



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

Milton Keynes College

SUMMARY

Milton Keynes College provides satisfactory training in the areas of construction, hospitality and hair and beauty. There is good off-the-job training in most areas but achievement and retention rates are poor. Training in engineering and business administration is unsatisfactory, with little involvement by employers in training. The college promotes equal opportunities widely within the college but its monitoring of this area in the workplace, where trainees spend most of their time, is ineffective. The initial assessment of trainees is poor and some are placed on inappropriate programmes, but individual learning support for trainees is good. Management of training and quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. Action to improve the poor retention and achievement rates is ineffective. The college's quality assurance arrangements for work-based training are inadequate and there is little use of statistical data to improve the standard of training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4
Business administration	4
Hospitality	3
Hair & beauty	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good off-the-job training across most occupational areas
- ◆ good management of on- and off-the-job training in hairdressing
- ◆ comprehensive and effective learning support for trainees
- ◆ good access to and use of college's resources and support services
- ◆ flexible training arrangements
- ◆ systematic observation of training sessions

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ little use of work-based assessment in most occupational areas
- ◆ poor implementation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment process
- ◆ poor initial induction for some trainees
- ◆ ineffective action to address poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ slow implementation and poor integration of key skills with vocational training
- ◆ inadequate quality assurance arrangements for work-based training
- ◆ insufficient use of statistical data to improve work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. Milton Keynes College (the college) is a medium-sized general further education college. It was formed in 1982 when the two further education colleges at Wolverton and Bletchley merged. The college operates from its main site in Milton Keynes and two other sites at Bletchley and Bletchley Park. The college has approximately 8,000 students and 75 per cent of them come from the Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire area. The college is currently working on a plan to merge its work-based training with that of the two training providers it owns, based upon the expertise of each of the partners.

2. The college contracts with Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) to provide work-based training. The contract with the CCTE is managed by a member of staff of a subsidiary company of the college. This company, which is a company limited by guarantee, is wholly owned by the college. The college subcontracts all of the recruitment, initial assessment and initial induction of trainees to the subsidiary company. Work-based training is provided within the college's three main curriculum areas, each of which has a middle manager responsible for it. Members of staff who train and assess trainees are managed by team leaders, who are based within the three curriculum areas. Trainees join day-release, part-time and evening classes at the college, which include students who are employees of local companies and those who have enrolled as members of the public.

3. The borough of Milton Keynes has one of the fastest growing populations in the United Kingdom. The area has a population of 222,000. It has a higher percentage of young people under 16 than the national average. In 2000, the number of young people achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 41 per cent, which is below the national average of 49.2 per cent. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups, at 5.8 per cent, is slightly higher than the proportion for the Southeast as a whole, which is 4.4 per cent. The proportion of minority ethnic groups is increasing as asylum seekers are moving into the area.

4. Employment is buoyant in the Milton Keynes area. The unemployment rate was only 1.5 per cent in October 2000, compared with the national rate of 3.4 per cent. There are unfilled job vacancies in the area and a growing skills shortage. Fifty-five per cent of the 7,091 companies in Milton Keynes employ fewer than 20 people. The local economy is dominated by the service sector but there is also a significant number of manufacturing companies.

5. The college provides work-based training for 226 young people as advanced modern apprentices, national trainees/foundation modern apprentices and trainees on other programmes. Trainees are taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the areas of motor vehicle, electrical installation, administration, information technology, accounting, hospitality, hairdressing, engineering, customer service, warehousing and estate agency. The last four areas were not



included in the inspection as they had low numbers of trainees, with only 13 trainees among them.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. The college produced the first self-assessment report on its work-based training in 1999. A second report was produced in the summer of 2000 for the Training Standards Council (TSC) inspection. The college has a clear process for producing the self-assessment report, based upon an annual cycle. Working groups in curriculum areas meet in the December of each year to identify strengths and weaknesses, which are then approved in the spring of the following year by a self-assessment review group. Action plans, which are produced for each occupational section of the report, are then reviewed and updated. The college's quality and development board approves the report and action plan. A meeting is then held with local CCTE officers to review both the self-assessment report and the action plan. During the summer, a small working party reviews the self-assessment report and examines the provisional grades which have been internally awarded. The grades are subsequently agreed using additional data and information gathered from the college's internal quality assurance procedures in August of each year. The self-assessment report was updated before the start of the inspection.

7. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 27 days at Milton Keynes College in October and November 2000. They held 34 interviews with college staff and interviewed 67 trainees and 15 workplace supervisors. They visited 22 employers and work placements. They conducted six interviews with staff from the college's subcontractor and interviewed an officer from the local CCTE and a college governor. They examined a wide range of documents including strategic and operational plans, internal and external verification reports, trainees' records and individual training plans, trainees' portfolios, lesson plans and learning schedules. The inspection coincided with that of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and, where it was appropriate, evidence gathered by FEFC inspectors was taken into account. Inspectors observed 16 instruction sessions and the following grades were awarded to them.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		1	1			2
Engineering		1	1			2
Business administration	1	2	4	1		8
Hospitality			2			2
Hair & beauty	1	1				2
Total	2	5	8	1	0	16

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. There are 29 electrical installation trainees comprising 15 advanced modern apprentices, 11 national trainees/foundation modern apprentices and three trainees on other training programmes. Advanced modern apprentices take an NVQ at level 2 in installing electrotechnical systems and an NVQ at level 3 in installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems and equipment, together with specified theoretical and practical competencies and specified key skills. Foundation modern apprentices take an NVQ at level 2 plus specified theoretical, practical and key skills components. Trainees on other training programmes are working towards an NVQ at level 2 and some will take an NVQ at level 3. The advanced and foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks have recently been revised with the result that there are trainees working within both the original and new frameworks. The national training organisation for the industry does not specify a length of time for the apprenticeship. Advanced modern apprentices ranged from those who are in the first to those that are in the fifth year of their programme. Trainees are employed in 23 general electrical contracting businesses across north Buckinghamshire and the Milton Keynes area. The trainees attend the college's Bletchley Park campus for day release or a combination of day and evening classes each week for practical and theoretical training. They work towards a nationally recognised qualification in electrical installation competences. NVQ assessment at level 2 is based on a combination of practical assignments in the college and evidence from the workplace. The NVQ at level 3 in installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems and equipment is recognised by the industry as the standard qualification for electricians. Advanced modern apprentices also work towards the achievement measurement 2 (AM2) standard, and qualify for membership of a national register of qualified electricians. Achievement is difficult to quantify year-on-year. No trainees have completed their individual training plan over the past three years. The proportion of advanced modern apprentices achieving their level 2 NVQ and the nationally recognised qualification in electrical installation competences was 67 per cent in 1996-97, 100 per cent in 1997-98 and 78 per cent in 1998-99. The figures reflect the retention for the first two years, with the rate falling to 67 per cent in 1999-2000. The proportion of national trainees remaining on programme is 80 per cent for 1999-2000 and it is 100 per cent for those on other training. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured off-the-job training
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ additional qualifications provided for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress by trainees towards achieving NVQs
- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ poor target-setting and progress reviews
- ◆ some overcrowding of classrooms and workshops

9. Trainees have the choice of attending day or evening classes, or a combination of the two for their off-the-job training. The training sessions include both practical and theoretical elements. The training is well planned and learning schedules clearly specify what the training will consist of and which skills will be practised each week. The training schedule includes details of the dates and times of examinations and practical competence tests. The structure of the training ensures that there is a good balance of practical and theoretical learning during each day in college. Trainers adopt a flexible approach to ensure that individual trainees practise their skills at their own pace. Theoretical and practical training is given in adjacent rooms, giving good opportunities for trainers to reinforce theoretical learning with practical demonstrations. As well as gaining skills in electrical installation, trainees learn to use an industry-standard software package to design electrical distribution systems. Trainers also make use of a robotics training facility on the college campus to demonstrate electrical distribution practice in industrial installations. Trainees are given comprehensive information packs to support them in their learning. There are appropriately detailed sections to supplement their theoretical learning, a section containing practical tasks, and a section on relevant health and safety legislation and practice. While the learning schedules identify the overall objective of each week's sessions, there are insufficient individual session plans. Trainees are not given copies of the learning schedules and are only told at the end of each training session what they will be studying the following week.

10. All trainees are employed. Trainees work for small businesses, mainly electrical installation and/or maintenance contractors. A few tend to specialise in, for example, the installation and maintenance of alarm systems. Employers offer the opportunity to learn and practise a wide range of electrical installation skills in a variety of contexts which are well matched to the NVQ standards. Employers support and encourage their trainees effectively, recognising the need to avoid giving them repetitive work which requires low levels of skill. Most employers allow trainees time for portfolio-building in addition to the time for their off-the-job training.

11. When they are approaching the end of their programme advanced modern apprentices are encouraged to attend additional training sessions leading to a certificate in testing and commissioning electrical systems, and to take the qualification for the 16th edition of the wiring regulations through an examination. Apprentices are also encouraged to apply for membership of a national register of qualified electricians.

12. Trainees make slow progress towards achieving their NVQs. Trainees are not introduced to the structure and requirements of their NVQs at an early stage of their training. The college regards the completion of NVQs as milestones to mark the end of the apprenticeship rather than trainees achieving them as soon as they can demonstrate the required competence. The college does not encourage trainees to achieve individual units of their NVQ as they progress. There are two modern apprentices who have reached the fifth year of their programmes without completing their frameworks. Their NVQ portfolios have been assessed and internally verified, but they still have to complete their key skills. While progress towards achieving NVQs is slow, retention rates are good and the rate of achievement of NVQs at level 2 is good, though it has declined over the last year.

13. The evidence put together for NVQ assessments is largely made up of material generated at college during off-the-job training sessions. Trainees are not told about the practice of collecting evidence in their workplace until late in their programmes. Witness testimony is provided by trainees' supervisors who, while they are occupationally competent, are not familiar with the NVQ standards. Assessment is not systematically planned. Opportunities for using evidence produced in the workplace are missed. There is insufficient assessment through the observation of trainees' performance in the workplace. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Trainees are not effectively coached in the practice of cross-referencing their evidence to the NVQ standards. In many cases, assessors carry out this work without explaining the process to the trainees. Trainees are not encouraged to put forward different types of evidence for assessment. Trainees are given information packs, which cover the process of putting together an NVQ portfolio, but they are uncertain how to use the materials effectively.

14. Trainees have regular reviews with their assessor. Recently, assessors have carried out these reviews more frequently in the workplace than in the college, which is a significant improvement in policy. While reviews are regular, they are not always used effectively. Trainees' action plans do not always specify clear objectives and, when they are reviewed at the next session, assessors do not always record what has been achieved. Successive action plans specify the same targets, with no reasons given for them being carried over. Action-planning practice is sometimes poor. Some action plans are linked to NVQ standards, while others are not.

15. There have been significant recent changes in personnel. The team leader left in August and new staff have recently been recruited. Some of the weaknesses outlined above have been recognised by the college, and efforts are being made to eliminate long-standing poor practice. Action planning with trainees is now being undertaken in the workplace instead of at the college. Assessors are now planning assessments more effectively and identifying opportunities for carrying out observation in the workplace. Assessors are responding at short notice to opportunities of capturing naturally occurring evidence through workplace observations.

16. Employers respect the trainer/assessors for their knowledge and experience, and their work with the trainees. They have regular discussions with the trainer/assessors at the quarterly reviews and the action planning visits. These meetings are not always used to exchange information which could improve the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Some employers have little knowledge of their trainee's NVQ programme. Trainees sometimes spend unnecessary time in the college learning practical skills which they have already developed to the required competence in the workplace. Trainer/assessors miss opportunities to influence the type of work undertaken in the workplace and to provide supplementary college-based practical learning to fill any identified gaps. This is another area, however, where the staff changes have had a positive benefit, with new staff discussing training needs more frequently with employers.

17. The workshop and training room are overcrowded. They were each designed for 12 trainees and the groups using them, which include both trainees and college students, are as large as 18.

Engineering

Grade 4

18. The college has 44 motor vehicle trainees, of whom 15 are advanced modern apprentices, 20 are national trainees/foundation modern apprentices and nine are on other training programmes. The trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in vehicle maintenance. The trainees attend weekly day-release classes at the Bletchley Park campus, where they have both theoretical and practical training. All trainees are employed by small and medium-sized employers in the north Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes areas. There are three tutors responsible for training and assessment and reviewing trainees' progress. The college was only able to supply data for the occupational area as a whole and did not distinguish between engineering and motor vehicle programmes. In 1999-2000 of the five advanced modern apprentices started training programmes one has achieved an NVQ at level 2 and three have left without completing any qualification. Of the 26 trainees who started advanced modern apprenticeships in 1998-99, 12 left early without a qualification and 14 are still in training, but only six of those have achieved an NVQ at level 2. Of the 22 national trainees who started in 1999-2000, 10 have left early and three have achieved an NVQ at level 2. In 1998-99, of the nine national trainees who started training, seven left early and only one achieved an NVQ at level 2. Over the last two years, five trainees have started other training programmes. Only one of these trainees completed an NVQ at level 2, with one leaving early and three trainees still in training. Inspectors considered a number of the strengths in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with one of the weaknesses. They identified further strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than the one given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and -presented off-the-job training
- ◆ creative off-the-job training projects
- ◆ good NVQ assessment practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor target-setting and action-planning
- ◆ unplanned on-the-job training
- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates

19. Off-the-job training is well planned and the sessions are presented in a lively and interesting way, using practical examples of work to illustrate points. Tutors use well-designed worksheets, visual aids and videos during the theory sessions and these are supported by practical demonstrations. The college's workshops are housed in temporary buildings which are small but adequately equipped. Work on key skills is integrated with theory sessions for the NVQs and the tutors have developed exercises to cover the standards across a number of units.

20. Creative assignments and projects are used to complement the trainees' theoretical training sessions and cover the practical aspects of motor vehicle engineering. Some trainees have rebuilt a car. Four of the trainees gained licences to race the car and others worked as a support team in the racetrack's pits. Another project was to build a fuel-efficient car for a fuel economy trial. The local authority supported these projects as part of its work with disaffected young people. Tutors made good use of these projects to enable trainees to gain an NVQ unit in coaching skills for their work with the young people.

21. All trainees are employed in local companies which offer good facilities and give trainees ample opportunities to practise their skills. All employers ensure that there is good practice in the area of health and safety. Trainees are involved in a wide range of activities and display good levels of skills and knowledge. In many cases, trainees in the second year of their apprenticeship service vehicles competently with a minimum amount of supervision. One trainee is testing the effectiveness of composite materials and is solely responsible for writing a report on this activity.

22. Tutors make regular visits to the workplace, where assessments are planned in detail. The trainees and their workplace supervisors are fully consulted over when and how assessments will take place. The tutors provide guidance notes on the assessment process. The workplace supervisor provides supplementary information on the competence of trainees and sets the work activities on which they will be assessed. The assessor makes detailed notes on the assessment and gives both verbal and written feedback to trainees.

23. Trainees are unclear about their medium-term targets and have little knowledge of their progress in terms of achieving their NVQ and completing their

programme. Trainees' reviews are carried out more frequently than specified in the TEC contract but they are focused on pastoral matters. They are not used effectively to set targets for trainees or to monitor their progress towards gaining their qualification. Supervisors are not involved in the reviews and have insufficient understanding of the NVQ standards. Much of the trainees' on-the-job training is unplanned and not related to the NVQ standards. Trainees learn at work by observing their supervisor and other colleagues performing tasks, rather than following a planned training programme which can be monitored and reviewed to ensure that trainees are making suitable progress.

24. The college can only supply data for the whole of the engineering area, which includes motor vehicle studies. Trainees' retention and achievement rates are poor. Across the motor vehicle programmes, 50 per cent of trainees leave their programmes early without having achieved a qualification. The highest proportion of modern apprentices and national trainees achieving an NVQ at level 2 is 23 per cent.

Business administration

Grade 4

25. The college offers NVQs in accounting at levels 2, 3 and 4 and in administration and information technology at levels 2 and 3. There are 55 trainees across business administration programmes, of whom 28 are advanced modern apprentices, 17 are national trainees/foundation modern apprentices and 10 are trainees on other training programmes. Accounting trainees attend day-release classes, or two evening sessions, or one afternoon and one evening class each week. Administration and information technology trainees are encouraged to attend college once a week, where they can take part in structured group training sessions. All the programmes are provided at the college's main site. The college-owned subsidiary company carries out the recruitment selection and placing of trainees. Staff from the accounting programme also carry out an occupational interview with prospective trainees. Trainees also complete diagnostic key skills tests. A work-based assessor visits all trainees in the workplace every four to six weeks. All trainees are employed in a range of small and medium-sized companies in the Milton Keynes area. The trainees have progress reviews every 12 weeks. They attend two course review meetings each year, when they are asked to give feedback and comments on their programmes. The college could only supply data for the business administration sector as a whole. Of the 31 trainees who started modern apprenticeship programmes in 1998-99, 25 entered at NVQ level 2 and six at level 3. Of these, 10 trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2, three achieved an NVQ at level 3 and 19 left without achieving any qualification. Eleven trainees are still in training but only one has completed their individual training plan. Of the five national trainees who started in 1998-99 none has achieved a qualification and four have left the programme early. Of the six modern apprentices who started their programme in 1999-2000, none have achieved a qualification and three have left early. Ten of the 17 national trainees who started in 1999-2000 have left the programme early and of the and seven who are still in training only one has achieved an NVQ at level 2. Inspectors regarded two strengths identified in the

self-assessment report as being no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with all weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good range of additional qualifications for administration and information technology trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of employers' involvement in training
- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ poor action-planning and target-setting for accounting trainees
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

26. Employers provide effective support for trainees. Trainees are employed in a wide variety of jobs in a range of sectors from manufacturing to service industries. Some trainees have highly responsible jobs with good promotion prospects and many undertake a wide range of activities. One administration advanced modern apprentice is working as a supervisor for a data-management company and is responsible for 14 staff. Another modern apprentice works in the purchasing department of a large retailer dealing with orders, buying goods and assisting in the general accounts department. Even when companies are working to tight deadlines, most trainees are given study time in addition to attending off-the-job training sessions.

27. Both the college and employers offer additional qualifications to trainees. At the college, trainees take qualifications in word processing, use of spreadsheets and office skills. These give trainees a firm foundation in office-related skills and enhance their employability. Employers also give trainees the chance to gain extra qualifications and in some cases trainees are also taking professional qualifications, such as a certificate in marketing.

28. Most trainees attend weekly off-the-job sessions. These sessions are well planned and there is a timetable for the whole year. Employers, however, are not informed about the schedule or content of these weekly training sessions. The college day-release timetable is not given to work-based supervisors. Supervisors cannot, therefore, plan additional training to support the college. Assessors visit the trainees at their employer's premises on a monthly basis, but they do not always visit the trainees' work area. They see trainees in separate interview rooms and do not take the opportunity to carry out workplace assessments. Some employers have very little contact with the college and do not feel that they are informed or involved in their trainees' training or assessment.

29. In accounting, assessors use little or no action-planning with trainees. Trainees follow a standard programme. Of the 14 trainees' files inspected, nine had no evidence of action-planning or target-setting following assessors' visits. The section on the trainees' monthly progress-review record had not been completed. Trainees who attend the weekly off-the-job training sessions are set few assignments and given insufficient written feedback on their work. Those trainees who do not attend the sessions are often left with little idea of how they are progressing or what short-term objectives they should be working towards.

POOR PRACTICE

One trainee collected naturally occurring work-based evidence for the application of number unit of her key skills qualification. She was advised that it was better to complete a college assignment, which would meet all of the requirements of the unit. She then discarded the evidence she had produced in favour of simulated material, although she had clearly demonstrated her competence at work.

30. Trainees' achievement and retention rates are poor. The data supplied by the college does not distinguish between the performance of accounting, administration and information technology trainees and only covers the last two years. The highest rate of achievement over the last two years has been 32 per cent for modern apprentices achieving an NVQ at level 2. However, only 10 per cent of those who started in 1998-99 achieved an NVQ at level 3. The highest retention rate on any programme over the last two years has been 39 per cent while the lowest figure is 20 per cent. Of the 37 modern apprentices who started, only one has achieved the targets on their individual training plan. Of the 22 national trainees who started over the past two years none has achieved all the targets on their individual training plan and only one has achieved an NVQ.

31. One of the reasons that trainees have not been able to complete their individual training plans is the late introduction of work on key skills. Modern apprentices only start working on key skills during their second year. The college has designed booklets describing individual key skills units and their requirements but these are only issued as units are covered. This late introduction and the consideration of one unit at a time has led to poor integration of key skills with the trainees' NVQs.

Hospitality**Grade 3**

32. There are 40 hospitality trainees. The programmes they are following are listed in the table given below. Trainees are employed by, or have placements with, a wide range of employers including hotels, restaurants, public houses and leisure centres. Trainees on food preparation and cookery NVQs attend the college one day each week during term time. During the day, they have a four-hour practical cookery session which is followed by three hours of theoretical training, portfolio building, key skills work and tutorials. Other trainees are visited in the workplace by trainers and assessors but they also attend occasional specialist workshops at the college. Four members of staff have the main responsibility for work-based trainees. They are qualified teachers and assessors and have relevant industrial experience. The number of trainees following hospitality programmes has increased this year. Over the previous two years from 1998, 17 national trainees and 13 modern apprentices had started programmes. Of these, three national trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2 and only one modern apprentice achieved an NVQ at level 3. Fourteen national trainees and six modern apprentices left their

programmes early without achieving any qualification. No trainee has completed his or her full individual training plan including key skills units. Inspectors regarded some of the strengths in the self-assessment report as being no more than normal practice and agreed with the one weakness that was given. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified. The action plan which was attached to the report included actions to address weaknesses which were not identified in the report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Table: numbers of hospitality trainees by NVQ subject and type of training

NVQ	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices (national trainees)	Other work-based training for young people	Total
Food Preparation and cookery	7	13	4	24
Restaurant service	5	5	1	11
Bar / licensed premises	2		2	4
Front office			1	1
Total	14	18	8	40

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective links between tutors and workplace supervisors
- ◆ detailed action-planning involving all parties
- ◆ frequent and effective visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ continuous evaluation of programmes leading to action planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ training programmes not fully individualized
- ◆ some repetitive and uninteresting off-the-job training
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

33. The four college tutors who are mainly responsible for trainees have wide experience in the hospitality industry. They are the main contact for employers and workplace supervisors. Employers recognise and respect their knowledge and experience. In addition to discussing training and assessment, supervisors discuss a range of other work-related issues with tutors. This close contact helps to ensure that effective links are made between on- and off-the-job training. The trainees and their employers or workplace supervisors are all involved in reviewing the trainees' progress. These progress reviews include action-planning and the setting of specific, realistic targets for trainees to achieve by the next review. Trainees are

encouraged and supported in working towards these targets by both their supervisors and the college's tutors. Trainees are visited at work by their tutor/assessor as well as being seen each week during their day at college. These visits are rarely more than a month apart and frequently much less. Wherever possible, assessments are carried out at work by the tutor or occasionally by a workplace supervisor with an assessor's qualification. Assessments of the skills and knowledge which are not used in the trainee's workplace are carried out at college.

34. As well as taking part in the college's self-assessment process, the curriculum manager and the tutors carry out their own analysis and evaluation of their programmes. They identify weaknesses themselves and ask for the opinions of trainees. They use this information to help them develop and improve the learning programmes.

35. Some trainees with particular experience or ability are allowed to progress more quickly through the standard schedule of off-the-job training. However, most trainees are expected to attend all the off-the-job training sessions regardless of the particular skills and training they may already have. Tutors use the experience of individual trainees as examples for the class but still normally expect each trainee to attend all of the classes. Individual training plans are discussed with each trainee but the plans rarely go beyond unit level. Trainees are frustrated at being expected to practise skills which they can already demonstrate their competence in at work and routinely undertake to an appropriate standard.

36. The off-the-job training which the college provides is comprehensive, but trainees find aspects of both their theory and practical training sessions repetitive. Some classes are conducted well, but college tutors have a highly traditional view of training for the hospitality industry. Many trainees now work in modern establishments which have a creative view of the appropriate image for restaurants, bars and kitchens and welcome imaginative, and even extrovert staff. Some of these trainees have difficulty relating to off-the-job training in which they are expected to conform to the traditional image of a chef or waiter.

37. Trainees' achievement and retention rates are generally lower in hospitality than in many other occupational areas. The hospitality industry in the Milton Keynes area is particularly short of staff and there are many opportunities for employment. However, the college's retention and achievement rates are poor. Overall, the level of achievement reflects the poor retention rates. Of all the national trainees who started in 1998-99 and 1999-2000, only 18 per cent have achieved an NVQ at level 2. The proportion of modern apprentices achieving an NVQ at level 3 over the same period is only 8 per cent. Some trainees who completed their NVQ up to five months ago are still working towards their key skills but have not yet achieved a single unit. Some trainees who were part of a key skills pilot project last year have still not achieved the required units. No trainees have completed their modern apprenticeships or national traineeships.

Hair & beauty**Grade 3**

38. There are 45 hairdressing trainees, of whom 29 are national trainees and 16 are trainees on other training programmes. All of the trainees are employed. Twenty-nine trainees attend the college one day each week for off-the-job training. The other 16 receive off-the-job training in their workplaces, with college tutors visiting every week to give theoretical training. Two workplace supervisors act as work-based assessors in two of the salons. A college assessor also visits these 16 trainees at work every fortnight. All trainees have study packs which cover the knowledge they require for the NVQ. All trainees are visited in their salon each month for a progress review. This is also supported by a quarterly review in line with the contractual requirements. The self-assessment report identified five strengths. Inspectors regarded three strengths as being no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the other two and identified three further strengths. Inspectors identified an additional weakness to the one given in the self-assessment report, and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ frequent and effective visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ wide range of free hairdressing equipment for trainees
- ◆ thorough internal verification
- ◆ good analysis and use of data to evaluate programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates

39. There is good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. The hairdressing team leader monitors the training using comprehensive procedures she has devised with her team. These procedures are also used by employers and their staff, who work with trainees who do not come into college for off-the-job training. Employers are given a well-designed handbook, which covers topics such as trainees' attendance requirements and assessment procedures. It also clearly defines the employers' role and responsibilities during the training programme. There are also written procedures for trainees' quarterly progress reviews. These progress reviews fully involve employers and also cover the trainees' welfare and their satisfaction with the training. The programme team works together closely and effectively.

40. The college provides all hairdressing trainees with a comprehensive set of equipment. This includes a hairdryer and scissors as well as a wide selection of brushes and combs. A model head is given to trainees to practise their skills on outside the college. All trainees are given the standard college salon dress. A

hairdressing kit is provided by employers for trainees who do not attend the college. They also receive a free model head and a textbook from the college.

41. College staff make frequent and effective visits to trainees in their workplaces. The day-release trainees are visited at least once each month to review their progress. Trainees who do not attend the college are visited every week for training and assessment and every two weeks for action-planning. The programme co-ordinator monitors these visits. The trainees' reviews are highly effective and include monitoring of NVQ assessments, and trainees' progress at work as well as work on the theoretical learning packs provided for all trainees. Any specific training needs are jointly identified and agreed with the reviewer, the trainee and employer.

42. Internal verification is thorough and effective. It is supported by a clear set of procedures which all verifiers use. There is a detailed sampling plan which each verifier uses to ensure that all trainees and all types of assessment activity are verified. The verification process requires each assessor to look at a minimum of one type of evidence and one NVQ unit for each trainee within each six-month period. This includes the observation of assessments, the use of written and verbal questions and portfolio evidence. Work-based assessors are included in the internal verification process. The programme co-ordinator regularly samples the work of the assessors carrying out internal verification. Any issues arising from this are fed back to staff and an action plan is put into place to correct poor practice. All NVQ portfolios are internally verified again before a request for final certification is made.

43. There is good analysis and use of data on the training programme. All trainees are given two questionnaires during the first and second year in training. The questionnaires are well designed, covering the trainees' training and assessment both at work and in the college. The responses are analysed in depth and used by the programme team to produce an action plan to correct any problems. Data on the destinations of trainees are also analysed and the results are presented in both graph and text format for evaluation purposes. A similar procedure is used for the questionnaires completed by trainees who leave the programme early. A questionnaire for use with employers has only been recently introduced and has been completed by two employers.

44. Retention and achievement rates are poor. Over the past two years, the average proportion of trainees remaining on hairdressing programmes has been just 20 per cent. No trainees have achieved their key skills units or the whole of their modern apprenticeship or national traineeship framework during this period. No modern apprentice has achieved an NVQ at level 3 and only 40 per cent of national trainees and 17 per cent of other trainees have achieved an NVQ at level 2 in hairdressing.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

45. The principal of the college takes direct personal responsibility for the management of equal opportunities. The principal chairs an advisory committee on equal opportunities, the members of which are drawn from college staff. There is also a disability co-ordinator, who is responsible for working with people with disabilities. The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy. This policy is reviewed annually and was last updated five months ago. Detailed procedures to implement and monitor the policy are not included within the policy statement. Procedures relating to equal opportunities are contained within a variety of operating manuals in the college. In its charter, Milton Keynes College undertakes to provide opportunity for all and to value diversity. This charter is distributed to all staff, trainees, and students and is published on the Internet. The charter and other key documents are available in other formats including Braille and audiotape. The college does not distinguish between college students and work-based trainees in analysing equal opportunities data. These data can be produced at individual programme level using statistics provided by the local CCTE and the college's subcontractor. Thirty-eight per cent of all college students, including work-based trainees, are men. There are 7.7 per cent of students, including trainees, from minority ethnic groups, compared with 5.8 per cent in the borough's population. Inspectors agreed with one of the three strengths given in the self-assessment report. One of the strengths given in the report was regarded as being no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. A lower grade was awarded than the one given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly visible promotion of equal opportunities within the college
- ◆ exceptionally wide-ranging equal opportunities policies and statements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor implementation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ little use of equal opportunities data

46. The college's commitment to valuing individuals and differences is stated explicitly in the college charter, staff and students' handbooks and the college's main prospectus for full-time students, but there is no statement relating to the promotion of equal opportunities in the prospectus designed for trainees and part-time students. All staff understand and subscribe to the college's policies. Senior staff give a high profile to equality of opportunity and equal treatment for all. The college participates in a range of activities within the community relating to particular minority groups and potentially disadvantaged individuals.

47. The college's policies and procedures include not only the areas required by law, but also many other aspects of valuing differences including age, sexuality, and gender reassignment. The college produces individual leaflets on topics such as harassment, and reporting wrongdoing. These are widely distributed and prominently displayed in areas used by trainees when they visit the college. The college has given a high profile to such information, with stickers being displayed in toilets, for example. They give concise and easily understood descriptions of an individual's rights and describe actions they can take if their rights are threatened or infringed.

48. Not all parts of the college's equal opportunities policy have been implemented. The policy states that equal opportunities training will be provided for all staff and governors. The college has an extensive staff-development programme, which contains some activities related to equal opportunities, but few staff have attended these. The policy states that the college will ensure that equal opportunities is part of the trainees' tutorial programme, but some trainees are not aware of the college's equal opportunities statements. Only those trainees who joined their programmes from September 2000, and attended the college for an initial induction, have received training in equal opportunities. This training is based upon a video recently supplied by the local CCTE. Work-based trainees who do not take part in the college's tutorial programme have little awareness of equal opportunities issues. No action has been taken to ensure that trainees who started before September 2000 have an awareness and understanding of equal opportunities issues.

49. The college is required by its contract with the CCTE to check that all work-placement providers comply with equal opportunities legislation. Employers are asked if they have an equal opportunities policy, but they are not asked to show it. Some employers do not have a policy and others state that they have one but cannot find a copy of it. Employers are given a copy of the college's policy. Assessors or reviewers visiting workplaces do not take a systematic approach to monitoring employers or trainees' understanding and commitment to equal opportunities. Data relating to the balance of trainees on programme and the representation of minority groups are produced. Many staff are not aware that such data are available and the data are not examined by all programme teams when evaluating the programme. There is no systematic approach to considering the balance between gender groups on all programmes. In hairdressing there are no men and in motor vehicle and construction there are no women. Where programme teams have identified that there is a gender imbalance, for example in the area of construction, no action has been taken to address it. There is no targeting of disadvantaged groups based upon the data which are produced at programme level.

50. The college has produced a manual, which lays down procedures for responding to people who are making their first contact with the college. It includes procedures for the initial interview of potential students and trainees to ensure that there are no barriers for those who come from disadvantaged or under-represented groups. However, some work-based trainees do not join their programmes this way. Other routes taken to join work-based programmes, such as

direct recruitment from employers, are not controlled or monitored in the same way. There is no systematic analysis of the data relating to applicants for training and the number who are finally recruited by gender, disability or ethnicity. There is no identification of potential barriers which trainees from disadvantaged or minority groups might face.

Trainee support

Grade 4

51. The college's subsidiary company is responsible for the recruitment, selection and initial testing of applicants to work-based training programmes. A member of the college's staff has been seconded to this company to carry out most of this work. Recruitment methods include visits to schools and career events. The college places advertisements in the local newspapers and in job centres. Potential trainees can attend the college's regular advisory evenings or the local training providers' careers conventions. Some employers contact the college directly and staff visit their employees to carry out initial interviews. Most of the trainees on the hairdressing programme are recruited in this way. Other applicants are referred by the careers service. All trainees can use the college's guidance and advisory services and other facilities. The college has a guidance unit which also has responsibility for responding to requests from potential trainees and shares some of the same functions as those of the subsidiary company's staff. The company's employer-liaison officer carries out initial psychometric tests with trainees, either at the college in a group or individually in the workplace. The results of the initial assessment process are used to determine the most suitable training programme for each applicant. They are also used to determine any learning support required. Each trainee is subsequently visited in the workplace, where the trainer, the trainee and the employer negotiate an individual training plan. Progress reviews are carried out quarterly, as required by the TEC's contract. Trainers also pay monthly visits to trainees in the workplace. The self-assessment report identified five strengths. Inspectors regarded one as being no more than normal practice and another as relating to an occupational area. Inspectors agreed with only one of the strengths but identified three others. The self-assessment report gave two weaknesses and inspectors identified three significant additional ones. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and effective learning support for trainees
- ◆ good access to and use of college's resources and support services
- ◆ highly detailed individual training plans
- ◆ good celebration of trainees' success

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment process
- ◆ inappropriate choice of training programmes for some trainees
- ◆ poor initial induction for some trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

The college provides a bus service to help trainees overcome transport problems. The college sees local public transport as a problem for many potential trainees, as it is unreliable and expensive. The college bus takes trainees from the train station and town centre to the college's campuses. The cost for each journey is 50 pence.

52. There is comprehensive and effective learning support for trainees. A specialist tutor from the college's learning resource unit works with those trainees identified as having poor basic skills. Trainees are given tuition individually or in small groups. The size of the group is dependent on the needs of the individuals. Trainees who attend the college on a day-release basis attend these support sessions in the learning resource unit for a minimum of one hour each week. A basic skills tutor visits those trainees who do not attend college in their workplace. The type of support offered is tailored to the trainees' needs. Some support concentrates on the development of numeracy and literacy skills. Some tutors also help trainees with the theoretical aspects of their NVQs. Specialist support is provided for trainees identified as dyslexic. Trainees who have medical conditions, visual or hearing impairments, or learning difficulties are also given additional learning support.

GOOD PRACTICE

'Alert slips' are placed in the registers to assist tutors in monitoring trainees for areas of concern and strengths. Areas of concern include inappropriate social behaviour and unauthorised absence. Strengths are noted in relation to positive contributions made and activity demonstrated towards learning. The tutor passes the slips to the assessor and a letter noting any comments is sent to the employer.

53. Trainees have good access to the college's learning-resource centre and student services. These resources are well used by trainees. The learning-resource centre provides an environment in which to learn, study or just read, and holds a variety of printed, audiovisual and electronic learning resources. Trainees can find information for use on projects or assignments, as well as information on future careers and training opportunities. Trainees use the computers at the learning-resource centre and borrow learning materials. Trainees use the student services for advice and help on financial and welfare issues as well as personal counselling. Stickers telling trainees about the counselling service are posted inside toilets. Trainees are also given a postcard which they are encouraged to complete if they need to talk to someone outside their programme about any personal issues which are preventing them from making the most of their training. The trainees return the card to the college with their name and address and a member of the student services' staff contacts them.

54. There are highly detailed individual training plans to support learning. The plan is put together by the tutor and the trainee. The plan identifies the aims of the training programme and the short-term objectives to be achieved. The tutor's assessment of the trainee's skills and knowledge and their preferred learning style are also recorded. The paperwork contains a detailed record of the training given, including the date of each session, the work covered, the resources used to support the learning, and the trainees and tutors' comments. After six weeks, the individual learning plan and the trainee's progress are reviewed. The tutor and the trainee then develop a further plan. They each keep a copy of the learning plan and a copy is also kept in the trainee's file.

55. The college celebrates trainees' success through a special presentation ceremony, which is sponsored by local employers. It is organised to reward trainees' achievement across all vocational areas. Awards are given to trainees for various achievements. An award is made to the trainee who has made most progress towards achieving their goals. Another award is given to the 'trainee achiever' of the year. This celebrates a trainee who has been successful in spite of difficult personal circumstances or needing additional learning support. A third award is given for the work-based trainee of the year, who is selected from those trainees who do not attend the college on a day-release basis. The hairdressing section of the college also has its own awards ceremony.

56. Despite these otherwise satisfactory provisions, the college's arrangements for trainee support are undermined by several significant weaknesses. For example, the college's initial assessment procedures are ineffective. Most trainees are given an initial assessment using a psychometric test. Staff have had training in administering and marking the test but are not able to define the support needs of the trainees effectively based upon their results. There is no initial diagnosis of trainees' learning support needs using standardised materials. There is no initial assessment of their key skills. Some trainees' vocational aptitude is tested using 'skill scans', which compare their work activities with the requirements of their NVQs. These are not systematically carried out in all vocational areas, however. Not all trainees receive a written initial assessment and for some trainees, initial assessment is undertaken verbally. The results of the initial assessment are not given to trainees. Some trainees' files do not contain the results of their assessments. Some comments recorded on the initial assessment record form are wholly inappropriate and the information provided does not indicate why trainees are allocated to different programmes.

57. Some trainees are recruited onto inappropriate training programmes. As most of the recruitment for work-based training is done by the college's subsidiary company, many of the college's staff, and consequently many employers, are unfamiliar with the recommended skill levels for entry to advanced or foundation modern apprenticeships or other training options. Staff do not know why trainees have been placed on particular programmes, as the reasons are not always recorded in trainees' files, and where they are, they often lack sufficient detail to be of use to staff. Some trainees who were initially identified as advanced modern apprentices have been unable to cope with this level of training. They have then been transferred to what is regarded as being a lower programme, either a foundation modern apprenticeship (national traineeship) or another training programme. This has a demoralising effect on both trainees and staff. In other cases, trainees are placed on other training programmes when they would clearly benefit from an advanced modern apprenticeship. In one case, a trainee was placed on other work-based training rather than an advanced modern apprenticeship, in spite of the fact that she had already completed a relevant NVQ at level 2, held a responsible post at work, had a wealth of experience, was ambitious to progress and was fully supported in her aspirations by her manager. Trainees with similar profiles and school qualifications are placed on different programmes. The recruitment, selection and initial assessment processes are not monitored and

evaluated to ensure fairness, consistency and that trainees are placed on appropriate programmes.

58. Induction is poor for some trainees. It is planned that trainees receive both a general initial induction to work-based training and an initial induction to their occupational area. However, some trainees, especially those who do not come into the college for off-the-job training, either do not receive an initial induction, or are given one in the workplace which lasts approximately an hour and covers mainly personnel and health and safety issues. A group of trainees in one occupational area, who are trained entirely in the workplace, have not received any information relating to grievance or complaints procedures. The range of topics covered at initial induction has improved this year, but many trainees only have a vague memory of their induction. Trainees' knowledge and understanding of items covered at initial induction are not systematically checked throughout their time in training. Some trainees have not received any information about the college's procedures and policies apart from being given a copy of the college's charter and a 'student diary' to read in their own time. Some trainees are only sent these documents after their assessors have found that they do not have copies, and no check is made to ensure that they are aware of the important information they contain. In two occupational areas, the training staff have invited representatives from student services to give work-based trainees an initial induction to the college. Most trainees do not receive this induction. There is no standardisation of initial induction procedures between occupational areas and there are major differences in the content and presentation of the initial induction programmes. There is no systematic review or evaluation of the effectiveness of the initial induction process.

Management of training

Grade 4

59. All work-based training is provided in three curriculum areas in the college. A middle manager is responsible for each of these areas as a head of curriculum. Training is provided at the college's main site at Chaffron Way in Milton Keynes and at sites at Bletchley and Bletchley Park. Section managers, and in turn team leaders, manage the work of assessors and tutors and they report to curriculum managers. The college has subcontracted the recruitment and initial assessment of trainees to the work of its wholly owned subsidiary company, which itself provides work-based training in the Milton Keynes area. The college's principal is responsible for monitoring this contract. The college acquired this subsidiary company in January 1998 but the company has retained its own legal status and a separate board of directors. The chief executive of the subsidiary company is a full member of the college's senior management team. The subsidiary company negotiates the work-based training contract with the local CCTE and a member of the company's staff manages the contract and supplies management information to college managers. Discussions are held on a monthly basis between the contract manager and the curriculum heads and their teams at a series of separate meetings to discuss compliance with the CCTE contract. A member of the college's staff is on secondment to the subsidiary company to market work-based training, to recruit and select trainees and to find work placements. The college has strategic and

operational plans, which are reviewed annually. The business plan relates directly to the operational plan, which is linked to curriculum area and team objectives. The college has achieved the Investors in People Standard and was successfully re-assessed in 1999. All staff have up-to-date job descriptions. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths in the self-assessment report. They agreed with the two weaknesses which are given in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible training arrangements
- ◆ comprehensive staff-development programme
- ◆ productive links with local communities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective action to improve achievement and retention rates
- ◆ slow implementation and poor integration of key skills with vocational training
- ◆ poor management of some part-time staff

60. In four occupational areas, the college offers a good variety of training arrangements for employers and trainees to choose from. As well as whole day sessions, trainees can opt for a combination of a morning or afternoon session combined with an evening class or can take two evening classes each week. Trainees often attend classes with other part-time college students and can benefit from their age and experience. For many employed trainees, the evening may be the only time they can attend additional training sessions.

GOOD PRACTICE

There is a series of open training days organised by the human resources department for a half-day each week. Courses are free and are planned to coincide with non-teaching time. Topics include key skills and information technology.

61. Staff training is linked to strategic and operational planning. All staff can attend training, which is based on their own work objectives and the operational plan for the year. Staff training is prioritised according to how important it is in terms of the strategic and operational plan. Training in areas not directly related to operational plans is paid for partly by the college and then by negotiation by the individual with contributions from their curriculum area. Both internal and external training is provided for staff across a wide range of areas including taking an NVQ, training in the application of computer graphics and quality assurance. Staff on short-term and hourly paid contracts can receive free teacher training within the college. There are four training days a year, to which all staff are invited. Subjects covered during these days have included updating key skills, improving learning, an introduction to spreadsheets and managing difficult or disruptive learners.

62. The college has a history of productive and wide-ranging links with its local community. There are good relationships and joint initiatives with a local school which shares the same campus with the college, with other training providers and groups representing minority ethnic people. The college is currently working on a

plan to merge its work-based training with that of the two training providers it owns, based upon the expertise of each of the partners. Links with community groups includes work with members of a local disability group, three minority ethnic women's groups, an Asian support group and a probation service support group.

63. Trainees' retention and achievement rates are poor in four of the occupational areas. The college began working on a strategy to address this issue in 1999. Senior managers are responsible for the overall strategy. A member of the subcontractor's staff, who oversees the CCTE contract, is responsible for monitoring the progress of the strategy for work-based training. Curriculum areas have action plans based on the overall strategy. However, these action plans are often vague and do not stipulate specific action points. The timescale for action points to be implemented is based on an annual cycle and opportunities to take effective action are missed. In one case, the college had recognised that employers had not been asked for their views on their trainees' training programmes. An initial survey was carried out in September 2000, but there was a very poor response, with only 2 per cent of employers responding from one of the occupational areas. These facts were noted on an action plan. However, the survey was insufficiently wide-ranging in its scope. It did not seek to gauge the level of involvement of employers in their trainees' training, nor did it ask employers to comment on the efficiency of the college. The strategy does not include a review of the employers' survey. No questionnaires are to be issued to try to gauge employers' views before another year has elapsed.

64. The extended timescales in the action plans mean that programme-area staff approach issues in a piecemeal way. There is no coherent strategy to focus on issues in terms of their importance and relative urgency. Issues are raised at the monthly meetings of the curriculum and team leaders and the subcontractor's contract manager. However, these meetings focus on the requirements of the CCTE's contract in terms of recruiting new trainees and meeting targets for the achievement of NVQs. The action plans do not cover key aspects of the training programmes such as initial assessment and trainees' initial induction, as these are the sole responsibility of the subcontractor.

65. Although the subcontractor supplies statistical data to curriculum managers, these data are not always given to programme co-ordinators and programme team members. Furthermore, curriculum managers do not always have access to relevant achievement data, which shows the performance of trainees compared with that of students in the same vocational area. For example, the overall achievement rate for students and trainees on accounting programmes was satisfactory. However, the performance of trainees was unsatisfactory. As the curriculum managers did not have this information their action plan did not address the problems which work-based trainees might be experiencing. The minutes of programme team meetings make few references to the effectiveness of measures which have been adopted.

66. There has been slow implementation and integration of key skills across all occupational areas. There have been attempts to integrate them with the trainees' NVQ in some occupational areas but some work-based trainees receive key skills

training sessions separate from their vocational training. The late implementation of key skills has resulted in some trainees failing to complete their programme. Some trainees rely upon generating simulated evidence to demonstrate their competence. This work lacks relevance for trainees who have already completed an NVQ and are faced with duplicating work and producing new evidence for their key skills. The college has recently appointed a member of staff to co-ordinate key skills across college. A useful and well-written key skills handbook has been produced and a series of cross-college meetings has been held at various levels to raise awareness and encourage training in key skills. There are approximately 25 staff working towards a key skills qualification.

67. Visiting trainer/assessors are used in construction, hospitality, hairdressing and business administration. Some only work for eight hours each month. They are responsible for training and assessment in the workplace, and some also conduct trainees' progress reviews. In hairdressing, 80 per cent of training staff are visiting trainer/assessors, while in construction and business administration, the proportion is 50 per cent, and in hospitality it is 30 per cent. The college is aware that some staff acting as visiting trainer/assessors, especially those who are paid hourly, work mainly on their own without direct contact with other college staff. The college is taking steps to address this issue. All visiting trainer/assessors now attend a half-day college induction in addition to an initial induction in their own curriculum area. The college has a comprehensive staff-appraisal system but this is not always used for visiting trainer/assessors. They can have an appraisal if they wish but must do so in their own time. Few have taken up the offer. In hairdressing, the programme co-ordinator has monthly meetings with all visiting trainer/assessors and they play a full part in all the team's meetings. In hospitality and business administration, visiting trainers are required to attend one curriculum meeting each term but they are not paid for doing so and must attend the meeting in their own time. There are no specific mechanisms for these staff to share good practice and ideas or to discuss problems and concerns about their work.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

68. One of the vice-principals of the college has overall responsibility for quality assurance arrangements within the college. The principal of the college chairs a quality and development board, to which a self-assessment review group, chaired by the vice-principal, reports. This group is responsible for the production of an annual self-assessment report. There is also a small quality assurance working party for work-based training, which includes two staff from the college's subsidiary company. The vice-principal is responsible for maintaining a college-wide manual of quality assurance policies and procedures. The policies for work-based training form an appendix to the quality assurance manual. The quality and development board monitors the operation of the manual. The college operates an internal inspection system and a system of regularly observing training sessions given by members of staff. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses to those given in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic observation of training sessions
- ◆ well-established feedback systems for staff and trainees
- ◆ well-defined self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate quality assurance arrangements for work-based training
- ◆ some poor internal verification
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice
- ◆ insufficient use of statistical data to improve work-based training

69. The college has an effective system of regularly observing staff while they are teaching. Feedback is given to staff about their performance and the results are collated and used within the college's self-assessment process. There is an emphasis on advising and coaching staff to help them improve the quality and methods of their presentation.

70. The college uses a series of well-structured questionnaires to gain trainees' views on their training at three points during their training programmes. The results are collated, fully analysed and considered at curriculum area level across the college. The results are presented on graphs which are used to identify trends. Specific attention is given to areas where negative trends are highlighted. The results are also considered as part of the college's self-assessment process. A survey of employers' views was made for the first time in September 2000.

71. The college has a quality assurance manual containing defined policies and procedures. Some of these procedures, such as the use of questionnaires to gain trainees' feedback, have been effectively applied to work-based training. However, the policies which specifically refer to work-based training, and form an appendix to the quality assurance manual, are inadequate. Not all of the forms or policies have precise instructions to ensure that they are used in a consistent way. Some internal auditing of how these forms are used has been done, but this has failed to identify significant problems, such as the inadequate performance of the college's subsidiary company in the key areas of initial assessment and trainees' initial induction in the workplace.

72. Internal verification practice is poor in most occupational areas. There are no college-wide procedures for internal verification. Records are not reviewed to ensure that internal verification sampling is sufficiently wide ranging. Internal verifiers do not observe trainees' assessments in the workplace. The resources allocated to internal verification in the construction programmes are wholly inadequate, given that the assessment team in that area is new and inexperienced. There has been no internal verification in construction for over three months. In another occupational area, internal verification only takes place when trainees have completed their NVQ portfolios. This means that there is neither regular

checking of the quality of the assessments of trainees' evidence, nor a system to support the assessors in their work. Internal verification has failed to identify the poor practice of using assignments and simulated evidence when evidence from real work situations could be used.

73. There is insufficient sharing of good practice across different curriculum areas and programme teams. In some curriculum areas, there are examples of good assessment and internal verification practices and detailed evaluations are made of how programme teams are performing. These good practices are not shared with other curriculum areas.

74. Curriculum managers receive statistical data on the performance of programme areas which relate mainly to how the college is meeting the requirements of its contract with the CCTE. The data do not give sufficient information about the performance of work-based trainees on particular programmes. It is difficult for managers to plan improvements with this level of data. Some managers do not have information on how work-based trainees are performing compared with other students where both groups are attending the same lessons. The college's subsidiary company only provides information about the achievement and retention rates of trainees at an occupational level, rather than for specific programmes within an occupational area. This happens within engineering, where there are motor vehicle studies as well as other engineering disciplines and within business administration where there are trainees on information technology, accounting and administration programmes. In accounting, the overall performance of all those being taught at the college is satisfactory. However, data for this area show that college students are performing well while work-based trainees are not performing to such a high standard.

75. The college has a well-defined self-assessment process. Each curriculum area has a working group looking at its own strengths and weaknesses. The information and judgements from these working groups is reviewed by a self-assessment review group, which is chaired by one of the college's vice-principals. This group submits its report to the college's quality and development board for final approval. Staff from the college's subsidiary company are involved in reviewing and updating the report, but employers are not asked for their views. The report is clearly written but it underestimates the seriousness of several weaknesses, particularly the poor achievement and retention rates in some occupational areas. Too much emphasis is placed on the experiences of trainees when they come into the college, rather than what happens to them in their workplaces where they spend most of their time. This emphasis on internal activities led the college to over-estimate the significance of some of its strengths. Actions were being taken to rectify some of the weaknesses which the self-assessment report identified.