



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 2000

North West Kent College

SUMMARY

North West Kent College provides good off-the-job training. Staff are well qualified, and staff recruitment and induction systems are effective. Insufficient attention is given to training and assessment in the workplace. Achievement and retention rates in retailing and customer services, and hair and beauty are poor. Data on achievement are not analysed and targets are not set for improvement. Management information is poorly co-ordinated. The college has initiated links with other organisations to encourage wider participation but does not monitor its equal opportunities practices adequately. Many trainees and employers are unclear about their rights and responsibilities in this regard. Pastoral support is effective but trainees are not set learning objectives at their progress reviews.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	4
Hair & beauty	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good initiatives to widen participation
- ◆ good learning and pastoral support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient assessment in trainees' workplaces
- ◆ poor retention rate in retailing
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no planning of on-the-job learning
- ◆ ineffective target-setting by management
- ◆ poor co-ordination and use of data on trainees' achievement

INTRODUCTION

1. North West Kent College is situated on three sites, in Dartford, Gravesend, and the National Sea Training Centre in Gravesham. The site at the National Sea Training Centre in Gravesham provides specialist training for the mercantile industry. Gravesend is the local authority area for Gravesend. The college is also provided with rent-free space at a large retail and leisure complex, to provide training. Most of the 8,500 students at the college are part time and study at the main sites at Gravesend and Dartford. The college employs about 600 full- and part-time staff, including 375 teaching staff, of whom half are employed on short, fixed-term contracts. All teaching is managed through one of the four faculties, each of which includes up to seven schools. The college has an arrangement with the University of Greenwich to provide higher education, and contracts with the Learning and Business Link Company, the local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), to provide work-based learning to young people and long-term unemployed adults. The college also has contracts with the Employment Service to provide the full-time education and training option and the training element of the employment option for New Deal clients in the Chatham, Greenwich and Maidstone, Dartford and Mid-Kent Units of Delivery. The college offers training in 10 occupational areas. Only five of these were inspected as the numbers of trainees in the other areas were low. Eleven staff in the college's training credits unit administer the work-based training. The head of the training credits unit reports to the director of enterprise, who is also responsible for community liaison, the New Deal, and initiatives funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). There are no trainees on the work-based learning for adults programme, and no training projects funded by the ESF. There are 380 young people on TEC-funded programmes, and 29 New Deal clients aged 18 to 24. The numbers of trainees and clients in each occupational area is shown in the table below. All trainees and the three New Deal clients on the employment option are employed. Training and assessment of some New Deal clients, particularly in some of the construction trades, is subcontracted to another further education college.

2. The local economy and population are growing. Housing is currently being built to accommodate the predicted rise in the population by 60,000 over the next few years. Other important construction projects include the high-speed rail link to the Channel Tunnel, an international railway terminal, a large business and distribution park, and a 400-bed hospital. There is also increasing demand for skilled labour in the retail sector. Employment in this sector has expanded since the opening of a large retail centre in 1999, where about 8,000 people are now employed. In October 2000, 825 people were unemployed in Dartford, and 1,500 in Gravesham, representing respectively 1.9 per cent and 4.3 per cent of the workforce in each location. In the Southeast, outside London, the unemployment rate is 1.8 per cent, which is lower than the national rate of 3.4 per cent. At the time of the 1991 census, 4.1 per cent of Dartford's 85,000 residents were from a minority ethnic group. In Gravesham the proportion was 8.4 per cent. Some secondary schools in Kent are grammar schools, which select pupils according to

their ability in tests in their sixth year of compulsory education. Most trainees at the college attended non-selective schools. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above varied widely. Over 95 per cent of pupils from most selective schools achieved these qualifications and grades but in many non-selective schools fewer than 25 per cent of pupils did so. The average proportion in Kent was 51.3 per cent, higher than the national average of 49.2 per cent.

Trainees at the time of inspection.

	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	New Deal 18 - 24	Total
Construction	51	62	32	8	153
Engineering	53	28	20	8	109
Business administration	36	3	6	1	46
Retailing & customer service	14	28	4	6	52
Hair & beauty	1	20	1	0	22
Other occupational areas	4	1	16	6	27
TOTAL	159	142	79	29	409

The other occupational areas are: leisure, sport and travel; hospitality; health, care and public services; and media and design.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Staff from all the schools in each faculty were involved in the compilation of the college's self-assessment report for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in June 2000. Judgements from this were used as a basis for the self-assessment of work-based training, for which college staff wrote a separate report in September 2000. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently self-critical and does not give a good description of the training. Senior staff were consulted throughout the self-assessment process and their views sought. All staff were involved in the identification of strengths and weaknesses. The views of employers and trainees were not sought. The impact of retention and achievement rates, and of on-the-job training and assessment, on grades was underestimated. Inspectors consider that many of the strengths in the self-assessment report are normal practice, although the statements are accurate. The report fails to identify some weaknesses, and in many areas inspectors awarded lower grades than those given in the self-assessment report.

4. A team of nine inspectors spent a total of 36 days at the college in December 2000, as part of a joint inspection of the college with inspectors from the FEFC. They interviewed 70 trainees and 62 members of staff. They visited 43 workplaces, where they spoke with 39 supervisors. They observed and graded 16 training sessions and examined many records, including trainees' files and portfolios, the reports of audits by the TEC and awarding bodies, policies, procedures, minutes of meetings and records of the achievements of former trainees. The grades awarded to the training sessions are given in the table below.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		4	2			6
Engineering		2	2			4
Business administration		3				3
Retailing & customer service						0
Hair & beauty		2	1			3
Total	0	11	5	0	0	16

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

5. There are 145 trainees and eight New Deal clients. Of the trainees, 51 are advanced modern apprentices, 62 are foundation modern apprentices, and 32 are

on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in brickwork, formworking, electrical installation, painting and decorating, plumbing, security systems and wood occupations. The number of trainees in each trade by programme is given in the table below. Off-the-job training and training in theory is carried out at the college on a day-release basis. Trainees are recruited through schools, through the local careers service, directly by the college and particularly from local employers. All trainees are employed, most by companies in northwest Kent. These vary from large international companies to small businesses. The key skill of information technology is taught by staff from the information and communications technology department of the college. All other key skills are integrated into the occupational training. Staff from the training credits unit review trainees' welfare and progress in the workplace every 12 weeks. Fourteen construction staff are qualified assessors and one member of staff is working towards this qualification. Six members of staff are also qualified internal verifiers. The average retention rate over the past three years for work-based trainees has been 61 per cent. Over the same period, 48 per cent of trainees have achieved at least one NVQ. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report, and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Construction trainees at December 2000

	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	New Deal 18 - 24	Total
Plumbing	13	22	8	3	46
Wood occupations	15	19	2	3	39
Electrical installation	3	1	22	0	26
Brickwork	4	7	0	0	11
Painting & decorating	4	9	0	1	14
Security systems	7	4	0	1	12
Formworking	5	0	0	0	5
TOTAL	51	62	32	8	153

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well-presented portfolios of evidence
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ particularly thorough internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little assessment in the workplace
- ◆ inadequate resources in some workshops

6. All trainees produce good work-based evidence. Trainees' portfolios are well presented and contain a wide range of detailed evidence to demonstrate their competence. All evidence is gathered from different sources, including observation of activities. The evidence is well recorded. There are well-designed systems for recording and monitoring trainees' achievements. Individual units are assessed, recorded and accredited. Trainees can easily identify their progress and have records which identify the elements and NVQ units they have achieved. This system is cross-referenced to the assessors' records and charts showing which units have been achieved are displayed in workshop areas.

7. Well-qualified, enthusiastic staff teach construction skills in the college. Trainees are appreciative of the high standard of training and support. The progress of trainees is carefully monitored and action plans are regularly updated. Schemes of work and lesson plans are well presented and detailed worksheets for trainees are produced for each training session. In the security systems training room, training sessions are recorded by closed circuit television, adding realism to the sessions. This is a good use of resources. Training in theory is constantly reinforced with reference to current industrial practices. Trainees' experiences in the workplace are integrated into the training activity.

8. Six qualified internal verifiers carry out internal verification. There are detailed, well-written policies and procedures for internal verification within the school of construction. Effective planning documents and a planning matrix clearly set out the dates of internal verification and aspects of the assessment procedure to be verified. The internal verification process thoroughly covers all aspects of the assessment procedure, portfolios, assessments, observation of assessors and tests in theory. Internal verifiers give prompt verbal feedback and clear written feedback to assessors. Regular staff meetings are held and internal verification is an agenda item. Minutes of these meetings show that internal verification is an important issue and that action-planning for continuous improvement is implemented.

9. There is insufficient work-based assessment of trainees. Most assessment is carried out under simulated conditions at college. Trainees gather evidence in the workplace and enter this into their portfolio. This evidence is added to the off-the-job evidence and assessed by a qualified assessor at the college. The evidence is mainly in the form of witness testimony, with very little supporting narrative, although photographic and written work is included. Assessors rarely observe trainees at work. There are many opportunities for trainees to be assessed in the workplace. Many employers want to be involved in the assessment of trainees on the job. Work placements are of a high standard and the work undertaken is varied. Despite this, trainees repeat at college tasks they have already carried out in the workplace.

10. The construction department relocated to the Gravesend campus in September 2000. Workshops have been built or refurbished to meet the requirements of work-based training. Workshop facilities in plumbing, painting and decorating and brickwork are not fully developed. Trainee plumbers are using their training time to equip the workshop area. This work does not help them progress towards the NVQ at level 3. The workshop facilities in painting and decorating are poor but various project areas on the college campus allow for realistic simulated training opportunities.

Engineering

Grade 3

11. The college provides a wide range of engineering programmes at different levels. These include motor vehicle, refrigeration and air conditioning, information technology systems support, fabrication and welding, mechanical production and marine engineering. Most trainees attend the college's Gravesend site, one day each week, for practical training and training in theory. There are a total of 109 trainees over all the programmes. The number of trainees on advanced modern apprenticeships, foundation modern apprenticeships, the New Deal and other work-based training programmes is shown by occupational subgrouping in the table below. Trainees are employed in a wide range of companies located throughout the Dartford and Gravesham areas, and further afield in Kent and London. Companies range in scope from small specialist motor engineering businesses, servicing the local motor racing industry, to businesses maintaining air conditioning units. Some are national companies with hundreds of employees, while others are small family businesses employing one or two people. Most trainees are recruited by their employers, which then approach the college for a suitable training programme. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

Engineering trainees at December 2000

	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	New Deal 18 - 24	Total
Motor vehicle	22	12	4	3	41
Refrigeration & air conditioning	29	3	7	1	40
Mechanical production	2	13	8	0	23
Information technology systems support	0	0	0	4	4
Marine engineering	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	53	28	20	8	109

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good and well-qualified trainers
- ◆ good technical support in college workshops
- ◆ good retention rates for most training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment of occupational competence
- ◆ low awareness of key skills by some trainees

12. Staff are occupationally well qualified and appropriately experienced. Most trainers have teaching qualifications with the majority holding certificates or postgraduate certificates in education. Most are university graduates and have appropriate assessors' qualifications. A sufficient number are qualified as internal verifiers. Those not qualified as assessors are working towards assessors' qualifications. All trainers have relevant industrial experience and put this to good use in the teaching of practical skills and theory. This is apparent across all aspects of engineering training. The enthusiasm and application of trainers is high and the training staff give individual training to those who find work difficult.

13. Practical skills are practised regularly. Trainees are able to practise and demonstrate the various practical skills necessary to achieve their competencies. In off-the-job training, experienced and knowledgeable technicians are allocated to all fabrication and welding, and motor vehicle practical lessons. This reduces trainers' preparation time and minimises disruption to lessons owing to failure of equipment. The high level of technical support also increases trainers' availability to trainees and allows trainers to concentrate on the teaching. The range of off-the-job training facilities is varied and appropriate to the core requirements of the vocational courses.

14. Of 24 trainees starting non-apprenticeship training programmes over the period 1997-2000, only three left before they had completed the programme. Two of these achieved some qualifications before they left. The retention rates of trainees starting in the years 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000 were 89 per cent, 71 per cent and 100 per cent respectively. Eight of these trainees have already achieved all the targets on their individual training plans. The achievement and retention rates for advanced modern apprentices have improved steadily over the past three years. Of the 24 advanced modern apprentices who started in 1997-98, 17 left early, including 12 who achieved NVQs at level 2. The years 1998-99 and 1999-2000 have seen an improvement, with good retention rates of 73 per cent and 77 per cent. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is lower, at 27 per cent and 47 per cent for the years 1998-99 and 1999-2000. In 1999-2000, eight of the 15 foundation modern apprentices who started the programme had left by November 2000, when they had only achieved half of the targets on their individual training plans.

GOOD PRACTICE

A local company employed two young men as car valets. There was no suitable qualification. The college researched relevant competence criteria from other motor vehicle awards, and with the employer's help, made a proposal for an NVQ in valeting at level 1. The awarding body accepted the proposal. The first trainee has achieved this award and the other is making good progress towards it.

15. There is poor assessment of occupational competence. Evidence is gathered either through off-the-job training or by job sheets and photographs from trainees' workplaces. In many cases a standard college work record sheet is used. The work record sheets are completed at the workplaces and signed by the supervisors. Most assessments are carried out using witness testimony, which at times is poorly recorded and not specifically related to NVQ performance criteria. Some witness testimony is inaccurate or incomplete and there are many examples of statements being accepted on trust. Very few trainees are assessed in the workplace. Trainees are not required to start gathering evidence of their competence until the second year. Opportunities to assess and accredit trainees' competence in the first year are lost. In refrigeration and air conditioning, trainees are not assessed until they are in the final stages of their training. This does not motivate trainees or give them a sense of achievement. Trainees nearing the end of their training cannot be sure if work they did two years previously is sufficient to meet the requirements of the qualification. The college has identified the lack of work-based assessment as a weakness and is recruiting more appropriately qualified staff to address this issue.

16. Trainees do not know what key skills are and how they relate to the modern apprenticeship framework. Many understand key skills to be solely the use of computers. They do not know when they are being assessed on key skills. Trainees do not know which key skills are required to meet the performance criteria of some elements within their programme, and cannot focus on achieving such awards. Within the air conditioning and refrigeration programme there was no strategy for the teaching and assessment of key skills.

Business administration**Grade 3**

17. North West Kent College provides training in accounting, administration and information technology at its centres at Gravesend and Dartford, and in key skills at its training centre in the large retail centre. All other trainees are studying for an NVQ in accounting, at levels 2, 3 or 4. These levels are also known as foundation, intermediate and technician levels. Most trainees start at foundation level and are expected to complete each level within a year. Most trainees are advanced modern apprentices. The number of trainees in each occupational area is given in the table below. Trainees work in a variety of workplaces, including professional accountancy firms and industry. The information technology and administration trainees are employed by the college. These trainees are assessed in the workplace by qualified college staff. Trainees can attend college on a day-release basis or study for two evenings each week. They sit a formal examination at each level and prepare a portfolio of work-based and other evidence for assessment. Eleven members of staff are responsible for training and assessment. One part-time member of staff is the internal verifier. All accountancy staff have appropriate teaching and professional qualifications. Inspectors considered that several of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified several additional weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report, and awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

Business administration trainees at December 2000

	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	New Deal 18 - 24	Total
Accounts	33	3	6	1	43
Administration	1	0	0	0	1
Information technology	2	0	0	0	2
TOTAL	36	3	6	1	46

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good rate of achievement of accounting NVQs at levels 3 and 4
- ◆ improved retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor on-the-job training
- ◆ poor rate of achievement of key skills

18. The college provides good off-the-job training. Courses and lessons are well planned. Lecturers explain complicated accounting terms and concepts clearly. Trainees appear interested in their studies and respond positively in class. Lecturers frequently question trainees to check their understanding. The work carried out by trainees in the classrooms indicates a clear grasp of the subjects being studied. Trainees' written work is well presented and confirms their understanding of the topics covered.

19. The retention rate and the rate of achievement of accounting NVQs at levels 3 and 4 are now good. In 1999-2000, of the 14 trainees who started on the level 2 NVQ, six have achieved it. Six have taken the examination and are awaiting the results and two are still working towards the qualification. At level 3, nine trainees started, seven have completed the qualification and two are still in training. At level 4, nine started and eight have achieved the NVQ. In previous years, the retention rate was lower, particularly on the level 2 programme. Assessment is rigorous and most lecturers add helpful comments on assessment reports to encourage trainees and to provide clear guidance as to how work can be improved.

20. On-the-job training is poor for some trainees. Some trainees receive little or no relevant training from their employers and have no opportunity to carry out practical tasks which are relevant to their studies at college. Their employers are

unaware of the requirements of the NVQ and the need for on-the-job training. Employers are not given any information about their trainees' academic progress, other than at the quarterly progress reviews from non-specialist staff. Some employers do not attend these reviews.

21. Many trainees do not achieve their key skills. Until recently, key skills training was available only during the day. Some trainees found it difficult to attend. In accounting before September 2000, key skills were taught through units devised by the accounting awarding body. Units devised by a different awarding body are now used.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 4

22. Few trainees trained at the college in retailing or customer service before April 1999, when the nearby shopping complex opened. There are now 48 trainees working towards NVQs in retailing and customer service. Most are on foundation or advanced modern apprenticeships in retailing or customer service and are employed in outlets of large multisite companies. About two thirds of the trainees are based at the largest retail complex in Europe, or employed by a large, national sports clothing retailer in shops in Kent and south London. Staff from the college approach retailers and offer their young employees the opportunity to work towards an NVQ in retailing or customer service. Trainees are then allocated a monitoring liaison officer. These officers visit the trainees in the workplace to carry out the first part of the induction and complete the necessary paperwork. They check the health and safety arrangements and complete the individual training plans. The trainee's assessor carries out the second part of the induction. Some trainees are at work full time and have little or no off-the-job training. Others attend the college's training centre in the retail complex, for training in key skills and customer service. All assessment is in the workplace by qualified assessors employed by the college. Internal verification is undertaken by other qualified college staff. The college's staff work closely with the Employment Service. New Deal clients are recruited at the training centre in the retail complex. About a third of these clients gain employment.

23. The self-assessment report identifies six strengths. Inspectors considered many of these to be normal practice. Inspectors agree with the three weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified a fourth. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

Retailing and customer service trainees at December 2000

	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	New Deal 18 - 24	Total
NVQ in retailing	11	19	1	6	37
NVQ in customer service	3	9	2	0	14
NVQ in sales	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	14	28	4	6	52

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-located and -equipped retail training centre
- ◆ good opportunities for on- and off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ no involvement of workplace supervisors in training
- ◆ slow progress by trainees
- ◆ no integration of key skills

24. The college's training centre at retail complex is modern, well lit, well equipped and appealing. It is in an ideal location, and is frequently visited by employers in the retail industry. The college runs this centre in conjunction with the Employment Service and a property management company. It provides particularly good opportunities for training for the many trainees employed at the retail complex. For trainees employed elsewhere, it offers the opportunity to study retail skills in a thriving environment.

25. All trainees are employed in well-presented shops, either in high streets or in the retail complex. Most trainees are in national companies well known to the public, which specialise in clothing or sports fashion stores. Most trainees are supervised by other young people and are working in a lively and busy environment. They are given responsibility and have the opportunity to acquire and practise a range of skills. Their working environments are fully appropriate for the requirements of their NVQs, and there is ample opportunity to assess their competence in a range of skills.

26. The retention rates are very low. Staff turnover is high in the retail industry in the area. Many trainees drop out of their programme when they change job. Of the 80 trainees who started as advanced modern apprentices in 1999-2000, only five are still in training. Seventy-four left early with no qualifications. In the same

period, 41 foundation modern apprentices started training. Of these, 12 are still in training and 29 left with no qualifications. Of the seven trainees who started other training programmes, five left early with no qualifications. There is no strategy to improve retention rates.

27. Most workplace supervisors have little or no knowledge of the NVQ requirements. Many supervisors do not value the training and assessment and have little involvement in the process. Communication is poor and some workplace supervisors have no knowledge of the progress of their trainees. Progress is slow for many trainees. Some trainees are visited infrequently by their assessors. Some workplaces do not allow assessors to visit trainees during busy periods of the year. Some trainees have lost their motivation to gain a qualification and question the value of the NVQ. Few trainees know their current level of achievement and many do not know the level or title of the NVQ they were working towards. Some trainees have become even more demotivated at progress reviews when they have seen little action despite expressing their concerns to their reviewers. Some progress reviews take place less frequently than every 12 weeks. Key skills are introduced at the end of the programme, when a different assessor is used. Trainees working within the retail complex use the training centre to cover aspects of their key skills. Most trainees on other sites do not use this facility and there are no other arrangements for their training in key skills.

Hair & beauty

Grade 4

28. There are 22 trainees on hairdressing programmes. Twenty-one are foundation modern apprentices, one is an advanced modern apprentice and one is on other work-based training working towards an NVQ at level 2. The college no longer offers advanced modern apprenticeships in hairdressing. Trainees attend the Dartford campus one day each week for off-the-job training. This takes place in a hairdressing salon at the college. There are further facilities for training in both hairdressing and beauty therapy on the Gravesend site. All full-time staff at the college are qualified teachers as well as being qualified assessors and internal verifiers. All part-time staff are qualified assessors. Most trainees start their training in September following their recruitment by employers. Trainees are employed at small and medium-sized salons in northwest Kent. Trainees recruited before September are visited in the workplace by monitoring officers from the college before starting their off-the-job training. Induction to the training programme is normally in the workplace. The monitoring officer visits the trainees in their workplaces every 12 weeks to review their progress and to carry out health and safety checks. Hairdressing lecturers visit the trainees in their workplaces three times each year. They do not carry out any assessment in the workplace.

29. The self-assessment report is based upon careful analysis of the experience of the trainees at the college but does not include any judgements about trainees' on-the-job training. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths in the self-assessment

report but considered that others were normal practice. The report identifies poor achievement rates and limited integration of key skills as weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good workplaces

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ no assessment in the workplace
- ◆ poor understanding of key skills among employers and trainees

30. Trainees receive good training at the college. The timetable is well structured with good opportunities for trainees to work on their portfolios during their time at college. They receive good feedback on their progress and receive a certificate from the college for achievement of each unit within the qualification. Tutors regularly complete an action plan with each trainee, which notes their progress since the previous action plan and sets targets for the next period. Tutors provide trainees with comprehensive feedback on their written and practical work. Written assignments are carefully marked and trainees are given sufficient time to complete assignments to the required standards. During their first year, all trainees take part in hairdressing competitions. This encourages them to extend their skills. In their second year, trainees are taught computer skills once a week. The trainees are well taught and learn occupationally relevant skills, such as using a spreadsheet to record details of clients. Trainees practise the full range of hairdressing skills in practical sessions. All college teaching staff are well qualified as hairdressers, trainers and assessors. Training sessions in college salons are well supported by technical staff. The salons are well equipped with a good range of modern equipment and products which are widely used commercially although lack of a wide range of models reduces opportunities for assessment.

31. Workplaces also provide trainees with good opportunities and the resources to practise the full range of modern hairdressing techniques. Employers are fully supportive of training and most consult trainees about the type of on-the-job training which they want to do. Most salons arrange model-training sessions for their trainees, particularly in their second year of training.

32. Achievement rates are poor. Of the 46 young people who started foundation or advanced modern apprenticeship programmes between April 1997 and March 2000, none have completed the programme. Thirty-five have left without completing the framework. Of these, only nine have achieved an NVQ, most at level 2. The achievement rate of young people on other work-based training

programmes is no better. Of the 13 young people who started these programmes in the same three-year period, only one is still training at the college. Three of the 12 who have left gained an NVQ. The college has ceased to offer training towards NVQs at level 3 because of poor achievement rates. All five young people who started advanced modern apprenticeships in 1999-2000 have left without achieving an NVQ. Ten of the 14 trainees who started foundation modern apprenticeships in 1999-2000 are still on the training programme. Trainees make slow progress. All individual training plans anticipate that trainees will achieve all their targets in two years and take no account of previous experience. Records of progress reviews contain little information on the development of trainees' hairdressing skills.

33. There is no assessment in the workplace. There is no use of witness testimony. There is little work-based evidence in trainees' portfolios. There are missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace. There are very few qualified assessors in the employers' salons. The college's tutors visit the trainees at work three times a year but do not use these opportunities to carry out assessment.

34. Trainees and employers have a poor understanding of key skills. Trainees do not know either the level or the range of skills on their individual training plans. Instruction in computing skills is introduced late in the training course. The college has started to incorporate the application of number and communication key skills into hairdressing assignments. The potential of new trainees to reach the required standards in key skills is assessed using a computer-based package. This provides detailed written information. Most trainees do not understand the significance of the assessment. Employers all understand the structure of and training for the NVQ but are unaware of the place of key skills in the individual training plan.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

35. The college has an equal opportunities policy. This is included in the staff handbook, which is available as a printed document and on the college's intranet. The handbook also contains an equal opportunities statement and procedure. The policy covers access, marketing, publicity, staff issues, the curriculum, the environment of the college, and administrative arrangements for equal opportunities. The procedure contains more detail and includes management responsibilities, co-ordination, monitoring and implementation of the equal opportunities policy. Terms used are defined, as are bullying and harassment. The complaints procedures are described. The college's secretary reviews the policy and procedure. There is a co-ordinator for equal opportunities, and the college's secretary chairs an equal opportunities committee which meets three times each year. Trainees are given a handbook containing an equal opportunities statement. This refers to the college charter, where further details are contained. There is an annual training course for staff. People from minority ethnic groups make up 6 per

cent of the population of Dartford and Gravesham. There are three trainees with a disability and six trainees from minority ethnic groups. About 1.5 per cent of the trainees and New Deal clients are from minority ethnic groups. This is much lower than the proportion in the population. All trainees in hair and beauty, and care are women. In engineering, all the trainees are white men. Only four women have started training in construction in the past three years, compared with 218 men. The college has appropriate facilities for people with restricted mobility. Employers' premises vary widely, from large companies equipped to cater for people with disabilities to small family businesses run from the domestic home with no special facilities. Inspectors agree with the strength in the self-assessment report concerning widening participation but consider the other strengths to be no more than normal practice. The college underestimates the importance of equal opportunities in the workplace and the importance of systems for the protection of trainees from discrimination and harassment when away from the college. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good initiatives to widen participation
- ◆ good staff training in equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities among many trainees
- ◆ inadequate equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ no evaluation of equal opportunities data

36. Equal opportunities in training and assessment is positively promoted. The college has appointed a community development co-ordinator to make contact with the communities in the area. An employment co-ordinator fulfils a similar role with local employers. For the past few years, girls from a local high school have attended a one-day introductory course in engineering to encourage interest in this occupation among young women. The college provides staff and equipment for a special training centre in an area where a large proportion of residents are from minority ethnic groups. Information technology courses are provided free within this training centre. A training centre has been established at a large retail complex to provide easy access to information, training and assessment for trainees in retailing, and to attract unemployed people to training opportunities offered by the New Deal. Marketing material contains a good range of positive images of under-represented groups. One brochure contains a welcome in Punjabi, a language spoken by many of those in the area from a minority ethnic background. As part of a local partnership funded by the SRB, the college has held two equal opportunities conferences, and regularly meets with a trust and the adult education department to discuss equality of opportunity in education and training.

37. Staff training in equal opportunities is good and is offered to staff on an annual basis. Most staff in the training credits unit have had this training but no assessors or tutors have attended. The course covers the relevant legislation, broad meanings of discrimination and harassment, and describes symptoms commonly shown by someone being harassed.

38. Equality of opportunity in the workplace is not monitored with sufficient rigour. Employers' roles and responsibilities in relation to equal opportunities are not sufficiently emphasised during visits by college staff. Employers have recently been sent a copy of the college's new equal opportunities policy but there has been no follow-up visit to emphasise its importance or to check understanding. Reviewers do not always check that trainees are being treated fairly either in the workplace or when they attend off-the-job training. Questionnaires do not check trainees' or employers' understanding of equal opportunities or the procedures they would follow if they experience harassment or bullying or wish to make a complaint. Most trainees understand how to make a complaint as the grievance procedure is described in the handbook they are given.

39. Awareness of equal opportunities is low among many staff, trainees and employers. Staff and employers are not clear as to the wider aspects of equal opportunities beyond gender, ethnicity and disability. Trainees are unsure how equal opportunities affects them. Some have missed induction and have not had the college's policy and procedures on equality of opportunity explained to them. Most trainees have heard of equal opportunities from their induction but their understanding is not checked. There is no further training on equality of opportunity after the induction. Trainees in construction do have a good understanding from their induction, which includes participative learning exercises.

40. Policies and procedures relating to equal opportunities are inadequate. The statement, policy and procedure are difficult to follow and do not have a logical sequence. The legislative framework which sets the criteria for the documents is not included. The current legislation and practice for *The Disability Discrimination Act 1995* are not included. No mention is made of the trainees' employers and how the policy and procedures relate to them. Subcontractors are not mentioned. The procedure is not written in words which a trainee would easily understand. Subtle and indirect forms of harassment are not described. The documents are largely concerned with sex and race discrimination. The arrangements for reviewing the policy and procedures are inadequate. The student handbook contains insufficient material on equal opportunities and harassment. The descriptions which are in the handbook are shallow. The college has a plan to establish a subcommittee of the senior management team to report termly on progress with equal opportunities. This will have a widely based membership including students' representatives.

41. There is no evaluation of data relating to equal opportunities. Some data are collected on trainees' ethnicity but these are not analysed. The reasons why trainees leave early or take a long time to complete qualifications are not evaluated

by gender or ethnic group. Data relating to trainees' perceptions regarding equal opportunities are not collected.

Trainee support

Grade 3

42. Most trainees are recruited by their employers before they join the college. Trainees are screened for literacy and numeracy, using a nationally approved initial assessment test. Trainees' competence in key skills is assessed using computer-based tests. Staff from the training credits unit give summarised results of these initial assessments to tutors, who organise additional basic skills support if needed. The college has a learning support centre. Additional training is usually arranged during the day that the trainees attend other off-the-job training at the college. Trainee painters and decorators attend college for two days each week for off-the-job training. One of these days is dedicated to additional support. Training credits unit staff usually assess trainees' suitability for foundation or advanced apprenticeship programmes when they first meet them at their workplace. Monitoring officers review trainees' progress, usually at 12-weekly intervals, to meet the college's contractual obligations. Monitoring officers induct all trainees to the workplace and explain NVQ procedures, health and safety and equal opportunities to the trainees. Monitoring officers also write the trainees' individual training plans. Personal counselling is available and contact details are provided in the college's student handbook, a copy of which is given to each trainee. Individual training plans are completed for all trainees. The self-assessment report identifies strengths, relating to effective counselling and basic skills support in the college, but fails to recognise the importance of regular, detailed reviewing of progress towards achievement of NVQs. The lack of formal accreditation of prior learning is also identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. Inspectors identified further weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good basic skills support
- ◆ good use of additional support records
- ◆ effective counselling of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no accreditation of prior achievement
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment of some trainees
- ◆ insufficient focus on trainees' learning during progress reviews

43. There is good basic skills training for trainees. This provides effective support for the NVQ training. Tutors try to ensure trainees attend without embarrassment

or fear of ridicule from their fellow trainees. For example, basic skills support sessions are referred to as portfolio-building. The issue is treated with sensitivity. The literacy and numeracy support is occupationally focused and relevant to trainees' work and NVQs. Trainees get individual help with their course work and assignments. The rate of attendance at the support sessions is good. Support tutors inform college tutors if any trainee is absent for two consecutive weeks. There is a formal management structure for the support of trainees. Lines of responsibility and communication are clear.

44. Detailed, up-to-date records are kept of all support for trainees. They are frequently referred to by tutors and are easy to follow. The records are used effectively in conjunction with trainees' action plans. Both are included in individual work folders. Personal counselling is particularly good. It enables trainees to overcome their problems, continue their training and achieve their NVQ. There are qualified counsellors in the college's central support unit. Tutors refer trainees to these staff. Staff in the training credits unit have good interpersonal skills. Many trainees discuss their problems with these staff.

POOR PRACTICE

A trainee's progress was reviewed by a non-specialist. In the section of the review report called 'units to be covered next' the reviewer wrote 'not sure'. The NVQ assessor did not see this. This process gives no guidance or challenge to the trainee.

45. Some initial assessment of trainees' basic and key skills is ineffective. Initial assessment is not always done before trainees start their training programme, and so does not always shape trainees' individual training plans. The decision to place trainees on foundation or advanced modern apprenticeships is rarely based on an assessment of the trainees' potential to meet the requirements of the framework. There is no accreditation of any prior learning. In most occupational areas, there are trainees with skills acquired during previous employment or training, some in family businesses. These skills are not assessed or taken into account when planning their training. Most individual training plans for a particular qualification have the same content for each trainee.

POOR PRACTICE

All trainees are inducted to the workplace, but some trainees, particularly those who do not start at traditional college times, do not receive a college induction.

46. Trainees' progress reviews do not focus on progress towards the NVQ or key skills, nor do they set demanding, achievable targets for the trainees. Records of progress reviews lack detail and often give no indication of what has been achieved to date or what is still to be done. Too often, they simply state that the trainee is progressing towards their qualification.

Management of training**Grade 4**

47. The director of enterprise is responsible for work-based training, which is managed by the training credits unit. The director of enterprise reports to the associate principal. The training credits unit is headed by a manager known as the TEC manager. She leads a team of four monitoring officers and six administrative staff. The monitoring officers visit the trainees at their workplaces every 12 weeks to review their progress and welfare. Each trainee is registered with one of the college's schools. Most trainees attend the college one day each week, throughout the year. The heads of schools are responsible for trainees' training and assessment. The training credits unit moved from Dartford to Gravesend in

November 2000 and has recently been restructured. Monitoring officers are now allocated trainees according to the trainees' occupational areas. The college's personnel department is responsible for policies regarding staff recruitment, induction, training and appraisal. The college was first accredited with the Investors in People standard in 1998, and has been successfully re-accredited each year since then. Although inspectors broadly agreed with the self-assessment report, some of its strengths were not within the scope of this inspection. Inspectors also accorded more significance to the weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good arrangements for staff recruitment and induction
- ◆ good staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of management information
- ◆ no planning of on-the-job learning
- ◆ ineffective target-setting by management
- ◆ insufficient liaison between college staff and employers

48. The staff recruitment system is very thorough. Job descriptions and specifications are written for each post. All posts are advertised internally, and most are also advertised externally, in different publications depending on the seniority or specialism of the post. This promotes the opportunities at the college to a wide range of people, including those in groups under-represented among the college's staff. Selection procedures are clearly set out and interviews always include a panel of staff. New staff have a one and a half-day induction course at the beginning of their first academic term. If a new employee starts midway through a term, they have a short induction to the college, which lasts about an hour and a half. They then complete the full induction at the beginning of the next term.

49. There is good staff development. When appraising their staff, line managers discuss their training needs, and at these and other times recommend appropriate training courses. Most staff are well qualified, as trainers as well as assessors, and many are currently following a training course, leading to a nationally recognised certificate. The college organises a wide range of courses for staff. Many of these are short courses. It is easy for staff to book themselves on to any course run by the college. Courses are free for staff. Many courses are of general relevance to teaching and non-teaching staff, and include a range of computer applications, equal opportunities awareness courses, and courses explaining key skills. Lists of courses, in the form of booklets, are well publicised on staff notice boards. Alternative dates are offered for the most popular courses.

50. Information regarding trainees is poorly co-ordinated. In the training credits unit, the computers are not networked. Different administrative staff keep lists of trainees for different purposes. The organisation cannot easily produce a list of its trainees, showing which trainees are training in which occupational area. Turnover of trainees is rapid but lists of trainees are not dated. It is not possible to know whether a list of trainees is up to date. Training staff do not plan their trainees' learning at work. Most employers do not supply the college with a list of tasks to be undertaken by the trainees during the period of their apprenticeship or other training. When the monitoring officers visit the trainees at work they do not set the trainees' learning targets. They do not ask the supervisors to set the trainees' objectives for areas for improvement or for new areas of learning or responsibility. The monitoring officers often do not discuss details of the trainees' progress with their workplace supervisors.

51. Managers do not set clear targets for the development or improvement of the training credits unit. For example, in some occupational areas, most trainees stay only a short time on the programme, and leave without achieving any part of an NVQ. Targets are not set for improving the rates of retention or achievement of trainees in these areas. In most occupational areas, training staff never or rarely visit trainees at work. Some employers do not know the level or requirements of the qualification which their trainees are taking. Some do not know anything about NVQs. Some feel uninformed about their trainees' progress with off-the-job training. Many supervisors in retailing do not value the NVQ and resent the time needed to assess trainees' competence. These issues have not been sufficiently addressed by the college's managers.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

52. The quality assurance arrangements for the college are contained within its policies and procedures manual. This is also available on the college's intranet. These arrangements do not specify how work-based learning is evaluated. Arrangements are also contained in the student handbook issued to all students and trainees. The associate principal reviews all external verifiers' reports, records comments on them and forwards them to the appropriate occupational area. There is no systematic review or evaluation of the quality assurance system. The college identified 11 strengths in its self-assessment report. Inspectors consider that many of the statements are accurate but that they do not relate to strengths. Two strengths in the self-assessment report relate to management of training. Inspectors agree with six of the seven weaknesses identified by the college, some of which are closely related. The remaining weakness relates to another generic area. A lower grade is awarded than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide dissemination of quality assurance policy

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of analysis of data on retention and achievement
- ◆ weak monitoring of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no systematic collection of employers' views
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of subcontractors

53. All quality assurance arrangements are available to members of staff on the college's intranet. Staff are aware of this and know how to access the procedures. They are also available in paper form and partially reproduced in the student handbook.

54. The college's systems for recording the achievement and retention rates of trainees are underdeveloped. Many trainees leave their training early. The staff of the training credits unit send out letters to these trainees and try to contact them by telephone to find out why they left. They write the reasons on various forms, one for each month. They do not analyse these by occupational area or pass these results to the relevant training departments. The departments do not analyse the achievement rates of work-based trainees separately from those of other students at the college. There is little analysis of how long trainees stay on the programme. In areas where the retention rate is low, this is recognised by assessors but its impact on the quality of training is underestimated.

55. Training sessions in key skills and portfolio-building and some sessions in theory are not monitored or evaluated. Their effectiveness cannot be established. There is no process for monitoring on-the-job training other than records of assessments and reviews, which are not designed to capture this information and are not systematically evaluated. This has been identified as an action point by the college and attempts are being made to address this. Views on the standard of training are not sought from employers in a systematic way. Some anecdotal feedback is received when there is a long-standing relationship between the college's staff and the employer. When feedback is received, it is not analysed or shared across the occupational areas. Subcontractors' agreements do not contain any details of the quality assurance arrangements or of how the training will be monitored. They do specify that the subcontractor should provide regular progress reports on the trainees. Receipt of these reports is not monitored. When they are received, there is no evaluation or report to the employer.