 New Deal clients at the college. The college employs 221 full-time and 72 part-time staff. Learning is organised through five faculties, where work-based trainees and New Deal clients are generally taught alongside full-time students. In the case of hairdressing, there are sufficient trainees to warrant separate groups for work-based trainees. The college's training partnership manager has overall responsibility for work based training.

3. TEC-funded trainees are currently being trained in three occupational areas. There are 12 trainees in business administration, one in hospitality and 30 in hairdressing. Of these 43 trainees, five are modern apprentices and 38 are on the national traineeship programme. All trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 or 3, as well as key skills units.

4. Middlesbrough has a population of 145,000, one of the largest within the Tees Valley conurbation, which includes Hartlepool (92,000), Redcar and Cleveland (139,000), Stockton-upon-Tees (180,000) and Darlington (101,000). In October 2000, the unemployment rate in Middlesbrough was high at 8.4 per cent, compared with the national figure of 3.4 per cent. Of the area's unemployed people, 28.8 per cent were between the ages of 18 and 24. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Middlesbrough achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 34.6 per cent compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. This figure is the lowest in the north east region of England. Figures produced by the Basic Skills Agency show that the proportion of Middlesbrough's population with low literacy and numeracy skills is 5 per cent higher than the national figure. Incomes in the area are low and the number of single-parent households is above the national average.

5. The traditional industries of steel, shipbuilding and latterly the chemical industry have dominated Teesside's economic history. In recent years, the severe declines in these sectors have had a serious impact on the area. Within the Tees Valley area, 21.6 per cent of the working population are currently employed in manufacturing, 6.2 per cent in construction and 71 per cent in service industries.



There are skill shortages in communications, information technology, management, technical and manual skills.

6. Approximately 2 per cent of Teesside's population are from minority ethnic groups, which is lower than the national average of 6 per cent. In Middlesbrough, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 4.4 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. The college produced its self-assessment report for inspection in July 2000. Inspections by the FEFC and the Training Standards Council (TSC) took place during the same week. The college provided inspectors with an update to its action plan to show the progress that had been made by the time of inspection. Self-assessment is an annual process at the college and is linked to the college's business-planning cycle. The self-assessment process was led by the director of quality, who consulted widely with trainees, employers and staff. Staff within the two faculties identified the strengths and weaknesses of the occupational areas, and proposed a self-assessment grade for these areas, while a cross-college team of staff evaluated the generic aspects. The self-assessment report was approved by the validation panel, which included representatives from trainees, external stakeholders and staff. Inspectors awarded lower grades than those given in the self-assessment report for all areas except for trainee support, with which they agreed.

8. In November 2000, a team of three TSC inspectors spent a total of 12 days at the college. Where appropriate, FEFC and TSC inspectors shared evidence, including lesson observations. Hospitality was not inspected as there was only one apprentice in this sector. The New Deal was also excluded from the scope of inspection as this work had previously been inspected as part of the unit of delivery inspection. TSC inspectors interviewed 17 trainees and examined 35 trainee files. They interviewed 30 staff and 10 employers. Sixteen portfolios of NVQ assessment evidence were examined, and a wide range of documentary evidence was also scrutinised, including minutes of meetings, policies, quality assurance documents, action plans and management information. Four training sessions were observed.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

9. There are 12 trainees on the college's business administration programme. Five are modern apprentices and seven are on the national traineeship programme. All are working towards NVQs in administration at levels 2 or 3. All national trainees

are of non-employed status, but attend work placements four days a week. Trainees work in a range of establishments, including the college itself, two local police offices, a private training provider and a commercial garage. Tutors visit trainees at least once every six weeks in the workplace to carry out monitoring, assessments and reviews. All trainees attend the college one day each week for theory work, key skills, keyboard skills and portfolio-building. Recruitment to the national traineeship programme (formerly youth training until April 1999) has remained constant over the last three years, with seven new starters in each year, and three new recruits in the current year. Recruitment to the modern apprenticeship programme, however, has been erratic, with no new entrants during 1998-99. Over the last three years, there have been 10 recruits to the modern apprenticeship programme. Five of these are still in training, two left early without a qualification and three left having achieved NVQs at level 3. Over the same period, 17 people have left the national traineeship programme. Nine of these trainees left early without a qualification and eight completed their individual training programmes. Inspectors agreed with the strength outlined in the self-assessment report relating to good off-the-job training and found additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that proposed by the college's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good workplace training
- ◆ well-planned programme of off-the-job training
- ◆ frequent assessment and progress reviews for national trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some slow trainee progress
- ◆ key skills training and assessment not fully integrated with the NVQ
- ◆ poor retention rate on national traineeship programme

10. Training in the workplace is good and clearly structured. On-the-job training plans are provided, which specify learning that will be undertaken at work. Employers not only set aside time during working hours for trainees to work on their evidence portfolios, they are also fully aware of the content of the NVQ programme and provide a high level of guidance and support for trainees. Tasks are set to enable trainees to cover the whole of the NVQ and to generate assessment evidence. Workplace supervisors willingly supply witness testimonies, so trainees can use tasks they have done at work for assessment purposes. There is regular and frequent communication between workplace supervisors and college tutors, who are also the NVQ assessors. To enhance the on-the-job training arrangements, the college has produced a form, on which employers give details of the training they will provide against each unit of the award. Where gaps are identified, tutors ensure that appropriate experience will be provided off the job at the college. In addition to NVQ training, trainees benefit from the staff training

provided by employers on topics such as manual handling, effective communication, team-building and disability awareness.

11. The college provides a well-structured and clearly planned programme of off-the-job training. Trainees and workplace supervisors are given copies of the scheme of work, showing which topics will be covered on each day of attendance. These copies provide details of resources to be used, course-work expectations of trainees and links with key skills.

12. Trainees are visited in the workplace frequently by their assessor. These visits are scheduled for every six weeks. During visits, assessors carry out progress reviews and observations for assessment purposes. The reviews fully involve the workplace supervisor concerned. Assessment plans are used effectively and clearly specify elements of competence to be assessed, assessment methods and target dates. Following assessment, trainees are given comprehensive written and verbal feedback.

13. Generally, each group of trainees progresses through the NVQ being worked towards at the same pace as the other groups, with most taking a full two years to complete a national traineeship and three years to finish a modern apprenticeship. For some trainees, however, this pace is not sufficiently challenging as they are capable of progressing far more quickly. On the whole, trainees are not set very demanding targets. Where targets are not met, they are routinely extended, often for one or two months, when the task set could reasonably be completed much more rapidly.

14. The college has worked hard to improve the way in which it approaches key skills. Last year, trainees attended day-release sessions in college over a four-week period. During these sessions, they concentrated on generating assessment evidence for key skills. In the current year, trainees attend key skills sessions at college throughout their programme and are also advised of evidence to be collected from the workplace. However, key skills are not yet fully integrated into the NVQ programme, as evidence is still collected separately and kept in a separate file from the NVQ evidence. Furthermore, NVQ assessment observations do not include key skills elements.

15. Retention rates on the national traineeship programme are poor. The trainee achievement figures for national apprentices for the last three years include two years in which trainees were on the youth training programme. Retention rate figures over the last three years show that 53 per cent of trainees left early without a qualification, while the remaining 47 per cent completed their individual training plans. However, of the 14 youth trainee leavers between 1997 and 1999, 10 progressed into employment.

Hair & beauty

Grade 4

16. There are 30 trainees on the college's hairdressing programme, all of whom are on the national traineeship programme and are working towards NVQs at level

2 plus key skills units. Trainees have work placements in a variety of salons in the locality. There are currently 27 work-placement providers. Trainees attend college one day a week throughout the year for theory and practical training. They also have an individual tutorial once every term. The college has a training salon which is open to members of the public. Most assessments are carried out in college, although there are seven qualified NVQ assessors in the 27 placements. Trainees are visited in the workplace by the placement monitoring officer, who carries out progress reviews and health and safety checks. There are four staff involved in the training programme, all of whom hold advanced hairdressing qualifications, teaching qualifications and NVQ assessor awards. Three of these staff are also qualified internal verifiers. The self-assessment report accurately identified the high quality of training, both in college and in the workplace, as strengths. Inspectors did not agree with the other strengths proposed, but identified an additional strength not mentioned by the college. Inspectors agree with the weaknesses in the report relating to poor success rates of the programme and lack of clients in the college's salon. They identified three additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good practical training in the workplace
- ◆ well-planned and thorough theory instruction
- ◆ trainee participation in a wide range of events and competitions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little work-based evidence used for assessments
- ◆ too few hairdressing clients in the college's salon
- ◆ failure to set trainees challenging targets
- ◆ key skills not fully integrated with the NVQ
- ◆ poor NVQ achievement rates

GOOD PRACTICE

One employer has demonstrated its support for trainees by purchasing tuition heads for them to practice their skills on when the salon is quiet.

17. Employers are highly supportive of trainees and provide good opportunities for them to develop their practical skills. Many have regular structured training sessions and encourage trainees to bring models into the salon during quiet times to practice their skills. Trainees are encouraged to learn quickly a wide range of salon skills to enable them to become productive members of the team. Most of the trainees work on paying clients, carrying out a wide range of services, including colouring, blow-drying and setting. Some trainees have their own list of regular clients. Trainees gain a sense of achievement through their rapid development of practical skills and are well motivated. Employers value their contribution and are keen to support the next generation of stylists for their salons.

18. Theory sessions in college are well planned and competently taught by qualified and experienced staff. MC provides detailed schemes of work and session plans, as well as a wide range of learning aids that are used to provide

variety and interest. The theory sessions are interactive, and learning is regularly checked by the training staff. Questions are used to encourage debate and maintain trainee involvement. For each NVQ unit, learning packages have been devised to develop knowledge of theory. These are comprehensive and well presented. However, the rooms used for theory sessions are generally too small and hot. This unsuitable environment distracts trainees from their work and their attention is not fully maintained throughout the sessions.

19. Trainees are encouraged to take part in hairdressing competitions and attend national trade shows and events. These are arranged by the training staff and the cost is heavily subsidised by the college. Employers also encourage participation in such events and support trainees when competing in local competitions. Where success is achieved, it is celebrated at the college's annual prize-giving ceremony. In addition to those who succeed in competitions, awards are also given to trainees whose efforts have been outstanding.

20. Very little evidence of trainee competence is gathered from the workplace. While there are seven qualified NVQ assessors in the 27 work placements, little assessment is done at work. Of the trainees who began their programme in July 1999, few have had any assessment in the workplace. The placement monitoring officer does not carry out assessments when visiting trainees in the workplace. Trainees and workplace supervisors are unaware that evidence of tasks done at work can be used for assessments, through the provision of witness testimonies by the supervisor. The college has systems and documents to support the collection of assessment evidence generated at work through the use of witness testimonies, but these are not currently being used. Two experienced members of the hairdressing team are currently on long-term absence, which has clearly had an impact on the extent to which workplace evidence has been gathered.

21. Most assessment takes place in the college's salon. However, there are not enough clients in the salon for trainees to practise on, and of those clients that do attend, there is an insufficient variety. The two hairdressing groups each contain 16 and 18 trainees respectively. Those who arrive first get to work on the few clients who are booked into the salon, while the remaining trainees have to work on tuition heads. Time is thus wasted and opportunities to develop skills such as client consultation, promotion of products and aftercare are missed. The lack of clients is hindering trainees' progress through the NVQ, and there are often substantial delays between trainees being assessed on the theory and practical aspects of their NVQ units. For example, some trainees have completed all the written assessment on perming, but have not yet had the opportunity to perform the practical assessment. Schemes of work are designed to ensure that theory and practical work are linked, but these cannot be followed because of the lack of clients. Trainees find it difficult to retain the theoretical knowledge without practical application. Their knowledge is checked again when the practical work is eventually done, but often this is after many months.

22. Trainees are not set challenging targets. Target dates for completion of individual training plans are constantly being put back, often by as much as a year. Most of the trainees who began their programme in July 1999 have still not

completed their shampoo and conditioning units. Indeed, the majority of trainees take approximately 18 months to complete such basic parts of the programme. Trainees' practical skills are good, however, and many are performing more advanced techniques, such as colouring, successfully in the workplace.

23. Much work has been done by the college on key skills training over the past year. However, trainees attend separate sessions for key skills development, and these sessions are not linked with the occupational training. In effect, this means that although trainees are improving their key skills, they are missing out on the opportunity to capture evidence of competence in key skills alongside the NVQ itself. Separate assessments are therefore being carried out for communication and application of number which could easily be assessed as part of the NVQ.

24. NVQ achievement rates are poor, although improvements were made in the last contract year. Over the last three years, 53 trainees have left the programme. Of these, 36 per cent completed their individual training plans and 64 per cent left early without a qualification. Of those who started in the contract year 1999-2000, 26 have left the programme. Fifty per cent achieved all the targets in their individual training plans, and the remaining 50 per cent left without a qualification.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

25. The college has an equal opportunities policy, which refers to current legislation on sex discrimination, race relations, equal pay and disability discrimination. It is signed by the chief executive. The college also has a racial harassment policy, a policy for tutorial support, a disability statement, an inclusive learning policy and a complaints procedure. Policies and procedures are contained in the staff handbook and on the college's intranet. A statement on equal opportunities is contained in the student charter which is given to all trainees during their induction programme. The director of human resources has overall responsibility for equal opportunities and the equal opportunities committee is chaired by the co-ordinator. The committee monitors and reviews progress towards the college action plan to further equality of opportunity. This action plan is produced annually. Staff and trainees receive training on equal opportunities through staff development, induction programmes and tutorial sessions. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and one of the weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. They identified an additional weakness relating to lack of monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace, and awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-established working groups to promote equal opportunities
- ◆ well-implemented policies and procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ under-representation of some groups in training
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace

26. The college places a high emphasis on equality of opportunities, having a designated committee and access group to ensure the progress of its equal opportunities agenda. The equal opportunities committee examines working practices across the college and identifies ways in which it can improve equality. It is instrumental in drawing up action plans for improvements and monitoring progress towards achievement of plans. The college has created links with external organisations to widen participation and encourage those from under-represented groups to participate in training. These external agencies include the Commission for Racial Equality, the Racial Harassment Forum, the Equal Opportunities Commission and local disability groups. It has an inclusive learning strategy which has led to improvements in the college's initial assessment procedures. The procedure now includes assessment of trainees' preferred learning styles, which are then taken into account when planning training. The college has introduced unit accreditation to acknowledge the achievements of trainees who are unable to obtain a full qualification. There is an extensive staff training programme on equal opportunities issues such as inclusive learning, disability awareness and learning preferences. The college's policy on equal opportunities is produced in a simplified format in the student charter to ensure that it is comprehensible to all. Non-discriminatory behaviour is promoted and reinforced during training.

27. Trainees and staff have a good awareness of the college's procedures for monitoring equality of opportunity. These procedures include staff and trainee recruitment policies, harassment policies and procedures covering review of promotional literature. Trainees have a good understanding of the college's complaints procedure, both for logging formal complaints through senior management and through the grievance procedure in occupational areas. Trainee complaints are treated seriously, resolved efficiently and dealt with confidentially. The director of corporate services manages the complaints procedure, which requires complaints to be acknowledged within three working days of being received and dealt with within 10 working days. Managers maintain and review records of complaints received and monitor the nature of the complaints to identify any trends or recurring themes.

28. Within the hairdressing and business administration areas, there is a marked under-representation of men, with only one man in each occupational area: only two, out of a total of 43 trainees. Despite the links created with local community groups and attempts to widen participation, the college's efforts have not resulted in success in recruiting more men into training.

29. The college provides a range of material to employers when agreeing placements and apprenticeships with employers. There is an employers' handbook which outlines their responsibilities, including adherence to the college's equal opportunities policy. As part of the initial vetting procedure for work placements,

checks are carried out on equality of opportunity in the workplace. However, following this initial check, no regular monitoring takes place. For example, the college's trainee review process fails to take the opportunity to review equal opportunities.

Trainee support

Grade 2

30. Trainees are referred to the college and recruited through direct links with employers. They initially complete an application form and are then contacted by the programme co-ordinator and invited for interview. Successful applicants attend an induction programme which lasts between one and two weeks. During this time, trainees are found a suitable work placement. They also undergo an initial assessment process, which includes basic skills and key skills assessment. The TEC contract requires the college to carry out reviews of trainees' progress every 12 weeks. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that its student support services are a key strength of trainee support. However, they did not agree with the other strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the self-assessment grade given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ very good careers guidance
- ◆ thorough induction programme
- ◆ wide range of support services for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor progress reviews in hairdressing

GOOD PRACTICE

All trainees are issued with an identity card. This was introduced as a safety initiative. All trainees must display their personal identity cards to a security guard on entry to the College. Failure to display identity is noted and action is taken if this is repeated.

31. The college maintains strong links with over 50 local schools. The college has a dedicated liaison officer who visits the schools regularly to discuss careers options with students. Potential trainees are well informed of the opportunities available to them. Promotional literature makes specific reference to work-based training programmes. There are also good links with the local careers service whose staff visit the college twice a week to hold careers clinics with trainees. Trainees can make appointments for this when necessary. The college's student services team maintains a high profile in all local careers events. The team has contacts with local youth clubs and close relationships with the youth service. The college has a purpose-built careers office situated in its entrance foyer which is permanently staffed by well-qualified careers guidance personnel. This high profile service is accessible to all trainees to ensure that they have full information on the range of training programmes available.

32. Trainees all undertake a comprehensive induction programme at the beginning of their studies, which lasts between one and two weeks. During induction, they

are given information on the college as a whole, including the wide range of support services available to them. Trainees are also provided with copies of the college's key policies and the student charter. They undertake a further in-depth induction in their relevant faculty, which provides detailed information on their chosen programme, including an overview of the NVQ and key skill units. Trainees also attend interviews for work placements during this time, and a suitable placement is found for them. Strong emphasis is placed on health and safety issues during trainee induction, and trainees' knowledge of health and safety is checked through the use of a questionnaire. Initial assessment is thorough, and includes assessment of trainees' basic and key skills. It also provides opportunities for the accreditation of prior learning. Furthermore, where trainees are identified as needing additional learning support, contact is made with the learning support co-ordinator to make the necessary arrangements.

33. The college has a wide range of support services available to all students. Many of the work-based trainees take advantage of these excellent services. For example, the student support services team offers a counselling and guidance service, run by qualified and experienced staff. This service is widely publicised throughout the college on posters and notices. The college also has good links with a range of agencies to whom it may refer trainees for more specialist counselling on issues such as drug dependence, child protection and health-related topics. A good range of practical support is available to trainees, including subsidised meals, a library, a learning resource centre which is well equipped with computers, and a newly renovated gym. Trainees can call in at the college at any time during the week to use these facilities. The college also provides buses to transport trainees from outlying areas.

34. The college provides additional learning support for all students. Several of the work-based trainees benefit from this service. Arrangements for these trainees to attend college for any additional training are made around their core timetable. Additional learning support includes literacy and numeracy training, which enables these trainees to meet the requirements of their NVQ programme and key skills units. Learning activities are also linked with the vocational programme. In many cases, trainees take their NVQ assignment and portfolio work to the learning support sessions so that they can work on them while they are there. Trainees greatly value the additional help given.

35. The TEC contract requires the college to carry out progress reviews with trainees every 13 weeks. In hairdressing, however, staff absences have disrupted the review cycle and some reviews have not been carried out on time. In addition, the reviews in hairdressing are carried out in the college, and the workplace supervisor is not involved in the process at all. The college has recently introduced a new system of recording progress reviews, which involves giving the workplace supervisor a copy of the review record. However, this arrangement is not yet fully established.

Management of training

Grade 3

36. Co-ordination of MC's TEC-funded and New Deal training is carried out by the training partnerships manager, who is directly responsible to the director of curriculum (one of five cross-college directors). There are five learning faculties, each of which has a faculty head assisted by curriculum managers. The principal, vice principal, assistant principal, five directors and five heads of faculty comprise the management team, which holds weekly formal meetings. Each faculty has a designated contact person for work-based training. There are TEC funded trainees in two of the faculties, which relate to the business and service industries. Staff within these faculties carry out off-the-job training, assessment and reviews. In business administration, tutors visit trainees in their workplace to carry out placement monitoring, assessment and reviews. In hairdressing, there is a separate placement monitoring officer. Assessment and reviews for trainees in hairdressing are carried out by tutors on the college premises. The college achieved the Investors in People standard in August 1998, was successfully re-accredited in 1999 and has a further re-assessment planned for late November 2000. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and two of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They identified two other strengths and an additional weakness relating to lack of success in securing employment status for trainees, and awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good internal and external communication
- ◆ good implementation of the college's policies
- ◆ effective arrangements for staff development
- ◆ well-established network of work-placement providers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak central co-ordination of work-based training
- ◆ lack of success in securing employed status for trainees
- ◆ inefficient co-ordination of management information

37. Good communication exists between staff, trainees and employers. The college has a range of internal mechanisms to enable such effective communication. These include regular staff briefings, a comprehensive schedule of meetings and a weekly staff bulletin. In addition, each faculty produces regular newsletters which are distributed to all trainees. There is an electronic mail system and a college intranet. Meetings are clearly recorded along with action points and dates for completion, and minutes are circulated to all concerned. Trainee and employer handbooks are available, which contain essential information on all training programmes. These are regularly updated and distributed to all concerned. In addition to visits to employers, staff maintain and record regular telephone

contact with the placement providers. Employers have a named person to whom they direct any communication or queries. This good range of measures ensures that staff, trainees and employers are well informed and have constant access to detailed information relating directly to the training programmes and broader college issues. Employers are given copies of the schemes of work to be covered in college, and records of trainees' attendance at college and work are well maintained.

38. The college has clearly documented policies which cover a range of cross-college issues, including those which impact directly on trainees. Many of these policies are included in the staff handbook, which is available on the intranet. They cover a wide range of topics, including a teaching code of practice and policies on internal verification, programme validation and review, staff appointments, trainee welfare, and health and safety. All the policies are fully supported by staff, well implemented and regularly reviewed by the management team.

39. Arrangements for staff development at the college are good and effective. There are annual staff appraisals, from which individual development plans are generated. The college also has a training plan which is linked to the strategic plan. Both are used to identify staff development needs. Staff undertake a range of development activities, including internal and external training courses. Some of these courses lead to qualifications, while others are not accredited. Staff are well qualified, and hold a variety of vocational, teaching and NVQ assessor awards. Some are also qualified to carry out internal verification and are able to advise trainees on accreditation of prior learning. In hairdressing, staff update their professional knowledge through attending regular seminars and training events provided by product manufacturers. In business administration, professional updating is achieved during tutors' regular visits to the workplace. Staff also have annual lesson observations and are given written feedback on their performance as well as suggestions for improvement. Lessons are graded and, where the quality of the session is considered to be less than satisfactory, a further observation takes place. The observation system is a useful staff development tool and enables college managers to monitor the quality of instruction. Observations have recently been carried out on the staff who teach the work-based training programmes.

40. Most employers and work placement providers have long-standing relationships with the college. They are highly satisfied with the current arrangements and are supportive of and loyal to the college. Indeed, many employers state that they would not consider being involved in work-based training through any other training provider. Staff at the college work hard to maintain the college's excellent reputation with employers and to provide an efficient, responsive service.

41. Work-based training is not very well co-ordinated centrally at the college. In recognition of this need, the college created the post of training partnerships manager in October 1999. The post holder left the college in May 2000 and a replacement staff member took up the post in June 2000. While much development work has recently been undertaken and substantial progress has been made, central

co-ordination is not yet fully established. Work-based trainees are taught alongside other academic trainees within the different faculties. Each faculty uses different systems and paperwork, which complicates the monitoring of work-based training at the college. Until recently, there has been little central monitoring of crucial aspects of the work-based training programme, such as trainees' progress, reviews, work placement visits or health and safety checks. Records of these activities have been maintained within each of the faculties, but not centrally. Work is currently being done to create a central recording and monitoring system for the work-based training at the college.

42. The college has a long history of providing non-employed status training programmes, including youth training and other training. In April 1999, the TEC ceased to contract with the college for other training programmes and required it to convert all those in such training to a national traineeship programme. Of the 43 trainees on TEC-funded programmes, 38 are national trainees. The national trainee frameworks strongly recommend that trainees be employed from the beginning of the programme. In its contract, however, the TEC states that employment is not a mandatory requirement. None of the national trainees at the college are employed. Action has been taken by the college to try to encourage work-placement providers to employ trainees, but this has so far been unsuccessful. However, most placement providers employ trainees at the end of their training programme.

43. The college highlighted in its self-assessment report that the current management information system for TEC-funded trainees is inefficient and unco-ordinated. All trainees who attend college are entered on the main college system which generates attendance registers. A list of current trainees is also produced by a separate system maintained by the training partnerships manager. Often there are discrepancies between the two systems, which are time-consuming to resolve. Records of the destination of training programme leavers are maintained by the faculty clerks. One of the clerks operates a manual system and the other has devised a computerised system to record details. While the information recorded is accurate and available, it is not centralised.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

44. A director of quality, responsible for quality assurance throughout the college, was appointed in October 1999. The college staff handbook, which is available on the intranet, contains many of the quality procedures. The quality assurance policy covers all aspects of the college's work. Programme review meetings are held every term, and these are attended by staff, trainees, representatives of the careers service, work-placement providers and employers. Questionnaires are also used to gather the views of trainees and employers. Findings from these questionnaires are collated and reported to the quality sub-committee of the academic board. The college has a panel which validates its self-assessment report. This panel includes a range of staff, a governor and a TEC representative. Inspectors did not agree with the six strengths given in the self-assessment report, although they identified three different strengths. Inspectors broadly agreed with the two weaknesses highlighted

through self-assessment and awarded a grade lower than that proposed by the college's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and consultative self-assessment process
- ◆ effective implementation of improvement plans
- ◆ good use made of trainee and employer feedback

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of established quality assurance procedures for work-based training
- ◆ little analysis of information relating to trainee retention and achievement

45. The college has demonstrated its strong commitment to quality assurance through the appointment of a director whose sole remit relates to this area. The college has carried out annual self-assessment to meet FEFC requirements since 1996. In 1999, it carried out self-assessment of its work-based training against a set of regional quality standards which were based upon *Raising the Standard*, as required by the TEC. In preparation for inspection, the college produced a separate self-assessment report for its TEC-funded work in addition to that produced for the FEFC. Self-assessment is an integral part of the college's quality assurance system. All relevant staff were involved in self-assessment and all proposed strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report is clear, detailed and well structured. Evidence is cited to support the judgements made. At inspection, evidence was well organised, clearly referenced and accessible. Despite this, many of the strengths in the self-assessment report were identified by inspectors as normal practice, and the college was not deemed to have taken sufficient account of trainee retention and achievements when forming its judgements.

46. The college has a well-established system of implementing improvement plans. Plans are drawn up for individuals, programmes and faculties. They are carefully monitored and successfully implemented. The director of quality centrally monitors reports from external audits and awarding body visits. Feedback from external verifiers is clearly communicated to staff and, where appropriate, remedial action is swiftly identified and taken. The college's system of lesson observations is well established and in its fourth year of operation. A paper on good practice identified through the lesson observations is circulated once a term. There are also regular good-practice forums, which help to address specific issues as they arise. Recent forums have covered assessment and lessons.

47. The views of trainees are sought through the issue of questionnaires three times a year. Responses are collated and analysed, and findings are reported to curriculum teams. Suggestions for improvements are discussed and, where appropriate, changes to the training programmes are made. Questionnaires are also sent to employers, although the response rate for these is poor. Only 11 responses

were received from 42 perception questionnaires issued to employers as part of the self-assessment process. Employers are also invited to the termly programme review meetings, which are fully attended by staff and trainees. Some work-placement providers attend these meetings and contribute feedback and ideas. Trainees are also represented on key committees such as the academic board, the information technology advisory group and the learning resource centre user group.

48. Quality procedures for work-based training are not fully developed yet. The college has recognised that some separate procedures for work-based training are required. The training partnership manager is in the process of developing these procedures. Although some have already been developed and were introduced in September 2000, others have yet to be implemented. Recently, checks have been made of trainee and work-placement files, and as a result of these some administrative errors and omissions were found. Requests for corrective action have been issued regarding this. As yet, there is no audit schedule outlining arrangements for systematically checking that quality procedures are being followed. Nevertheless, the college has an internal verification policy, which operates well in both faculties. Internal verification is well planned and clearly recorded.

49. Until recently, there has been little analysis of data relating to trainees' retention and achievement and the destination of leavers in order to inform improvements. While retention and achievement rates are available for FEFC-funded courses, separate figures are not routinely generated for work-based training. The figures produced for FEFC courses relate to the academic year from September to July, whereas the TEC contract year begins in April. These data are therefore of little use in measuring the success of the work-based training programmes. In preparation for inspection, however, the college produced data on trainees' retention and achievements for each of the two sectors and training programmes, which was more detailed than any data previously used. Also, new procedures for recording leaver destinations have recently been introduced.