



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

Walsall College of Arts and Technology

SUMMARY

Walsall College of Arts and Technology offers training in a variety of occupational areas including construction, engineering and hairdressing. There are good training facilities in all occupational areas, some of which are provided through excellent links with the appropriate industry. In construction, the achievements by painting and decorating trainees are good, although in wood occupations key skills have not been integrated into the programme. In engineering, employers provide good training and opportunities to collect work-based evidence, but few modern apprentices have completed their frameworks. There is some poor assessment practice in the hairdressing programmes and there are low levels of achievement. There is good awareness within the college of equal opportunities issues but there is little monitoring of equal opportunities issues by employers. Trainees receive a good induction and have access to a wide range of support services. Individual training plans are not used effectively. Management of training lacks co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training, but there is good staff recruitment and development. There is some poor management and quality assurance of some work-based training processes and there is insufficient sharing of good practice.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Hair & beauty	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured off-the-job training programmes
- ◆ good off-the-job training facilities and resources
- ◆ effective links with schools, careers service and industry
- ◆ wide range of good support services in college
- ◆ thorough staff recruitment and development procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor completion of modern apprenticeships in wood occupations, hairdressing and engineering
- ◆ some weak assessment practices
- ◆ poor practice in reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient action plans to address gender imbalances
- ◆ insufficient analysis and use of data to help with management decisions
- ◆ inadequate quality assurance policies and procedures for work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. Walsall College of Arts and Technology is a general further education college serving the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall and the surrounding area. The college was formed in 1992 following a merger between the college of technology and the college of art. The college operates from four main sites close to Walsall town centre. Most trainees attend the main site at St Paul's campus, though painting and decorating training is carried out at the Bradford Place annexe. The college plays an active part in the local community and supports the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects, a national health project, and is a founding member of the local area's business partnership. The college is also a partner in the local alliance promoting lifelong learning.

2. Walsall has a population of 263,000 people and 9.5 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. The list of the 10 per cent most deprived districts in England includes the borough of Walsall. There are few large private-sector employers and most businesses are small. One of the main areas for employment, despite recent declines, is still manufacturing and engineering, which employs 38 per cent of the population. The unemployment rate for the area in September 2000 was 4.8 per cent compared to a national average of 3.4 per cent.

3. Walsall College of Arts and Technology contracts with Walsall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for work-based training for young people, and subcontracts the New Deal Gateway and New Deal options. The college offers work-based training in the occupational areas of construction, engineering, business administration, leisure, sport and travel, hairdressing, health care, and foundation for work. Clients and trainees are following national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 or units of these. There are 33 advanced modern apprentices, 51 foundation modern apprentices, 12 trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people, four clients on the Gateway and 93 New Deal clients on options. There were too few clients in the Gateway to be included as part of the inspection. New Deal clients were also not included in the inspection as the Black Country Unit of Delivery was inspected in July 2000, and clients and staff at the college were interviewed by inspectors during that inspection.

4. In 1999-2000, the college enrolled 10,214 students, of whom 3022 attended the college full time and 87 were work-based trainees. The college employs 252 permanent teaching staff and 229 support staff. There are 27 staff involved directly in the training and support of TEC-funded trainees. In 1999, 46.5 per cent of year-11 school pupils chose to stay on in full-time education. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 37 compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The college produced its third self-assessment report in July 2000 for the TEC. The report was co-ordinated by the management team and was written in relation to the quality statements in *Raising the Standard*. The report is cross-referenced to the college's FEFC self-assessment report. The teams in each occupational area prepared a draft report based on information gathered from questionnaires and surveys used with trainees. The management team and occupational teams agreed grades for each aspect and prepared an action and development plan to address the weaknesses identified. The college did not include judgements on the trainees' retention and achievements in the report. The inspectors agreed with the grades given in construction and awarded lower grades for engineering, hairdressing and the generic areas.

6. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 26 days at Walsall College of Arts and Technology between the end of October and beginning of November 2000. The inspectors interviewed 48 trainees either at the college or in their workplaces. The inspectors visited 22 employers and interviewed 19 workplace managers or supervisors. A total of 62 interviews were conducted with staff from the college. Inspectors examined trainees' files and work, including portfolios and assessment records. Other paperwork examined included the TEC contract, quality and procedures manuals, lesson plans, minutes of meetings, and internal and external verifier's reports. Inspectors observed 12 training sessions, four key skills sessions, one assessment and one tutorial.

Grades awarded to observed sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		4	3	2		9
Engineering		1	3			4
Hair & beauty		1	3	1		5
Total	0	6	9	3	0	18

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. There are 47 trainees on construction training programmes. There are 23 trainees on the painting and decorating programmes, of whom six are foundation modern apprentices and 17 are advanced modern apprentices. There are 19 trainees on the wood occupations programmes, of whom 11 are foundation modern apprentices and eight are advanced modern apprentices. In plumbing there are four trainees, all of whom are foundation modern apprentices. There is one foundation

modern apprentice on the brickwork programme. All trainees are employed and attend college for off-the-job training on one day each week. All trainees are working towards the achievement of NVQs at levels 2 or 3, depending on the training framework they are following. Wood occupations, plumbing and brickwork training are given at the main college campus. Painting and decorating training is given at the college's Bradford Place annexe. Most construction trainees are assessed at the college. A work-placement officer has been appointed by the college for the purpose of reviewing trainees' progress in the workplace and to offer support and guidance to the trainees and employers. The trainees work for a wide variety of employers, both small and large, which provide trainees with the opportunity to develop their skills and establish competence in their occupational area. Between March 1999 and April 2000, 55 trainees started on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme and eight trainees are still in training. Of the 47 who have left, 26 were painting and decorating trainees who have completed their programme frameworks and 21 left early. Eleven of the early leavers achieved NVQs at level 2, while the other 10 achieved no qualifications. The modern apprentices all started this year. Some of the strengths in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. The inspectors agreed with the weakness of insufficient monitoring of trainees and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured and effective training sessions
- ◆ good resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ good integration of key skills in painting and decorating

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective assessment planning
- ◆ poor involvement of employers in some areas
- ◆ missed opportunities to gather work-based evidence
- ◆ poor completion of carpentry foundation modern apprenticeship framework

8. Training sessions are well structured and effective. Lesson plans include clear aims and objectives as well as methods of training and resources to be used. Training methods used are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of individual trainees. Trainees are actively encouraged to participate throughout the sessions. This is done through the use of brainstorming exercises, involvement in practical demonstrations, group activities and discussions. Trainees' understanding is checked at regular intervals throughout the sessions with the aid of questioning, case studies and the completion of simple task sheets. Most training is well paced with a variety of techniques used by the trainers. The learning experience is enhanced with the use of a wide variety of training aids, including slide projectors,

flipcharts, white boards, visual aids and material samples. In some sessions, trainees are required to use camcorders and camera equipment in order to produce images and record data. Computers are also used in some instances. Clear, informative handouts are distributed to trainees, where appropriate.

GOOD PRACTICE

The painting and decorating staff have produced special computer-based training materials for the NVQ unit on spraying. The material is very informative and easy to use. This has been used for a number of training sessions. It has proved to be effective and is well received by trainees.

9. Most of the workshops and classrooms are spacious and provide a good learning environment. The painting and decorating workshops are well laid out and very well maintained. One section within the painting and decorating department has been registered by a leading paint manufacturer as one of its professional-skills learning centres. This was opened in 1999 by the company's national specifications manager and the principal of the college. The same paint manufacturer visits the college at intervals to give presentations to trainees on the manufacturing and availability of its products and to demonstrate various application methods. These presentations are relevant to the NVQ and enhance the training being undertaken. Most trainees are well motivated and there are good working relationships between staff and trainees throughout the construction area.

10. Key skills are integrated well into the painting and decorating training programmes. Evidence from trainees' NVQ portfolios are carefully cross-referenced to various elements of the key skills standards. Additional evidence produced for key skills is in the context of the qualification being followed. There is good support from the college's key skills department for the processes of training and assessment. Trainees have access to a well-resourced information technology suite, which is contained within the painting and decorating department. This is used effectively by all of the trainees. All completed key skills portfolios are of a high standard.

11. Assessment planning is ineffective across most of the construction occupations. Many trainees are not given the opportunity to discuss and agree methods and timing of assessments individually with their assessors before they are assessed. In many cases, the trainees sign their assessment plans after they have been assessed. There are occasions when trainees are unsure as to whether they are being assessed or undergoing training. Some trainees are not aware of the actual NVQ units they are being assessed on. There is a poor understanding among trainees of the NVQ appeals procedure should they disagree with an assessment decision. Although trainees are issued with the standards for a particular assessment being undertaken, they are not aware of the performance criteria required to achieve these standards. The tracking system to ensure even cover of internal verification across NVQ units and trainees, however, is good.

12. There is little involvement by employers in the training and assessment of their trainees. Employers have very little influence or involvement in the planning and structuring of the training programmes. There is a lack of awareness among employers of the content of NVQs and the way in which the NVQ process operates. Training within the workplace is not structured to the NVQ and the college has little influence over on-the-job training. Although the college has suggested to employers that some staff may wish to become work-based assessors, training has yet to be undertaken by any of the employers' staff. Advisory

committees have been set up within the college, and employers are invited to participate as active members. However, attendance by construction employers is poor.

13. There are many missed opportunities to gather work-based evidence. Very little assessment is carried out in the workplace. When trainees are observed in the workplace, this only happens on a single occasion and competence is not observed over a period of time. Most trainees are not actively encouraged to gather evidence from the workplace to present to their assessors. These missed opportunities to gather evidence have resulted in trainees having to repeat work in college which they perform regularly in the workplace. The college has recently appointed two construction assessors to assess trainees in the workplace. These assessors are not yet visiting workplaces regularly. Suitable recording procedures for workplace assessments and gathering evidence are still being developed.

14. No trainees have completed the foundation modern apprenticeship framework in wood occupations. There are eight trainees who have completed their NVQs at level 2 and have transferred to the advanced modern apprenticeship programme but they have not yet achieved any of the required key skills.

Engineering

Grade 3

15. There are 32 engineering trainees on a range of engineering NVQs at levels 2 and 3. There are seven advanced modern apprentices and 13 foundation modern apprentices. The advanced modern apprentices are working towards NVQs at level 3 in technical services, manufacture, maintenance or engineering production. There are 12 trainees on work-based training programmes for young people. All trainees are employed in a diverse range of engineering manufacturing industries, with the exception of one who is employed in the motor-vehicle trade. All off-the-job training is given in workshops and classrooms at the St Paul's campus. The theory training for all engineering programmes is taught using the frameworks for the national or higher national certificates in engineering. Foundation modern apprentices follow a programme leading to NVQs at level 2 supported by an awarding body's craft programmes in engineering production. Trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people also follow this awarding body's craft programmes. There is one motor-vehicle trainee working towards an NVQ at level 2 in vehicle mechanical and electronic systems (unit replacement). The first four weeks of a trainee's programme are undertaken as a block-release course in the college's workshops. After this, trainees attend the college for one or two days a week. One of these two days is used for the practical training, and the other for associated theory training. Trainees who cannot attend the second day use the course information packs and study guides to develop their theoretical knowledge. This is tested in the workplace by visiting assessors.

16. Staff are well qualified and experienced in their specialist areas. Two staff are responsible for visiting trainees in the workplace to assess the work and act as mentors for them. None of the companies employing the trainees has staff

qualified as work-based assessors. Inspectors identified different strengths and weaknesses from those given in the self-assessment report, which did not include weaknesses about the low levels of retention and achievement. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of diverse evidence in most portfolios
- ◆ frequent, effective workplace visits
- ◆ good and supportive employers
- ◆ wide range of good workshop facilities and resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ missed opportunities for accrediting key skills
- ◆ over-reliance on witness statements for NVQs at level 3

17. Trainees use a good range of evidence in their portfolios. Trainees are enthusiastic about the tasks they are required to undertake to gain an engineering qualification while being employed. In some companies, trainees undertake a diverse range of engineering tasks which exceed the requirements of their NVQs. Trainees compile their portfolios using evidence gathered during on- and off-the-job training. Where possible, trainees make use of digital cameras to record evidence of their work in their workplaces and when undertaking tasks in customers' premises. During the weekly off-the-job training, a portfolio-building session is held. Trainees produce well-organised portfolios.

18. The college's assessors visit the trainees in the workplace every two or three weeks. Systems for internal verification are satisfactory. Flexibility is built into this schedule of visits to accommodate the shift patterns of trainees. During the visits, assessors review the progress of trainees and draw up an action plan. Employers value the frequency of these visits and, although they do not usually participate in the review sessions, they receive verbal feedback on the trainees' progress from the assessor and a copy of the action plan. The college's assessors ensure that workplace supervisors, wherever possible, allow trainees to experience the complete range of the workshop activities required for their NVQs. In one company, which is only able to offer a narrow range of engineering skills, the college has made arrangements for the trainee to join an alternative employer for a few weeks to cover all the other elements of the NVQ programme in a working environment.

19. Employers place great importance on the training and development of their apprentices. They frequently employ trainees recommended to them by the college, and use the college as an integral part of their recruitment processes. In some

companies, the workplace induction includes quite detailed reference to the college and the training apprentices will undertake there. Local employers participate in the college's engineering advisory committee and have made positive suggestions for improvements to the programmes. Employers have helped to establish an effective system for reporting the absence of trainees from college. Some workplace supervisors ensure that when the trainees are not busy in the workplace, they work on realistic and relevant test pieces which they can use to demonstrate competence. Some trainees have received promotion before completing their qualifications in recognition of the high standards of skills and knowledge they have gained during their training.

20. The college's workshops for off-the-job training have good resources and provide an effective industrial environment. The workshop's stores operate in the same manner as those in a manufacturing company. There is a good range of specialist machinery in the practical workshops and this reflects the equipment used by local employers. The motor-vehicle workshops have a high level of industry standard equipment. To create a commercial environment, the college has established a vehicle service centre, which is staffed by trainees, to maintain the cars of staff and students. There is a high level of awareness among trainees of health and safety. One trainee, who was about to operate a machine without a guard, was alerted by his peer group to the potential dangers.

21. There is poor retention and achievement on some programmes. Successful completion of individual training plans within the identified training period is low. Between 1996 and 1999, 15 advanced modern apprentices began training. Five are still in training, one has completed the programme and nine left their programmes early. This gives a retention rate of 47 per cent. Of the nine who left early, two achieved NVQs at level 2 and two achieved NVQs at level 3, but they did not complete the key skills requirements of their frameworks. Between 1998 and 2000, 19 foundation modern apprentices started training. None has completed the framework and 13, or 68 per cent, have remained in training. Of the 6 who have left, one achieved an NVQ at level 2 but did not complete the individual training plan. On other work-based training programmes between 1997 and 1999, the retention rate was 55 per cent, and the achievement rate was 34 per cent with 22 per cent still in training.

22. There are missed opportunities for trainees to achieve their key skills requirements. Most trainees do not fully understand the key skill requirements. There is little integration of key skills with occupational on- and off-the-job training. Most advanced modern apprentices are introduced to key skills towards the end of their programmes. One trainee, who successfully completed an NVQ at level 3 and is studying for a higher national certificate in engineering, was required to undertake unrelated key skills tasks at level 1 and complete a standard key skills workbook at this level. The trainee has not been encouraged to use the evidence already generated for the NVQ or higher national certificate. Some foundation modern apprentices produce good written evaluations of the practical work they undertake during off-the-job training. Trainees do not know if this evidence could be used and cross-referenced to their key skills portfolios.

23. There is an over-reliance on witness statements as evidence for NVQs at level 3. None of the employers have staff who are qualified as work-based assessors. Very few detailed observations are carried out in the workplace by the college's assessors. When the college's assessors visit trainees, they do not always take the opportunity to record the activity of trainees. One trainee was undertaking turning activities for a number of weeks and was visited frequently. Throughout this time, the college's assessor made no direct observation of the activity and the trainee's only evidence in the portfolio was witness statements.

Hair & beauty

Grade 4

24. There are 17 trainees on hairdressing programmes. There are no work-based trainees on beauty programmes. Sixteen of the trainees are foundation modern apprentices and are working towards the NVQs at level 2 in hairdressing. There is one advanced modern apprentice who has completed the NVQ at level 3 and is presently working towards the key skills requirements. All trainees are employed in local salons. Trainees attend the college for one day a week for theory and practical training as well as some assessments. During the day spent at college, there are also one-hour key skills and tutorial sessions. One member of the college's staff is employed as a workplace monitor to review and assess trainees in the workplace. The workplace monitor also carries out health and safety checks of employers' premises every three months. There is no set schedule for assessment visits to the employers' salons and they are arranged according to the trainees' assessment needs. Trainees are allocated a personal tutor at the college who takes them for their one-hour tutorial sessions each week. Every six weeks there is a student focus review. This involves all the staff who work with the trainees meeting to discuss all trainees and any areas of concern. Any issues arising from these meetings are picked up by the personal tutors and discussed with the trainees during the one-to-one tutorial sessions. Trainees are given an induction at the college on the first day that the trainee attends. Initial assessment of basic and key skills is also part of the induction. Some of the strengths in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors were unable to agree with the exceptional assessment procedures, which were claimed as a strength, as some poor assessment practices were observed during the inspection. Inspectors also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ modern, well-equipped college salons
- ◆ effective use of strong links with salons and suppliers to train staff
- ◆ good occupational careers guidance
- ◆ flexible visits to trainees in the workplace

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor assessment practices
- ◆ insufficient use of diverse forms of evidence
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities
- ◆ insufficient clients for trainees in the first year
- ◆ poor rates of retention and achievement of frameworks

POOR PRACTICE

One trainee is suffering from severe dermatitis of the hands. The trainee works for a relation in a very busy salon and is expected to shampoo clients. The tutors and workplace assessor are aware of this problem. The trainee has been assessed with open sores on the hands as wearing gloves irritates the hands even more. There are no records available to suggest any action has been taken by the college to protect the trainee from further suffering.

25. The college has three well-equipped salons at the college, which are designed for trainees at different stages of training. The trainees spend the first year working in the intermediate salon. In the second year of the programme for the NVQ at level 2, they move into the graduate salon. This salon runs as a commercial profit-making enterprise and has its own entrance near the front of the college, facing one of the main high streets in Walsall. A considerable financial outlay has been made in the salons, which were completely refurbished in 1998. There is a high standard of fittings, fixtures and decorating. The college works in collaboration with a local high-profile group of salons, and this group's director acts as a consultant to the hairdressing department. The graduate salon maintains the same standards of service and client care as that of the group of local salons. The college also uses the same product supplier as the group and there are strong links with this product supplier. Trainees have access to an extensive range of quality hairdressing products for use on clients and to sell to clients. The salon has a computerised client booking and recording system. This is operated by the college's staff, who are employed as salon receptionists. Trainees have access to a computer in the salon which has the same software as that at the reception, to enable them to experience computerised client record systems.

26. The partnership arrangements with the local group of salons includes providing staff development for the hairdressing tutors at the college. Staff can attend the group's training school in Stafford for intensive courses in cutting and colouring. This keeps staff up to date in a good standard of hairdressing skills. This also ensures that all staff work to the same standard patterns. The strong links with the product supplier also provide regular opportunities for the staff to keep their skills updated.

27. The trainees spend one hour each week in a group tutorial session working through a careers guidance pack. Trainees draw up curriculum vitae, write letters and learn about the different career routes available in hairdressing. The personal tutor, who is an occupational specialist, runs these sessions and gives specialist occupational advice. A range of advertisements is used from trade journals, and trainees produce simulated job applications. This activity broadens the trainees' outlook on work and the progression routes within the industry.

28. One member of staff visits trainees in the workplace on a flexible basis to carry out three-monthly progress reviews and assessments. The current assessor was recruited in March 1999. The assessor visits the salons on three days a week

to see trainees and carry out health and safety checks. There is no set schedule to the assessment visits, as trainees ring up and request a visit when they want to be assessed. This is a flexible arrangement and trainees are sometimes visited in the evenings and when they have their salon training sessions on Saturdays.

29. There are some poor assessment practices. Trainees have little opportunity to discuss and plan assessments with the assessor. Assessment-planning is not effective in preparing the trainees to be aware of what will be expected of them during the assessment. Sessions can be badly organised and ineffective. Trainees are not aware of the most suitable forms of evidence for the NVQ. It is not always clear whether trainees are undergoing assessment during their practical sessions. The tutors do not systematically complete records of the activities that take place during the sessions. The current assessment practice consists of deciding that if the trainee does well during the session then it will be used as evidence for assessment. Trainees receive little feedback, and records regarding their performance during a session are not always available. One trainee is still waiting for feedback from an assessment activity from two weeks ago. Another trainee was assessed in the workplace but did not have her assessment book with her at the time. The evidence was not transferred to the trainee's assessment book until three months later. Tracking grids in the trainees' assessment books, showing which criteria trainees have been assessed against, are often not completed. The tutors keep tracking grids of the trainees' progress, but trainees do not have a copy to refer to. Opportunities to complete outstanding assessments are missed.

30. There is an over-reliance on assessment by observation. Trainees wait for assessment by observation rather than using other forms of evidence generated during salon activities to cover the criteria required for their NVQs. There is little use of supplementary evidence, such as clients' records and consultation records, to support trainees' performance. Often, trainees do not use witness testimonies from the workplace. Most of the evidence, until recently, has come from sessions at the college. Employers are not aware of how they can support the trainees by providing witness testimony, and trainees are unsure how witness testimonies will contribute to their evidence. The college has had little communication with employers to enable them to understand how they can support their trainees. Employers have been invited to the college to take part in the hairdressing advisory committee, but attendance has been poor. At the last event, only one employer attended. One employer has a member of staff who is a qualified assessor. This assessor is demonstrating some good assessment practice but has had no guidance from the college. Most trainees do not have the opportunity to be assessed on naturally occurring activities. There are also missed opportunities to capture key skills evidence while collecting occupational evidence. Trainees do not start the key skills qualifications until after completing their NVQs. Key skills sessions are separate from the hairdressing sessions. Although evidence collected for the NVQs is used, it is not cross-referenced to the key skills until after the NVQs are complete. Trainees do not have the opportunity to ensure that they have covered the range required for the key skills qualification until after their occupational training has ended.

31. During the trainees' first year at the college, there are few clients for them to practise on. Trainees work on each other for training and assessments in shampooing, setting and blow-drying, and sometimes colouring. This simulated method of assessment is not advocated by the awarding body. Trainees are spending time as models having their hair worked on rather than learning. As the trainees only have three hours a week for practical work at college, this is not a productive use of their time. The college does not provide sufficient clients to ensure that trainees get the opportunity for training and assessment on a variety of hair types. Some trainees have only worked on two models since they started in September 1999. When clients are not available, trainees also work on head blocks, and assessments on working with long hair have been carried out using blocks. These are not valid assessments.

32. There are poor retention and achievement rates on modern apprentices and national traineeship programmes. Between 1997 and 1999, 10 trainees started as modern apprentices. All have left and only two completed the framework by achieving their NVQs at level 3, additional units and key skills. The current modern apprentice was one of the eight early leavers, who has restarted the framework in 2000. Between 1998 and 2000, 35 trainees began as national trainees. Four of these trainees have completed the framework and 16 are still in training, which is a retention rate of 57 per cent. Achievement is poor, with 13 of the 19 who have left achieving no qualifications. Trainees have taken a level 2 computing qualification instead of the key skills information technology qualification at level 1. The national training organisation for hairdressing has reviewed the work done by the trainees and has accepted these as acceptable equivalents. Eight trainees will receive full accreditation, six of them receiving the full national trainees' certificates and two the full advanced modern apprentices' certificate. Two of the national trainees left after the inspection.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

33. The college's equal opportunities policy is available, in booklet form, to all trainees. Staff are supplied with a copy of the policy as part of their induction. Employers are also issued with the policy as part of a pack for employers. The policy is reviewed every three years and the last review was in 1998. The next review will be within the next three months. This review of the equal opportunities policy is to be carried out by the college's equal opportunities review group. The college has also produced booklets on harassment and disability. Day-to-day responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the human resources manager. Across the college, 20 per cent of students are from minority ethnic groups compared to the local representation of 9.5 per cent. In work-based training, though, only 2 per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups. The college has excellent facilities for trainees with disabilities, though none of the work-based trainees have disabilities. The self-assessment report identifies the weakness in

monitoring of its policy which was also found by inspectors, but failed to identify the lack of monitoring in the workplace. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities throughout the college
- ◆ good initiatives to encourage participation from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ good coverage of equal opportunities through induction

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some staff do not attend regular equal opportunities training
- ◆ overly complex equal opportunities reference materials
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient action plans to address gender imbalances in work-based training

34. The college gives a high prominence to promoting equal opportunities. There are positive images displayed throughout the college of people from minority ethnic groups involved in non-traditional training and occupations. There is a strong emphasis on the inclusion of people from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities. The college's procedures and policies are also designed to promote equality of opportunity. Marketing materials and literature used by the college encourage the inclusion of people irrespective of their ethnicity, disability, gender and social background. The construction department is a member of the steering group which advises on the construction curriculum in the Walsall area project, which was established to address the poor image of construction among young people. The college offers advice and guidance on assessments of vocational qualifications to local schools which take part in offering a curriculum in construction. The college is involved in a number of working partnerships with local employers and support groups to promote equal opportunities and generate openings into employment and training for people from minority ethnic groups. The college takes part in a number of local and national initiatives including the local alliance promoting life-long learning, the local area's regeneration consortium and a group which promotes science and engineering as occupational areas for women. The college has a range of training projects within the community and celebrates multicultural events including Diwali, Eid and a Caribbean day.

35. Trainees have a good recollection of the awareness-raising session they are given on equal opportunities during their induction. Most trainees recall the session. Induction covers the college's equal opportunities policy, harassment policy and policy regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities. Trainees also participate in a case-study exercise to promote discussion on the breadth of equal

opportunities and complete an equal opportunities survey as part of this induction session.

36. Although training was given to all staff to raise their awareness of equal opportunities between 1989 and 1996, there have been no general awareness-raising events run since then. Several training events have been held to address specific areas of equal opportunities, such as working with disaffected young people and strategies for the inclusion and retention of young men from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. These training events are optional and few staff involved with work-based training have attended these events. There is no system to ensure that all work-based training staff are aware of current and new legislation.

37. Equal opportunities reference material produced by the college has not been adapted to ensure that it is fully understood by all trainees. Most trainees do not refer to this material once they have completed their induction. Terminology and phrasing contained within the materials makes it difficult for some trainees to understand. Although most trainees are aware that there is a grievance and appeals procedure, they do not understand how these procedures operate. Trainee's retention of specific equal opportunities information obtained during induction is not effectively checked. Although reviews include trainees' questions to test their equal opportunities awareness, these questions are not easily understood by trainees and answered incorrectly or, in some instances, not answered at all.

38. There is inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. The college issues all employers with a copy of its equal opportunities policy, but there is no system to ensure that trainees are protected from discrimination in the workplace. The trainees spend four days each week in the workplace and only one day each week in the protective environment of the college. Some trainees are not given the same opportunities as other trainees and employees to carry out different tasks in the workplace. Trainees do not discuss these issues with the college's staff, as they do not believe they can help with this. Several employers' premises displayed pictures on the walls of offices which some people find offensive, and in one instance this material was of a very explicit nature. Nothing has been done by the college to explain to employers that displaying such images can constitute harassment.

39. There are currently no specific action plans to address the stereotypical gender imbalance in the work-based training. There has been no systematic analysis of the equal opportunities data about trainees in each occupational area. Currently, in hairdressing all trainees are women and in engineering all trainees are men. In construction, one out of the 47 trainees is a woman. Although there is no co-ordinated approach to encouraging more applicants from under-represented groups, each department is involved in some promotional activities with schools. The construction department was invited to send women who are students at the college to a local school's equal opportunities awareness day to discuss the opportunities open to women in painting and decorating. The engineering department works with other partners to encourage young people to consider a career in engineering. Men and women in training work with students in school

engineering clubs to explain the opportunities available to them. Women have achieved awards in both construction and engineering at the college and their success has been widely publicised.

Trainee support

Grade 3

40. Many trainees are already employed before starting on a programme at the college. The trainees are also referred from the careers service or approach the college themselves. The applicant is interviewed by a tutor who represents the occupational area in which the prospective trainee is interested. When the trainees enrol at the college, they are issued with a trainees' charter, handbook, and a swipe card which enables them to access the full range of the college's resources. They have an induction on their first day of training at the college. This includes a thirty-minute session given by the student services staff, which covers the availability of services and resources to the trainees at the college. Specialist staff within the support services offer a range of support, including counselling and advice with financial difficulties. Trainees' rights, the charter, careers prospects and equal opportunities are discussed at the induction. The trainees then continue their induction with the specialists within the department of their chosen occupational area. Each occupational area develops its own specific induction literature relevant to that programme. Trainees are initially assessed during the induction. The college uses its own numeric test along with the basic skills agency's test in communication. Trainees are required to be reviewed within the workplace every three months. Some of the strengths in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. The college accurately identified the support available to trainees while at college as a strength and the weakness relating to little support for trainees in the workplace. The college did not identify weaknesses regarding the individual training plans and review process. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective links with the local schools and careers service
- ◆ good college induction
- ◆ good range of support services available at the college
- ◆ regular celebration of trainees' success

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ results of initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans
- ◆ poor review practices for trainees in the workplace

41. The college has effective links with the careers service and with local schools. Staff from the careers service attend the college to give presentations to trainees on different career routes. There are currently projects involving the college, local schools and the careers service which track trainees' progress from school and through their chosen work-based training option. Some trainees are identified as being at risk of expulsion or having difficulties fitting in with the education system when they are at school. The projects allow all parties involved with the trainees to follow their progress closely and respond quickly should there be any cause for concern. Schools use programmes run at the college to enable potential trainees to take taster courses and gain an insight into their chosen careers. The college attends all local careers events and promotes TEC-funded programmes to potential trainees. All marketing materials make reference to apprenticeships.

42. The college induction has been regularly reviewed to ensure that the right amount of information is given out according to the nature of the programmes which trainees are attending. When trainees enrol, they are issued with a range of reference materials and these materials are reinforced during the induction. This is given on the trainees' first day. The trainees attend a 30-minute computer-generated presentation in the lecture theatre by the student services staff to learn about the support services available. Trainees who start a programme outside the start dates of the usual academic year receive the same induction and reference materials. After six weeks, a check is carried out with the trainees to ensure everything has been covered. The individual departments develop their own materials which are specific to the occupational area. There is no systematic workplace induction and the level of detail is dependent on the trainees' employers.

43. There is a wide range of readily available and accessible support services for trainees. Specialist staff are available in areas such as counselling and careers guidance. Staff are well qualified and experienced in their specialist areas. There is a specialist key skills training centre which tutors and trainees use. There is a suite containing 150 computers with Internet access, which are available to and used by trainees.

44. There is good celebration of trainees' successes across all occupational areas. Trainees who may have achieved little throughout their school education are proud to achieve awards for effort and achievement. Trainees in most of the occupational areas are encouraged to enter various regional and national competitions run by external bodies. One woman training in painting and decorating has achieved a second and third place over the past two years as young paper hanger of the year. There are prizes awarded and sponsored by local industry and a female engineer achieved an apprentice of the year award. Much local publicity is gained through trainees' achievements.

45. All trainees undergo initial assessment in numeracy and communication as part of their induction. Mathematics specialists at the college have developed the colleges' numeracy test. Trainees are not always informed of the results of their test and are not sure why they have to take it. Trainees do not know how the results

of these tests influence their training programmes. Results of the initial assessment are entered on the individual training plan, but little reference is made to them. The individual training plan is kept at the college and trainees and tutors do not have a copy. Some tutors use additional materials to test trainees to establish their starting levels of ability as they are not aware of the results of the initial test they have already done.

46. The trainees' individual training plans are not used effectively. Administrators working in the central office complete large parts of the trainees' individual training plans without the trainees' input. The plan is then sent to the tutors to complete the qualification details and the form is sent to the employer to sign. Eventually it is sent out to the parents of the trainee for their signatures, as required by the TEC. Little emphasis is placed on the individual training plan, ignoring its critical importance in planning out the next two to three years of the trainee's career. Those involved in preparing and signing the plan place little value on its importance. Neither the trainees nor the employers have copies to refer to or to judge the trainees' progress against. Administration staff, who have little knowledge of each trainee and no knowledge of the occupational area, update the individual training plans. Changes to the frameworks which trainees are working towards have not been amended on the individual training plans. Some of the target dates for completion of the qualifications are inaccurate and inappropriate.

47. The contract with the TEC requires that trainees' progress reviews are held every three months. Many trainees have not had regular reviews. A new review form has been introduced, but it contains little useful information by which progress can be measured. Statements on trainees' progress reviews are general and unspecific, not qualified or quantified by the use of any data. There are no specific comments on progress or targets set. The trainees are not given a copy of the review form to refer to, although occasionally an employer will receive a copy through the post. Employers are not encouraged to contribute to the reviews in a meaningful way. Where trainees are graded on their personal skills, they are sometimes given lower grades than they were previously awarded. Since the reviews do not refer to the records of the previous reviews, it is not possible for the reviewer to comment sensibly on trainees' progress. The reviews are often not completed properly and questions asked are answered incorrectly through lack of guidance. Where trainees do comment, there is no indication what action has been taken to address any of their issues or concerns.

Management of training

Grade 3

48. The college has a mission statement, and a strategic plan which is developed every three years and reviewed on an annual basis. Targets are set within the plan, after consultation with occupational training teams, for recruitment, retention and achievement of work-based trainees. After the plan is agreed by the board of governors, an operating statement is drawn up, naming key staff responsible and giving timescales for achieving the targets set. The targets are reviewed weekly by

the senior management team and at monthly meetings of staff directly involved in the training aspect of the TEC contract. TEC-funded training is the responsibility of the head of faculty for services to people, with day-to-day management delegated to the college's finance manager. TEC-funded trainees are fully integrated into college programmes, and occupational teams take full responsibility for training and assessment. Each occupational area has an advisory board of local employers to provide links with industry and the community. The college has a detailed annual appraisal system linked to staff development. The college as a whole has 252 permanent teaching staff, of whom 27 are directly involved with TEC-funded training. All staff have up-to-date job descriptions. Inspectors agreed with the strength concerning good staff development and identified further strengths. The inspectors did not agree with the strength about excellent administration, or that the weakness about key skills integration should be included in this generic area. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses relating to the management of work-based training processes. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough staff recruitment procedures
- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ good range of internal communications
- ◆ excellent partnerships with industry

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate management of some work-based training processes
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient analysis and use of data as evidence for management decisions

POOR PRACTICE

One trainee in hairdressing has been attending the college for a year without the appropriate forms being correctly completed. The trainee believes she is a national trainee, but she is not signed up to any specific programme.

49. There is a systematic and well-written approach to recruitment of staff designed to encourage equality of opportunity. All posts are advertised externally, after job descriptions and person specifications have been drawn up by line managers in consultation with the personnel department. Applications are given a number to avoid any subjectivity. The tight short-listing and interview process involves the use of rating forms to aid fair selection. Staff conducting interviews have all received training in fair selection. The selection panel always includes a personnel officer, a senior manager and the line manager of the proposed appointee. Questions are carefully chosen, and are the same for each interviewee, and questions relating to equal opportunities are used as part of the selection criteria. Candidates are informed of the outcome of the interview within two days. Emergency cover for staff is provided from a pool of part-time staff who have all been appointed through the proper channels. Assessors must have occupational accreditation from awarding bodies.

50. The college encourages the continuous development of staff. The process starts with a comprehensive induction, which includes an introduction to policies and procedures on equal opportunities, harassment, quality assurance, health and safety, appraisal and staff development. During a six-month probationary period, new staff are supported by a mentor and receive three reviews by their line managers. All staff are subject to annual appraisals and six-monthly reviews, during which their development needs are identified. Results of appraisals are analysed to form the basis of a programme of five development days for staff a year, when training is offered to all staff according to business priorities, curriculum changes, or individual needs highlighted through appraisals or teaching observations. Staff can also apply for any other training they need to improve their job skills. Work secondments to industry are encouraged.

51. Good channels exist to keep staff informed of day-to-day matters and provide opportunities for two-way communication. The staff involved in TEC-funded training meet at least once a month to update one another on developments, to review targets, and to discuss arising issues. The principal holds monthly team briefings for key managers, and there are regular cross-college meetings for middle managers. A glossy monthly newsletter for staff contains articles on what staff are doing, training opportunities, new qualifications, changes in policies and procedures, social events and the trainees' successes. An abbreviated version of the strategic plan is circulated to staff with their monthly payslips. The college intranet provides instant information on such topics as staff development, news from awarding bodies, events and funding mechanisms.

52. The college has an excellent partnership with a major commercial hairdressing chain, which has resulted in a prominent manufacturer sponsoring the training salon within the college. The sponsors also provide staff development and work experience for trainees. This venture has improved the profile of hairdressing as a career and has benefited the trainees by exposing them to excellent facilities and work experience in a good commercial salon. In engineering and construction, productive two-way links between the college and local employers have resulted in mutual benefits. Employers have donated additional materials and equipment to the college and the college has provided some free training for employers. Some employers are involved with the occupational advisory boards, along with staff from the college, which meet three or four times a year to review training.

53. There is poor management of some of the work-based training processes. No system exists to ensure that there are periodic reviews with trainees at the contracted frequency of every three months. There is often inadequate training for staff when new forms or procedures relating to work-based training are introduced. Forms are sometimes disseminated at meetings of the staff team, but staff not attending receive no instructions or guidance on the forms. There is no central tracking of trainees' progress through their programmes from start to leaving. There is no management system for recording the completion of NVQ units or other components of their individual training plans. Some training staff are unclear about the TEC's contract requirements, despite receiving copies of all paperwork,

including the full contract.

54. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is weak. The extent of employers' involvement in training is variable. Some employers have little understanding of the NVQs, and they are unable to give training which they know will be relevant to their trainees. There are no training plans linking on- and off-the-job training, and training given by employers is not linked to the training given at college. Trainees often have to repeat training activities at college which they regularly carry out at work. Some employers have no knowledge of the skills trainees are learning at college and therefore miss opportunities to make use of trainees' new skills in the workplace.

55. Data produced by the management information system are used primarily to monitor the college's performance against the contractual requirements of the TEC. Current performance indicators do not identify the impact of the late introduction of key skills on the completion of trainees' frameworks. The retention and achievement data have not been analysed in a systematic way to identify any weaknesses. Some of the occupational teams are unaware of the poor retention rates on some programmes. Management decisions are not routinely guided by a detailed analysis of data and the monitoring of trends.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

56. Responsibility for quality assurance lies at senior level with the college's director of quality assurance. As a member of the senior management team, the director is charged with ensuring that quality assurance is integrated throughout all areas of the college. Supporting the director is the quality assurance unit, comprising the quality systems manager and the teaching and learning manager. The quality systems manager has daily responsibility for quality assurance, whereas the teaching and learning manager has responsibility for the quality of teaching and training. Each NVQ level has a programme management file, which is the quality assurance manual for training given at the specific level. It is designed to ensure consistency of training across sites. The quality assurance manuals are audited annually to ensure compliance with procedures. The self-assessment report identified the comprehensive quality assurance framework as a strength, and the lack of procedures for work-based training as a weakness. Inspectors also found these. However, it did not recognise the impact of inconsistent practices on the quality of the trainees' experience. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of action-planning to drive improvements
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance framework at college

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate policies, procedures and materials for work-based training
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice
- ◆ lack of focus on work-based training in self-assessment process

57. Action-planning following the self-assessment process, staff appraisals, team meetings and programme reviews has led to improvements. Examples of improvements tracked through action plans include the integration of key skills in painting and decorating programmes, the updating of induction materials in construction, the refurbishment of workshops, the tighter monitoring of attendance in engineering, and the appointment of occupationally experienced assessors to carry out assessment in the workplace. These positive outcomes have improved the experience of the trainees.

58. The college has a comprehensive quality assurance framework, developed by the quality assurance unit. The detailed systems and procedures cover most aspects of off-the-job training. Each NVQ training team is required to compile a detailed quality assurance manual, containing all the policies and processes relevant to that programme, from recruitment to completion of the qualification. This is the major vehicle for assuring the quality of off-the-job training. The training team reviews the training programme each term and action plans are developed to improve the quality of training. There is a systematic two-year cycle of observation of all trainers in order to evaluate the quality of training. A member of a specially selected team of qualified academic staff observes the trainer in a formal training session. Confidential feedback is given afterwards and, if necessary, an action plan is drawn up to address any issues. Appropriate staff development is available if required. Evaluation of the process is carried out on an annual basis and reviewed by the college governors' quality committee.

59. There are inadequate policies, procedures and materials for on-the-job, work-based training. There is no set procedure for the trainees' review process, detailing who should carry out the reviews how often, and what should be covered. Some reviews are not carried out at the required frequency. There is also no procedure for the completion of the individual training plans, which are currently not being completed by the occupational specialist in consultation with the trainee and employer. Target dates for completion of training are different from the target dates for achievement of the framework, resulting in some trainees remaining in training after completion of their programmes to complete the framework. These practices do not comply with the terms of the TEC contract. No guidelines exist for the college's staff who carry out workplace assessments to recommend the frequency of assessment, type of assessment, or the feedback to be given to trainees and employers. One employer has a member of staff who is a qualified assessor but is not included in the college's internal verification process. A tutor's checklist on equal opportunities was developed for the college's mainstream courses and has not been customised for work-based training. Training materials have not been quality-checked to ensure that they are appropriate for NVQ

training. Some materials contain the wrong course name and some assessment materials record results as pass or fail rather than giving a level of competence. There is no evaluation of training carried out by employers in the workplace.

60. There is insufficient sharing of the good practice which exists across occupational areas. The college's assessors who carry out work-based assessment are developing their own systems in isolation, duplicating time and effort, and not meeting to share best practice. The good practice of more experienced assessors is not always being used to train new assessors. In hairdressing, a file has been introduced so that assessors can submit and share materials which they consider to be good practice. The internal verification tracking plan for construction trainees is exceptionally good, enabling anyone to see at a glance how all trainees and every NVQ unit will be covered, yet this is not being shared with other areas. In some cases, good practice is not even shared within the same department. Examples include the excellent integration of on- and off-the-job training within the motor vehicle section, which is not seen elsewhere within engineering, and the integration of key skills training within painting and decorating programmes, which is poor elsewhere.

61. Self-assessment has been carried out annually for the last three years and is a fundamental part of the college's quality assurance system. The process has improved each year, and involves all members of staff. Employers and trainees are consulted. The latest self-assessment did not focus sufficiently on the work-based aspect of training, and underestimated the impact of inadequate systems and procedures on trainees, in particular the weak review process. In most areas, the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were not the same as the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. The weaknesses of poor retention and achievement in hairdressing and engineering were not recognised in the self-assessment report.