



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

Zenith Partnership  
at  
Warwickshire College

## SUMMARY

Zenith Partnership at Warwickshire College provides good training in construction, business administration and health, care and public services. Training in agriculture, engineering and hair and beauty is satisfactory. The quality of work placements is good and trainers and employers are supportive of trainees. Good off-the-job training is provided by well-qualified staff using good resources. There is little work-based assessment on most programmes and on- and off-the-job training are not always linked together. Retention and achievement rates on some programmes are low but improving. The college has good equal opportunities procedures, but trainees and employers have little awareness of equal opportunities. Learning support is good, but trainees' progress reviews lack focus. Zenith Partnership is well managed. Planning, target-setting and reviews are systematic and communications are good. A comprehensive framework for quality assurance and rigorous self-assessment lead to good quality assurance.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3
Construction	2
Engineering	3
Business administration	2
Hair & beauty	3
Health, care & public services	2

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good workplaces
- ◆ good learning support
- ◆ thorough strategic planning and review
- ◆ good internal and external communications
- ◆ rigorous procedures for quality assurance
- ◆ good use of data and bench marking
- ◆ rigorous self-assessment

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little work-based assessment on most programmes
- ◆ little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of external subcontractors
- ◆ poor awareness of equal opportunities among most trainees and employers
- ◆ low retention and achievement rates on some programmes

## INTRODUCTION

1. Zenith Partnership is a business unit of Warwickshire College, Royal Leamington Spa and Moreton Morrell. It was first established in 1988, as part of a supplier of youth training within Warwickshire County Council. It became part of the further education college in Leamington Spa in 1991. In 1996, a merger between the college at Leamington Spa and the Warwickshire College of Agriculture brought two separate training contracts and methods of working together. A single contract was obtained in 1997-98. The unit adopted the name Zenith Partnership in 1998 and moved to a single office on the Leamington Spa site in April 2000. Zenith is run by a manager and employs 10 staff who run and monitor the training contract. A senior manager at the college acts as the unit's link to the college's management team. The college provides courses from foundation to postgraduate level. Over 19,500 students enrol annually, of whom 3,700 are full time. At the time of inspection, 333 trainees were on work-based learning programmes funded by Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE): 111 on programmes in agriculture, 78 in construction, 30 in engineering, 46 in business administration, 16 in hair and beauty and 37 in health, care and public services. Fifteen trainees are on programmes in retailing and customer service, leisure, sport and travel and foundation for work, which are not reported on in this inspection. Most trainees are recruited from the local area, although some agricultural service engineering trainees are based in different parts of the country. Zenith Partnership subcontracts all its training, except for that in health, care and public services. Warwickshire College, Royal Leamington Spa and Moreton Morrell trains 94 per cent of the trainees. Eleven external subcontractors are used, including other colleges and employers which provide work-based training and assessment. Zenith Partnership also co-ordinates college-based New Deal training for Coventry and Warwickshire Units of Delivery. There are currently 17 clients on the full-time education and training option, following programmes in agriculture, construction, engineering, business administration, hair and beauty, media, arts and design and foundation for work.

2. The main towns served by Zenith Partnership, Leamington Spa, Warwick and Stratford, have a combined population of 236,000. The area of mid and south Warwickshire continues to attract new companies due to its location close to motorway networks. There has been a significant increase in employment in finance and business services over the past four years. Increases in opportunities for employment are expected in distribution, education and health and other services. Manufacturing continues to be the largest sector of employment, although this is in decline. A number of large automotive, communications, aerospace and electronics companies are located in the area. Unemployment is 2.2 per cent in Warwickshire, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent, and ranges from 4.2 per cent in Nuneaton to 1.2 per cent in Stratford. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is 3.4 per cent in Warwickshire. In Warwick District, the proportion is 5.6 per cent, with 4.5 per cent of Asian origin.



In 2000, 49.5 per cent of school leavers obtained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 1999, 71.7 per cent of school leavers in the Coventry and Warwickshire area remained in full-time education, 17.6 per cent started jobs with training, 2.5 per cent started jobs without training and 8.2 per cent were unemployed or their destinations were unknown. In Leamington Spa, only 7.6 per cent of young people from an Asian background enter work-based learning.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Self-assessment is well established and conducted annually . The initial draft of the report was prepared by Zenith Partnership staff, and then passed to occupational teams in the college for modification. Employers and trainees' feedback was incorporated, but external subcontractors were not involved. The CCTE undertook a validation exercise at the final stage. Action plans were drawn up and many of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. The self-assessment report was generally accurate, and self-critical, although some of the judgements for generic areas appeared in the wrong sections. In most areas, the strengths and weaknesses identified by staff were agreed with at inspection. Inspectors agreed with seven of the grades given in the self-assessment report and gave three areas one grade lower.

4. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 35 days with Zenith Partnership during November 2000. Six occupational areas, agriculture, construction, engineering, business administration, hair and beauty and health, care and public services, were inspected. Inspectors visited 45 work placements and the college and subcontractors' training centres. Interviews took place with 89 trainees and 45 workplace supervisors. Inspectors also conducted 38 interviews with staff, including senior staff at the college, the manager, subcontractors, training co-ordinators, trainers and assessors. A wide range of documents was reviewed, including trainees' files, NVQ portfolios, records of meetings, procedural manuals, policies, correspondence and external verifiers' reports. Five learning sessions were observed and graded.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture		2	1			3
Construction			1			1
Engineering		1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Agriculture

### Grade 3

5. Trainees are following foundation modern apprenticeships, advanced modern apprenticeships and other work-based learning programmes in a wide range of occupations. Details are given in the table below. Ninety-six per cent of trainees are employed. Most trainees attend the Moreton Morrell site for off-the-job learning for one day or one evening each week. In equine studies, two subcontracted employers carry out training and assessment on their premises. There is a training programme for apprentices with a large agricultural machinery dealership operating throughout the country. These apprentices attend training weeks at Moreton Morrell's training centre. Assessments are carried out at college or in the workplace and mainly by college staff. The college's staff internally verify assessments. Twenty-five staff are involved in training and assessment and there are 13 internal verifiers and one work-based assessor. Most programmes follow the college's academic year and are between one and three years in length. Staff are occupationally qualified and hold appropriate assessors and verifiers' awards. All trainees receive an induction, which includes health and safety and key skills initial assessment. Inspectors found several of the strengths in the self-assessment report to be either normal practice or not significant and identified two further strengths. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Trainees on programmes in agriculture

Programme	Advanced modern apprenticeship		Foundation modern apprenticeship	Other work-based training			Total
	Level 2	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	
Agriculture		4	6		2	3	15
Amenity horticulture (sports turf)			25		5	3	33
Amenity horticulture (decorative)			7				7
Commercial horticulture			6				6
Floristry					4		4
Agricultural engineering	12	11	6				29
Equine studies		5	4	1			10
Animal care			5	1	1		7
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>20</b>			<b>111</b>

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good learning resources at the college's training centre
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ up-to-date staff qualifications and experience

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ some poor achievement
- ◆ lack of established key skills training in some programmes

6. Good learning resources are available. The Moreton Morrell site has an established horse unit, which supplements trainees' workplace experience. There is a range of horses to suit all levels of trainee and modern equipment includes a variety of jumps and a grooming machine. A working stud, a treadmill and a farriery block provide additional relevant experience and support the optional units of the NVQ. An animal-care unit, including a grooming room and a kennel block, provides access to a wider range of animals than would normally be available in the workplace. The farm has a strong emphasis on livestock production, and a modern dairy and an arable enterprise provide good learning opportunities. Machinery is supplemented by equipment on loan from local farms but there are some shortages of modern equipment. The agricultural engineering company's workshop contains a range of modern machinery but this is available only to its own apprentices. Staff at Zenith Partnership, the college and the company work together closely to provide a well-structured programme for these apprentices. This includes joint presentation of the induction programme and training to update college lecturers on the company's products. The learning-resource centre has flexible opening hours and provides learning support and a wide range of learning materials.

7. Most trainees attend on day release at the Moreton Morrell site for practical training and training in theory. Training is good and trainees actively participate in learning. Training uses examples of experiences from the workplace and staff use up-to-date technical information. Specialist staff provide additional training. For example farriery trainers teach foot structure and shoeing to trainees in equine studies. Training is well structured and planned in advance. Appropriate language is used to ensure all trainees fully understand the sessions. Trainees have a copy of the schedule of work although this has only recently been given to employers. Links between on- and off-the-job training are poor in most areas and do not help trainees to progress. Two subcontracted equine businesses conduct their own training. Subcontractors have access to resources at the college site and this provides additional opportunities for learning.

8. In equine training staff have a good range of industrial experience and a high level of relevant qualifications. Five out of seven hold a nationally recognised

certificate in horse instruction. Staff in equine studies are all involved in other aspects of the industry. All staff across the occupational area hold training qualifications supplemented by occupational qualifications and experience. Staff, including recently recruited staff, hold or are working towards appropriate assessors and verifiers' qualifications. In animal care, staff are seconded back into the industry to maintain and update their knowledge.

9. Most assessments are carried out in the college. There is little work-based assessment and this results in delayed achievement. Work-based assessments have begun in most areas only this year. Employers' staff have been given the opportunity to train as assessors in equine training. Employers are currently involved in gathering evidence but there is no direct observation in the workplace by assessors. Staff have recently been appointed to assess horticultural and agricultural trainees in the workplace. Most trainees and employers are unaware of the requirements of the NVQ or the progress trainees are making. Completed units are not signed off and if a trainee leaves early there is no evidence to show what has been achieved.

10. Achievement rates for trainees on other work-based learning programmes are poor. Thirty-eight per cent of trainees achieved their target qualifications in 1997-98. This fell to 27 per cent in 1998-99. Retention rates have increased, however, from 43 per cent in 1998-99 to 77 per cent in 1999-2000. Zenith Partnership identified low achievement rates in horticulture in its self-assessment report. In 1998-99, no trainees achieved the foundation modern apprenticeship framework and only 11 per cent of trainees in other work-based learning achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans. In 1997-98, achievement rates were 60 per cent in floristry, 62 per cent in agricultural service engineering and 50 per cent on other training programmes in agriculture. Achievement in agricultural service engineering has been delayed by changes in portfolio development but no trainee left this programme early in 1999-2000. Retention rates in horticulture have improved over the past two years, from 60 per cent in 1998-99 to 77 per cent in 1999-2000. The retention rate in agriculture was 80 per cent in 1999-2000. Advanced modern apprentices in agriculture requested an evening class to allow them greater flexibility at work but this has slowed their achievement because there is less time available for training and assessment at college. Recruitment of trainees in animal care has been revised to encourage higher levels of employment. Most trainees take a one-year full-time course before starting work-based training and among both foundation and advanced modern apprentices, no trainee left their programme early in 1999-2000.

11. Key skills training has been introduced late into some programmes. Some foundation modern apprentices in agriculture have only recently started key skills, despite having taken two years to complete their level 2 NVQs. Some trainees are unaware of the key skills required by their programme and are unclear about how they will collect the evidence for them. Key skills training was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Trainees who attend college on day release have timetabled sessions for key skills. Work-based assignments have been developed in animal care and equine studies to help trainees collect evidence for



key skills. One of the equine training subcontractors integrates key skills with the NVQ. Zenith Partnership provides a trainer to conduct training at the premises of the other subcontractor.

## Construction

## Grade 2

12. Zenith has 78 trainees in construction. NVQ training is offered at levels 2 and 3 in brickwork, wood occupations and plumbing, and at level 2 in painting and decorating. There are 40 foundation modern apprentices, 26 advanced modern apprentices and 12 trainees on other work-based learning programmes. Recruitment for these programmes is from a full-time foundation course at the college. During this programme, trainees are offered a work placement with employers for three days each week. A training co-ordinator and occupational training manager assess these employers for suitability. Employers who offer full-time employment to a trainee sign a training agreement with Zenith Partnership. Brickwork and wood occupations trainees attend a day-release programme at the Moreton Morrell site. Plumbing and painting and decorating trainees attend the Leamington Spa site on day release. The self-assessment report prepared was generally accurate in its identification of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found one strength to be no more than normal practice and that one weakness had been rectified by the time of inspection. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ well-produced trainees' portfolios
- ◆ good use of workplace evidence
- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ high retention rates

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ late introduction of key skills in most areas

13. Training provided by the college is good. Staff have developed learning materials and assessment packs which give trainees detailed guidance on gathering evidence. There are comprehensive schemes of work for all programmes. Training is well resourced with good-quality machines and tools and adequate supplies of materials. In plumbing, additional resources are supplied by manufacturers. Trainees produce good-quality practical work. They are encouraged to enter occupational skills competitions and there are many examples of successful achievement, particularly at regional level. This success is celebrated by the college. Trainees are satisfied with their training and are motivated by off-the-job learning sessions. Trainees' portfolios contain work which demonstrates good

occupational knowledge and clear evidence of practical competence. There is good use of diverse evidence, particularly in plumbing where portfolios are highly individual. Trainees make excellent use of photographs and witness testimony to demonstrate competence.

14. Work-based assessment is used on all programmes. Work-based assessment booklets are used by trainees to record both training and activities which take place in the workplace. These booklets are easy to use and are supplemented by forms to request work-based assessment. The assessors use these forms to arrange visits to the workplace to check evidence recorded in the trainee's logbook. Trainers spend two days each week assessing trainees on site. In painting and decorating, trainees have the opportunity to work on realistic projects around the college if workplace evidence is not available. Assessors place a strong emphasis on the health and safety requirements of the NVQ. They will terminate any assessment where the trainee or site conditions fail to meet these requirements. This promotes awareness of health and safety at an early stage and helps to enforce the adoption of safe working practices.

15. Staff have strong links with employers and develop opportunities for training and assessment. Work placements are good and include large construction businesses and small, general builders. Trainees work to demanding industrial standards. When employers are unable to provide suitable work, alternative work placements are found which allow the trainee to develop relevant skills. Some trainees are unable to provide the site evidence necessary to achieve the relevant NVQ. Employers and workplace supervisors are supportive of trainees and act as work-based recorders of evidence and mentors. This support, with additional assistance from an external agency, has allowed a trainee with profound hearing difficulties to achieve a qualification. There is a long-established employers' consultative committee which meets three times each year to discuss issues such as health and safety and training. These meetings are well attended by a good cross-section of employers.

16. The retention rate on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme is 93 per cent. On the advanced modern apprenticeship programme, it is 95 per cent, and on other work-based learning programmes, no trainee has left early. Ninety-one per cent of advanced modern apprentices achieved an NVQ at level 2 during 1998-99 and 38 per cent achieved an NVQ at level 3. For trainees on other work-based learning programmes, only 33 per cent achieved a level 2 NVQ during the same period. Internal verification meets the requirements of the awarding bodies. A training manager co-ordinates internal verification and addresses any issues which arise.

17. There is slow development in key skills in most areas. They are not introduced in the first year of training. Most trainees are unaware of the key skills requirements and are unable to explain their relevance to their occupation. The exception to this is in plumbing, where key skills are fully integrated into the NVQ. Portfolios in this area are cross-referenced to identify key skills evidence from evidence for the occupational requirements of the programme.

## Engineering

## Grade 3

18. Zenith Partnership offers foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in engineering. There are 21 advanced modern apprentices and nine foundation modern apprentices. Most trainees are employed with small and medium-sized companies in the Coventry and Warwickshire area. Off-the-job training for level 2 NVQs is provided at the college as a block-release programme for trainees in their first year. There are six trainees following this route. Some trainees enter the level 3 NVQ programme after completing a full-time college course. Key skills training forms part of the college's programme for trainees working towards NVQs at level 2. Additional key skills sessions are arranged for some trainees in the evening. Level 3 trainees attend a day-release course to gain knowledge of theory for approved qualifications. Assessment is carried out by the college's staff who are qualified assessors. Trainees' progress is monitored and training reviewed by Zenith Partnership's training co-ordinator, who visits trainees at work. Induction is carried out by Zenith Partnership's staff at the beginning of training. There is further induction on entry to work and college. Over the past four years, overall retention rates have been 80 per cent on the advanced modern apprenticeship, 33 per cent on the foundation modern apprenticeship and 62 per cent on other work-based learning programmes. During this period, four trainees have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans, one of whom is an advanced modern apprentice. In addition, seven out of 12 trainees who started training in 1996 achieved their advanced modern apprenticeship in August 2000. The self-assessment report accurately identified employers' support, resources and off-the-job learning as strengths. Slow rates of achievement of NVQs and inadequate assessment in the workplace were identified as weaknesses. Inspectors identified an additional significant weakness. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ strong support from employers
- ◆ additional training

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ unplanned on-the-job training
- ◆ lack of work-based assessment
- ◆ slow rates of achievement

19. Off-the-job learning sessions are well planned and carried out. Trainees have a good understanding of the programme they are following. Learning materials for workshop and classroom sessions are available and used by trainees. Trainees

benefit from the high level of resources and up-to-date equipment which is available to support engineering training programmes for trainees with large companies provided by the college. Engineering staff, libraries, study aids and computers are all used to support trainees' learning. Trainees generally make good progress in their off-the-job learning and achieve the appropriate qualifications for the relevant stage of training. Progress in the off-the-job learning is monitored regularly by the college's staff and reviewed with trainees and Zenith Partnership's staff. There is an effective system for monitoring trainees' progress in their off-the-job training. Trainees work at a pace which suits their needs. Staff are well qualified and experienced. The college has been awarded a best practice award for its training by a regional engineering employers' association for the past three years. This award is based on the college's performance in its work with employers.

20. Most trainees are employed in small to medium sized companies, which offer a range of relevant learning opportunities. Employers are supportive of the trainees. Zenith Partnership is in regular contact with employers, which receive regular reports on trainees' progress in their off-the-job training. Trainees work alongside experienced and qualified engineers. They gain good skills and perform appropriate tasks competently. Some trainees have gained enough experience and skills to achieve positions of responsibility at work. There are regular progress-review visits and employers are involved in the review of training. There is an employers' consultative group, which meets quarterly at the college and is attended by employers with Zenith Partnership's trainees. The meetings provide an opportunity for employers to contribute their views and discuss their future training needs.

21. Some employers have good in-house training schemes and trainees benefit from the opportunities these provide. Some trainees are involved in performance review and appraisal at work set up by employers. One employer signs off trainees as competent for certain tasks associated with the service provided by the employer. These achievements have not been cross-referenced or incorporated into the training arrangements organised by Zenith Partnership. Some trainees take additional courses leading to certificates and these are used as evidence to support assessment. For example, some trainees have received additional training leading to qualifications in information technology, computer-aided design and hydraulics. Additional training is also provided by the college. For example, three trainees have received extra training to assist them with a national certificate course. Some trainees are studying for higher national certificates.

22. All trainees are employed. Most are in companies which offer a good range of training and skills and opportunities to work with experienced and qualified engineers. The programme is planned and agreed with employers and trainees at the start of training. This information is recorded in the individual learning plan kept in trainees' files. Trainees and employers are given a copy. Previously, a detailed work-based learning plan was drawn up and agreed with the employer. This plan described the detailed activity, content, training methods and timetable for the on-the-job training and set regular targets for progress towards the NVQ.

These plans are no longer produced. This has delayed achievement of level 3 NVQs for most trainees.

23. There is little assessment in the workplace. Only one employer has work-based assessors, and, while they support trainees and provide witness testimony, they do not assess. Training co-ordinators are not occupationally competent. Over the past three years, Zenith has used the college to assess in the workplace but this has not in fact been done for most level 3 NVQ trainees. In one case a trainee had not been assessed at work for over six months. Most assessment is of portfolio evidence, in some cases supported by witness statements. Lack of assessment was identified by Zenith earlier this year and remedial action taken. A qualified and occupationally competent work-based assessor has been appointed. New systems for planning assessment and verification have been introduced. Three trainees have been assessed and have completed their programmes. Continuous assessment is still not available for some trainees.

24. Trainees receive key skills training as part of their off-the-job training in year one. Some trainees who started programmes previously have not had their key skills assessed for two years. Extra sessions were provided in the evenings for some trainees but attendance was poor. Lack of key skills achievement and of regular, work-based assessment have contributed to slow rates of progress by trainees. Between 1997 and 2000, of the 46 trainees who started programmes, 12 achieved an NVQ at level 2 and two achieved an NVQ at level 3. During this period, only four trainees achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans.

## **Business administration**

## **Grade 2**

25. There are 46 trainees following programmes leading to NVQs at levels 2, 3 and 4 in accounting, and levels 2 and 3 in administration, insurance and information technology. Seven trainees and one New Deal client are following the two-year advanced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in business. Over 80 per cent of trainees are employed. Some trainees are employed when they join the programme, and Zenith Partnership helps the rest to find employers. Employers range from large public sector organisations to small businesses which provide experience in disciplines including accountancy, law and computer skills. Trainees have the opportunity to obtain additional qualifications in computer skills, word processing and telephone techniques. The college provides most of the off-the-job training and Zenith Partnership subcontracts training to three other training providers for one insurance trainee and two accounting trainees. Off-the-job training varies from regular day release to occasional workshops. Most trainees are assessed in the workplace every two to four weeks. Trainers and assessors have relevant occupational experience and qualifications. There are regular meetings between the assessors and the internal verifier to share good practice and to disseminate information. Of trainees starting training in 1998, 66 per cent achieved foundation modern apprenticeships and 50 per cent achieved advanced modern

apprenticeships. In the same, period 28 per cent of trainees on other work-based learning programmes achieved a qualification. The retention rate is currently 73 per cent for advanced modern apprentices, 66 per cent for foundation modern apprentices, and 66 per cent for trainees on other work-based learning. The self-assessment report identified additional qualifications, good target-setting and integration of key skills into most programmes as strengths. It did not identify the weakness identified by inspections of the delays caused to accounting trainees through key skills being introduced late into the programme. The report identified the lack of work-based assessment for some trainees. Action to address the weaknesses had already been taken at the time of inspection. The grade awarded by the inspectors was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

Trainees on programmes in business administration

Programme	Advanced modern apprenticeship			Foundation modern apprenticeship	Other work-based learning		Total
	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	
Administration		6		16	7		29
Information technology				3	3		6
Accounting		6	1		1	2	10
Insurance		1					1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>46</b>

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good integration of key skills
- ◆ challenging targets for trainees
- ◆ wide range of additional training provided

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little work-based assessment in accounting
- ◆ delays to progress for some trainees in accounting and insurance

26. Links with employers are good, especially on programmes in administration. The college uses its network of local employers to match trainees to the most appropriate work placement. At the start of training, the training co-ordinator arranges a meeting with the employer, the trainee and the assessor so that the various training options can be discussed and choices made. A training plan and



**GOOD PRACTICE**

*One employer includes the trainee in the staff-appraisal scheme. The training co-ordinator timetables an appropriate progress review to fit in with the appraisal in the workplace.*

the roles and responsibilities of the employer, the college and Zenith Partnership are agreed. The employer is provided with a detailed information pack which outlines the requirements of the framework, explains the NVQ and key skills, and gives details of off-the-job training. Regular visits to the workplace by the training co-ordinator and assessor ensure that any problems are quickly resolved. For example, one trainee's job did not provide sufficient scope to enable him to achieve a level 3 NVQ, and so the training co-ordinator found an alternative job within a few days. Employers are involved in progress reviews. Most employers give the trainees study leave. Some workplaces allocate a mentor to the trainee during the training and this helps the trainee to settle in quickly.

27. Key skills for the modern apprenticeship programmes in administration run by the college are well integrated into the NVQ training from the start. Trainees are assessed at induction to determine the level of key skills training required. Evidence from the NVQ portfolio is cross-referenced to the key skills units. Any shortfalls are covered by work-related key skills assignments devised by the college's staff. Trainees develop skills by attending regular workshops at the college and employers are encouraged to provide opportunities for developing key skills. This approach has enabled modern apprentices to achieve the requirements of their framework at an appropriate pace.

28. There is thorough action-planning for administration trainees. Clear, achievable NVQ and key skills targets are agreed on a regular basis. This is done through quarterly progress reviews by the training co-ordinator and the monthly visits by the assessor to the workplace. All targets are clearly recorded in trainees' portfolios. Trainees and their workplace supervisors have a clear idea of the evidence required for each assessment. Opportunities are taken for carrying out work-based assessment wherever possible.

29. Employers regularly provide additional training in telephone skills, computer applications, customer service, handling difficult people, data protection and developments in the law to develop work and personal skills. Some large employers provide additional experience through job rotation. Most of the trainees are given time off to work towards their qualifications. Trainees also achieve extra qualifications off the job. These include qualifications in word processing, and using accounting packages, and computer literacy certificates in addition to their NVQs.

30. In accounting and information technology programmes, assessment in the workplace is inadequate, with little use of alternative sources of evidence such as witness testimonies, professional discussion or oral questioning. There is little planning of assessments. Trainees do not know how they will be assessed, especially for key skills. Written feedback is rarely given. In accounting, there is an over-reliance on simulations. Poor assessment practice has resulted in some portfolios containing little evidence, which is inadequately referenced and does not fully meet the standards required. Processes for internal verification in accounting are inadequate and fail to identify weaknesses.

31. Progression has been delayed for some trainees. In information technology, two trainees were delayed by four months due to staff changeovers and delays in obtaining information from the awarding body. The insurance trainee was similarly delayed because of a delay in obtaining learning materials. The gathering of key skills evidence for some accountancy trainees does not start until they are at an advanced stage of the programme. Trainees who have completed the level 3 NVQ in accounting have not been assessed for key skills.

### **Hair & beauty**

### **Grade 3**

32. Zenith Partnership offers training for foundation and advanced modern apprentices in hairdressing. There are 15 foundation modern apprentices and one trainee on a programme of other work-based learning. Eight trainees attend the college for of-the-job training and eight are trained by an external subcontractor. Most trainees are recruited directly from the employers or by referral to Zenith Partnership after making applications to the college or the external subcontractor. Trainees attend the college or the subcontractor for off-the-job training one day each week. This consists of practical and theory training and assessment. The college offers training towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The external subcontractor offers NVQs at level 2 only. The college's staff carry out work-based assessments. Some assessment takes place at the college. The subcontractor assesses trainees during off-the-job training. A training co-ordinator visits all the trainees to review their progress. The self-assessment report identified as strengths good learning facilities in the college and integration of key skills in the college-based training. Inspectors identified two additional strengths and two significant additional weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive learning resources at the college
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good key skills training in college
- ◆ innovative use of diaries to record trainees' work tasks

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some poor assessment practices by the external subcontractor
- ◆ low retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices

33. The college-based training uses a wide range of learning resources. The college's salons have modern equipment, including motorised shampoo couches to enable the trainees to perform oriental and other massage techniques. There is a wide variety and quantity of hand-held and portable electrical equipment. All the



**GOOD PRACTICE**

*There is a high ratio of trainers to trainees. In the college and the subcontractor, there are never more than eight trainees to one trainer in any learning session. This results in each trainee having good individual attention.*

salons are equipped with up-to-date furniture, tools and general hairdressing equipment. There is a wide range of professional hairdressing products to help trainees develop product knowledge. Technicians who are qualified assessors staff the dispensary and reception area. An additional classroom is equipped with computers, printers, a shampoo basin and learning aids. This room is used for sessions on hairdressing theory, key skills development and demonstrations of practical skills.

34. In the college, workbooks are used to support practical training for each NVQ unit. Revision tests prepare the trainees for verbal questions in practical assessments. The completed workbooks are used as portfolio evidence. Both the college's and the external subcontractor's trainers are practising hairdressers and have up to date knowledge of the hairdressing industry. The external subcontractor's trainers are stylists in the company's salon. Some of the college's trainers are self-employed and work in their own salons. The learning sessions at the college are well structured and supported by comprehensive session plans which include the coverage of key skills. Both the college and the external subcontractor provide practical training of a very high standard. Trainees work at a high level of occupational competence.

35. Key skills are well integrated into the college-based learning programme. Trainees are familiar with key skills and regard them as skills which they need as professional hairdressers. Time is included for key skills during off-the-job learning sessions. Key skills for the foundation modern apprenticeship are developed in three of the hairdressing NVQ units. Key skills are also gained through work in the college's dispensary. A business-design component is available to upgrade the level of key skills for those trainees progressing to an NVQ at level 3. Progress towards key skills is, however, delayed by the external subcontractor.

36. There is good use of work diaries to monitor trainees' work tasks. Trainees complete the diaries on a daily basis and record each skill they demonstrate in the workplace. Trainers see these diaries weekly. This enables them to monitor development of skills and check for excessive repetition of tasks in the workplace. The diary is also used for portfolio evidence of practical work for portfolios.

37. The external subcontractor does not carry out practical assessments for the first three months of training. Many of the trainees have gained basic hairdressing skills through previous part-time employment. They use these skills in both the subcontractor's and other salons where they are employed. Trainees with the external subcontractor have a poor understanding of the NVQ. They do not have copies of the NVQ units. There is little action planning or planning of assessment. Trainees and employers are unaware of the progress made towards the qualification. There is little opportunity for work-based assessment and poor use of witness testimony. Few employers' staff are qualified assessors. There are no visits to the trainees in the workplace by staff from the external subcontractor. These trainees are assessed only during the off-the-job training.

38. Retention and achievement rates are low for some trainees. Forty-four per cent of foundation modern apprentices have left early with no qualification. In 1998-99, only 33 per cent achieved the requirements of their framework. Eighty per cent of trainees starting advanced modern apprenticeship involving NVQs at level 3 in 1997-98 left early with no qualification. Of those entering to work towards an NVQ at level 2, 50 per cent left early with no qualification. In 1999-2000, all three advanced modern apprentices achieved their framework. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is improving. Of the trainees starting in 1999-2000, only one has left early. Zenith Partnership is not currently recruiting trainees directly onto advanced modern apprenticeships. Suitable trainees may, however, progress to the level 3 NVQ through the college.

## **Health, care & public services**

## **Grade 2**

39. Zenith Partnership provides training towards NVQs in care and early years care and education at levels 2 and 3. There are three trainees on programmes in care and 34 on programmes in early years care and education. There are 10 modern apprentices and 21 national trainees. The remaining six trainees are on other work-based learning programmes. All trainees are interviewed before starting the programmes. The entry requirement for trainees in childcare is two GCSEs at grade D or above, including English. Trainees without the qualifications required for entry are referred to other training providers or the careers service or are given taster courses in nurseries before starting the programme. Some applicants are referred to a foundation programme at the college. Twenty-three trainees are employed and 14 are on work placements. Childcare trainees work in nurseries and nursery schools in the area. Care trainees are based in residential homes in the community. Care trainees attend occasional workshops which are held for other client groups from the care sector. Monthly workshops are provided off the job for childcare trainees. Zenith Partnership is approved as an assessment centre for early years care and education awards. Assessment for childcare and care trainees is done in the workplace by subcontracted visiting assessors. An external assessment centre is used for care. Five internal verifiers verify the early years care and education programme. Trainers, assessors and internal verifiers are all suitably qualified and occupationally competent. The training co-ordinator holds the key skills training award and is responsible for training and assessment of key skills in the workplace for both care and childcare trainees. The self-assessment report accurately identified as strengths the high skill levels of assessors and completion rates of advanced modern apprentices. The report also accurately identified as a weakness the lack of planned training for trainees on care programmes but did not identify that trainees are unaware of the assessment centre's appeals procedure. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ good off-the-job training in childcare
- ◆ highly skilled and well-qualified trainers and assessors
- ◆ high rates of retention and achievement among advanced modern apprentices

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ no planned off-the-job training in care
- ◆ lack of awareness of appeals procedure among trainees

40. Trainees gain a good understanding of the structure of their awards and portfolio-building during induction. Childcare trainees receive copies of workshop schedules, which clearly outline all the topics to be covered. Monthly workshops are held during the day, and also during the evening for trainees who are employed and unable to attend during the daytime. Trainees are encouraged to book places on the workshops at the beginning of the programme. Attendance at the workshops is high and trainees receive certificates of attendance, which they display in their portfolios. Training is well structured with clearly defined aims and objectives for every session. Trainees enjoy the sessions and are well motivated to apply their learning in the workplace. Reading lists are provided for trainees and there is a loan scheme for trainees to buy textbooks.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*Evidence for the key skills of improving own learning and performance and working with others is identified from trainees' care and early years care and education portfolios by the assessor. Trainees are not involved in this process and are not aware of how the evidence in their portfolios meets the requirements of the key skills.*

41. All assessors and trainers are occupationally qualified and experienced. A range of methods of assessment is used to suit trainees' learning needs. Trainees with particular needs are encouraged to learn through oral questions, guided discussion and frequent observations in the workplace. Trainees' understanding of background knowledge is thoroughly tested by assessors through challenging questioning. Assessors reinforce the importance of health and safety during assessment. Some trainers ensure their occupational skills are kept up to date by working part-time in the care sector. Key skills are introduced early in the programmes by a key skills trainer. Trainees take an initial key skills assessment during the two-day induction. They are visited in the workplace and receive one-to-one support to complete application of number and information technology. Assignments set by the trainer for these two areas link directly to workplace activities. A portable computer is used by the assessor in workplaces where there are no computing facilities. Some trainees complete these two units before starting assessment on the care and early years NVQs. Evidence produced for these two units of key skills is of a high standard.

42. Since 1997, there have been a total of 16 advanced modern apprentices nine of whom started training in 1998-99 and are on target to achieve all the targets on their individual learning plans. Six of the trainees started programmes between 1997-99 and they have all completed their individual learning plans. Achievement rates on other learning programmes are satisfactory.

43. Trainees in care do not receive a planned learning schedule relating to on- or off-the-job training. Training needs are not matched to NVQ requirements at the

start of training. Reviews are used to identify particular needs in relation to the NVQ requirements but this is unstructured. Trainees attend workshops held for other client groups from the care sector. On-the-job training takes place for some trainees but this is identified through progress reviews and not at the start of the programme.

44. Trainees attend a two-day induction programme with an additional day to reinforce the NVQ requirements. Trainees who miss this induction and start programmes later receive a one-to-one induction in the workplace. The programme does not always cover the appeals procedure and trainees' knowledge of this process is poor.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

45. The manager of Zenith Partnership is responsible for equal opportunities for work-based training. The college is committed to equal opportunities and employs an equal opportunities manager to advise staff. There is also a manager who assists people with additional needs to make use of the college's services. The college has a clear written policy which applies to its students, staff and governors. The policy also includes the wider community and the training provided by Zenith Partnership. In addition to this Zenith has a policy and procedures which apply to work-based training. Copies of the policy are given to trainees, employers and subcontractors. All policies are regularly reviewed and monitored as part of the college and Zenith Partnership's procedures for quality assurance. Staff and trainees' equal opportunities data are collected and monitored. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is below that of the local population. Use of data, bench marking and staff training in equal opportunities were agreed to be strengths by inspectors. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities was agreed to be a weakness. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of data to monitor equal opportunities
- ◆ all staff trained in equal opportunities
- ◆ systematic use of bench marking

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities among employers
- ◆ little understanding of equal opportunities by most trainees
- ◆ no use of college's resources to strengthen trainee's awareness of equal opportunities

46. An analysis of all applications received has been carried out annually for the past five years. Information is obtained on numbers of men and women applying and on the number of applicants from minority ethnic groups and the number with a declared disability or health problem. An analysis is also carried out of the numbers starting training and those who withdrew from programmes. This is done for each occupational area. Action is taken in any occupational area which demonstrates problems with recruitment or retention. For example, in 1999-2000, a decrease in the rate of progression to programmes of minority ethnic applicants from 30 per cent to 26 per cent was identified. Zenith checked trainees' details to establish the entry level, the date the application was received, the time taken to respond to the application and the date of the interview. The outcome was reviewed to establish why trainees withdrew. An additional report covers three years of activity and contains a detailed action plan. It reports on the gender, ethnicity, and long-term health problems of applicants by training programmes.

47. Equal opportunities training needs are identified through staff appraisal. Training courses taken by staff include drug awareness, self-defence for women, assertiveness training, mental health and abuse and self-harm. In addition training co-ordinators received specific training on equal opportunities. Information from this training has been used to make changes to questionnaires. It was also used to update the information for employers through the recent introduction of a more detailed employers' handbook.

48. There is systematic use of bench marking. Performance is measured for Zenith Partnership's training programmes compared with that at all other colleges in Coventry and Warwickshire. The analysis is carried out for each occupational area. It includes an appraisal of training available and the number of trainees taking up the options. An analysis is then carried out of gender, ethnicity, retention and achievement. The evaluation is honest and makes clear comments on the shortfalls in Zenith Partnership's performance.

49. There is a low awareness among employers of equal opportunities. Zenith Partnership recently identified the absence of any review of the employers' equal opportunities policies. This is now done for each employer. Employers which do not have their own policy are required to use the college's. However, most employers are still unaware of the policies and practices of Zenith Partnership and many have little understanding of equal opportunities. Any issues raised by the trainees are dealt with promptly by the training co-ordinators. There is a poor understanding by most trainees of equal opportunities. Equal opportunities is covered at induction but is not reinforced during training. There is little reinforcement of information given at induction on discrimination and harassment. Trainees do not understand how poor practice in these areas may affect them.

50. The college has comprehensive policies and procedures for equal opportunities but these are not applied to its trainees. The college has specifically designed equal opportunities resources, which include guidance on monitoring equal opportunities

and guidelines on harassment, programme planning and teaching, with materials to support trainers. These are not routinely used for the trainees. Similarly, there is a comprehensive glossary of terms and a personal check list for staff to use to identify their own developmental needs but this does not extend to trainees. Trainees who attend the college on day release benefit from staff awareness of equal opportunities but trainees placed with external subcontractors lack this support.

## Trainee support

## Grade 3

51. Trainees are recruited by advertising job vacancies, placing general advertisements for programmes and by presentations to school and college groups. Zenith Partnership attends local careers fairs and community events to promote programmes. Staff at Zenith Partnership and the college promote training at the college's open days and parents' evenings. Some trainees are referred directly from employers. A booklet gives details of work-based learning programmes on offer and details are also included in the college's prospectus. Applicants are offered an interview to assess their suitability for learning programmes and a record of the interview is completed. Some trainees attend an induction in a group. For others, this is carried out on a one-to-one basis either at the college or on an employer's premises. Understanding of health and safety is checked by a questionnaire which is completed by trainees before their first progress review takes place. Initial assessment of key skills takes place during induction. Reviews of progress are scheduled to take place quarterly. Records of visits and personal action plans are completed with trainees in the workplace by training co-ordinators and assessors. The self-assessment report identified several strengths and weaknesses relating to inadequate monitoring systems and inconsistent progress-review processes. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and the grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good advice and guidance
- ◆ good additional learning support
- ◆ celebration of trainees' success

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of focus in some progress reviews
- ◆ no use of individual training plans as working documents

52. Initial advice and guidance is good. Some trainees discuss their expectations individually with a programme advisor before completing their application forms. Work-placement tasters are offered to some trainees to help them decide if they are



suited to occupations. Trainees with particular requirements receive weekly advice and guidance from training co-ordinators in the workplace. Advice is given to trainees and employers about unfair practices, covering the minimum wage and health and safety in the workplace. The co-ordinators also provide guidance about trainee work routines to enable them to meet the range of requirements for their awards. There is a discretionary fund available to provide some trainees with a taxi service to and from their places of work. A bus service transports trainees to college at a reduced cost. Childcare facilities are advertised on notice boards at the college.

53. Additional learning requirements of trainees are identified early. Some needs are identified through application forms. Others are identified by the initial assessment of key skills. Learning support services provide group support in basic skills and one-to-one learning with support trainers. Trainers complete individual study plans with trainees and these clearly identify their learning needs. Weekly records are made of the work completed by trainees. Copies of the records are then sent to the training co-ordinators. Trainees complete tasks which link directly to portfolio work and improve literacy and numeracy. Additional support services for trainees are published in the staff and trainees' newsletters and are also available on the college intranet. One trainee on a construction programme has a sensory impairment and is being supported in off-the-job training with a signer.

54. Trainees' achievement of awards is promoted in college and Zenith Partnership's newsletters and featured in local newspapers. Trainees have been successful finalists in regional and national competitions. Trainees who have achieved awards are invited to give presentations at induction and discuss expectations of the programme with new recruits. The results of the trainees' surveys are openly displayed on notice boards throughout the college. Improvements to the college's facilities have been made as a result of feedback received from trainees. Improvements have included the introduction of better canteen facilities and vending machines for trainees' use.

55. Progress reviews are not always completed on time and do not always involve the employer. The training co-ordinators are not all occupationally competent and target-setting with trainees is often general rather than specific to the NVQ unit requirements. Demanding targets for achievement are not set. The relevance of occupational tasks carried out in the workplace and their potential as evidence for assessment is not always identified. There is a lack of consistency and frequency in the completion of personal action plans and reports on visits by training co-ordinators and assessors. Action plans completed by trainers and assessors sometimes contain both short- and long-term targets, but these are not linked to the progress-review process.

56. The results of initial assessment are not always recorded on individual learning plans. Initial targets set for achievement of key skills and NVQ programmes are general. Trainees who have previously achieved key skills have these accredited towards the modern apprenticeship framework but individual learning plans record little other prior learning and achievement. The achievements of NVQ units

identified during reviews with trainees are not always recorded in individual learning plans. Trainees do not have copies of their individual training plans. The plans are not used to update trainees on their progress.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

57. The manager of Zenith Partnership manages work-based training and co-ordinates New Deal programmes in the college. She reports to a director, who is a member of the senior management team of the college. Seven training co-ordinators organise, monitor and support training. Each is responsible for specific occupational areas. Ninety-four per cent of trainees are on programmes run by the college and 96 per cent of trainees are employed. There are service level agreements with each programme area of the college and training takes place on sites at Leamington Spa and Moreton Morrell. Eleven other subcontractors are used including private training companies, employers and other colleges. There are specific subcontractual agreements with each type of training provider. Trainers and assessors in each occupational area are appropriately qualified and experienced. The numbers of trainees have declined from 450 in 1997-98 to 333 at the time of inspection. The numbers of trainees have increased in construction but have declined in engineering and agriculture. The college was accredited as an Investor in People in 1994 and was re-accredited in 1997 and 1999. Inspectors agreed with all the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and identified two weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic planning, target-setting and review
- ◆ good internal and external communications
- ◆ high profile of work-based learning
- ◆ comprehensive recruitment, selection and appraisal process
- ◆ wide range of opportunities for staff training

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*A risk assessment has been done for training co-ordinators visiting work placements. It covers driving to work placements, offering lifts to trainees and lone visits to employers' premises. As a result, guidelines have been produced and mobile phones purchased for staff to use on visits.*

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ little management responsibility for co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

58. Zenith works to an annual plan, which is drawn up by the manager and training co-ordinators. A planning day is held each year at which co-ordinators report on the performance of each occupational area during the previous year and review



progress against action plans. Areas performing well are identified and strategies to build on their strengths are drawn up. New areas where performance is declining and areas which require high levels of attention or resources are identified. A detailed action plan is drawn up to set clear targets for the coming year and it is linked to self-assessment. It is also linked to targets set for Zenith Partnership in the college's overall strategic plan. Progress is reviewed at monthly team meetings. Targets for income and NVQ achievement set for Zenith Partnership by the college were achieved in 1999-2000.

59. There is regular communication between all staff involved in training. Training co-ordinators hold monthly team meetings. These have an agenda and are minuted with actions clearly identified and followed up. They include regular reviews of health and safety, equal opportunities, contractual performance and subcontractors. Most training co-ordinators attend weekly programme area meetings in college to discuss training and trainees' progress. Training co-ordinators meet regularly with college trainers and subcontractors. Some attend off-the-job training sessions to meet with trainees weekly during the early part of the programme. There is an informative weekly newsletter for college staff and an employers' newsletter is produced every three months.

60. Work-based learning has a high profile in the college and in the local community. Since the merger of training contracts in 1998, work-based learning has become well integrated with the college's other activities. Recent relocation of the Zenith Partnership's office to the main administrative centre in the college has made staff more accessible and raised awareness of the training provided. The principal and senior managers promote work-based learning alongside other forms of education and training. Promotional material, including the college's prospectus and Zenith Partnership's marketing leaflets give training a high profile with prospective trainees and employers. There are close links with employers' groups in most occupational areas.

61. There are comprehensive staffing procedures to ensure equality of opportunity in recruitment and development of staff. Detailed policies and procedures for all stages of recruitment are contained in a personnel manual. These include clearly written guidelines on drawing up job descriptions and person specifications and conducting shortlisting and interviews. All staff are appraised annually by their line manager. Relevant documents are sent to the appraiser and the appraisee when the appraisal is due. A comprehensive system is used to record details of appraisal and training and produce regular reports.

62. A wide range of training opportunities is available to all staff. Individual training needs identified through appraisal are drawn together into a staff development plan. An ongoing programme of training is arranged and all staff have access to it. Training events are advertised in the weekly staff newsletter. Training co-ordinators have received training in key skills, health and safety, equal opportunities and guidance and counselling through this programme. Specific training courses are agreed with line managers and funded from departmental budgets.

63. The progress of trainees who are due to complete their programmes is discussed at the monthly team meeting but there is no system for monitoring trainees' progress towards their qualifications. Through their contact with trainers and employers, the training co-ordinators are aware of the general progress being made by trainees but they do not keep individual records. This results in some slow progress by trainees because difficulties are not identified until late in the programme.

64. In most occupational areas, Zenith Partnership does not take full responsibility for linking on- and off-the-job training. Off-the-job training is generally of a high standard and work placements provide good opportunities for trainees to develop skills. Opportunities for training and assessment in the workplace are missed. In some cases, employers have little awareness of the training and assessment needs of their trainees and how they can better support them. In others, additional training which trainees receive in the workplace is not used for the NVQ. This results in slow progress towards their qualifications by some trainees.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

65. The manager of Zenith Partnership has overall responsibility for quality assurance. She reports directly to the director of quality and partnerships, who ensures that quality assurance is integrated within all areas of the college. Zenith Partnership has separate policies and procedures relating to work-based learning and also operates within the college's quality assurance framework. Zenith Partnership's staff receive copies of policies and procedures at induction. Surveys of trainees and employers are carried out on a regular basis. The college has a system for internal verification which includes Zenith Partnership. The procedures and standard forms used for assessment and monitoring trainees' progress are available to staff on the colleges' intranet. The college's procedures for verification are described in a leaflet for external verifiers. The self-assessment report accurately identified as strengths the comprehensive arrangements for quality assurance and the rigour of the self-assessment process, which has resulted in improvements to work-based learning. It also accurately identified good analysis of data and systematic use of feedback to make changes. It recognised the weakness of its monitoring of subcontractors and Zenith Partnership has already implemented an action plan to rectify this. The grade awarded at inspection was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

## STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive framework for quality assurance
- ◆ rigorous process for self-assessment
- ◆ good use of data and bench marking
- ◆ systematic use of feedback from trainees and employers

## WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of subcontracted training

66. The college has a comprehensive framework for quality assurance. There are separate policies and procedures for work-based learning. The college provides 94 per cent of the off-the-job training and has rigorous systems to assure its quality. All staff understand the procedures for quality assuring their area of work. Regular team meetings and an annual evaluation and review of programmes are held. There is a systematic annual cycle of observation of all full-time and most part-time trainers. The observations are carried out by line managers, who give confidential feedback. An action plan is drawn up to address any issues and appropriate staff development is available if required. The process is evaluated annually and reviewed by the governors' standards and quality committee. Identified issues are addressed by the college's quality assurance committee.

67. Self-assessment is well established and conducted rigorously on an annual basis. The initial draft of the report was prepared by Zenith Partnership's staff, and then passed to occupational teams in the college for modification. Feedback from trainees and employers was incorporated but external subcontractors were not involved. The CCTE was consulted at the final stage. Action plans were drawn up to rectify weaknesses and this has resulted in continuous improvement. Examples include the earlier integration of key skills within NVQ programmes, the provision of employers' briefing notes in all areas, action to address low retention rates, the introduction of work-based assessments to accounting, engineering and equine studies programmes, and the appointment of additional assessors in construction. The self-assessment report was accurate and self-critical, although some of the judgements for generic areas were considered more appropriate to other sections.

68. Zenith Partnership generates accurate data on recruitment, retention, ethnicity and gender. Targets are reviewed at the monthly team meetings so that action can be taken quickly to address any issues. Information on attendance at off-the-job training is produced by the college's registration system. Letters are generated to send to parents and employers to notify them of trainees' absence. This close monitoring helps improve the retention rate. Zenith Partnership uses bench marking against other colleges to measure its performance. This information is used as a basis for sharing successful practice and identifying underperforming areas. Retention and achievement rates are improving in most occupational areas.

69. Zenith regularly surveys employers and trainees' views on the quality of training programmes. Postal questionnaires, focus groups, telephone surveys and on-the-spot completion of questionnaires after events such as induction are used. A recent postal survey achieved a 48 per cent response from employers. Responses identified the need for more information on the training process and more contact between employers and Zenith Partnership's staff. Action has resulted in employers being invited to an induction briefing with the trainee, the workplace supervisor and the training co-ordinator. If the employer is unable to attend, the

training co-ordinator visits the employer to explain the training process and identify how the on- and off-the-job training can be linked. All employers are now provided with an information pack which includes a scheme of work for off-the-job training, the NVQ standards, copies of Zenith Partnership's policies on equal opportunities and health and safety, and the college's charter and students' handbook. The complaints procedure is good and the response to complaints is quick.

70. There is no systematic monitoring of external subcontractors to ensure that their arrangements for quality assurance meet the standards set by Zenith Partnership. For example, hairdressing trainees, equally divided between the college and an external subcontractor, experience different standards of training and assessment. Zenith has no system for assuring that internal verification by external subcontractors meets the college's rigorous standards. For example, one subcontractor does not observe assessors, and two subcontractors have not provided Zenith Partnership with copies of external verifiers' reports. There are inconsistencies between different subcontracting agreements on responsibilities for equal opportunities, health and safety and key skills. New vetting and monitoring procedures for subcontractors have recently been established.