



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2000

REINSPECTION FEBRUARY/MARCH 2001

# Bedford College Training Agency

## SUMMARY

At the time of the first inspection, Bedford College Training Agency's training in engineering, retailing and customer service, and health, care and public services was less than satisfactory. Training in these areas is now satisfactory. In engineering, work-based assessment occurs frequently but there are weak links between on- and off-the-job training. Although trainees and employers now have a good understanding of the apprenticeship frameworks in retailing and customer service, achievement rates are low. In health, care and public services, training is well planned but trainees make slow progress towards their qualification. The agency provides satisfactory training in construction, business administration and hair and beauty. All occupational areas are well resourced. Practices to support equal opportunities are adequate in the college but do not extend to the workplace. Pastoral care of trainees is good. Additional support for trainees is not well planned and target-setting at progress reviews is ineffective. Changes to the management of the training have led to improvements. The agency has introduced rigorous agreements with the college's programme areas covering training and assessment. Arrangements for quality assurance are now satisfactory.

**As a result of the reinspection of Bedford College Training Agency, the original published report text for engineering, retailing and customer service, health, care and public services, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction, and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	4
Hair & beauty	3
Health, care & public services	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Engineering	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Health, care & public services	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3



### **KEY STRENGTHS**

- ◆ good off-the-job training in most occupational areas
- ◆ well-resourced training facilities in the college
- ◆ good trainees' portfolios in construction and hair and beauty
- ◆ good work environments in engineering, and in retailing and customer service
- ◆ high level of personal support for trainees
- ◆ clearly specified harassment and grievance procedures
- ◆ very effective deployment of staff

### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ slow progress by trainees towards achievement of qualifications
- ◆ lack of equal opportunities policies and procedures for work-based training
- ◆ little planning and recording of additional support for trainees
- ◆ ineffective target-setting at progress reviews
- ◆ lack of co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate management-information system
- ◆ underdeveloped system to quality assure work-based learning

## INTRODUCTION

1. Bedford College Training Agency (BCTA) is the training arm of the general further education college in Bedford. The college's main campus is on a site in the town centre. BCTA provides training on a day-release basis at the town centre site in mechanical engineering, business administration, hair and beauty, childcare and care for the elderly. Training in construction and motor vehicle engineering takes place at premises three miles away in Kempston. Training in retailing and customer service is completely work based. At the first inspection, horticulture and hospitality were not inspected because there were only several trainees in total in these areas. The college has offered government-funded training since 1992. At the time of the first inspection, there were 200 trainees, of whom 61 were modern apprentices, 111 were national trainees and 28 were on other work-based learning programmes for young people. At the time of the reinspection, there were 174 young people in training across all the occupational areas. Of these, 126 were foundation modern apprentices, 43 were advanced modern apprentices and five were on other work-based training. BCTA is the responsibility of the college's director of academic programmes. The training is managed at a strategic level by a programme manager and on a day-to-day basis by BCTA's training manager, with the help of an administrator. At the first inspection, two full-time and two part-time training officers supported trainees on work-based learning programmes. There were two vacancies for training officers, in retailing and customer service and motor vehicle engineering respectively. At the time of the reinspection, there were seven occupationally competent training officers. All of BCTA's current work is funded by Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). The college has several sources of income. Seventy-eight per cent comes from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), and the remaining 22 per cent from tuition fees, higher-education grants, European funds and the contract with the CCTE.

2. The Bedford and Luton areas have many small employers, 62 per cent of which have fewer than five employees. At the time of the first inspection, the unemployment rate in the Bedfordshire area was low, at 2.6 per cent, in comparison with the national average of 4.1 per cent. At the time of the reinspection, the unemployment rate was still low, at 2.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.3 per cent. People from minority ethnic groups make up 10 per cent of the population in Bedford and Luton. Occupational sectors which are in decline include agriculture, manufacturing and construction. Sectors in which opportunities for employment are increasing include distribution, hotels, catering and business services. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Bedford was 47.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, this proportion had declined slightly, to 46 per cent, in comparison with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

Number of trainees in each programme area subject to reinspection

Programme area	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	Total
Mechanical engineering	1	5		6
Motor-vehicle engineering	4	6		10
Retailing and customer service		3	2	5
Early years care and education	3	21		24
Care of elderly people	1	3		4
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>49</b>

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The self-assessment report for the first inspection was published after extensive consultation with staff at the college and the agency. Data were collected and analysed by a self-assessment working group, which also had responsibility for the self-assessment report which was produced for the FEFC. The group included the principal and the manager responsible for quality assurance. Employers and trainees were not consulted during the process. An action plan, developed after the first inspection, was used to consolidate the strengths and address the weaknesses identified by self-assessment and inspection. A second self-assessment report was produced in November 2000, in preparation for reinspection. Staff at the college and the agency were involved in evaluating how the weaknesses identified at the first inspection had been addressed. Feedback from trainees and employers was gathered and a detailed analysis of these data was made. The second self-assessment report outlined the remedial action which had been taken and was cross-referenced to the action plan.

4. The first inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors, who spent a total of 32 days at BCTA in January 2000. The team worked jointly with a team of the FEFC's inspectors, sharing information and findings. The occupational areas inspected jointly were business administration, engineering, and health, care and public services, as well as the generic aspects of the training. Inspectors met 65 trainees and 37 workplace supervisors. Eighteen employers were visited. Inspectors interviewed 39 of BCTA's staff, including senior managers, middle managers and staff in the curriculum areas. Both teams examined a comprehensive selection of the college's documents.

5. Reinspection was carried out by a team of five inspectors, who spent a total of 18 days at BCTA during February and March 2001. They interviewed 38 trainees and undertook 37 interviews with staff at BCTA and the college. They visited 16 employers and conducted 14 interviews. They examined 10 portfolios, records of assessment, trainees' files and a wide selection of the college and agency's documents relating to management of training and quality assurance.

Grades awarded to learning sessions during the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2				2
Engineering		2				2
Business administration		2	2			4
Hair & beauty		2	1			3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		3				3
Retailing & customer service				1		1
Health, care & public services		1	3			4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 3

6. There are 62 trainees on construction programmes with BCTA. Sixteen are modern apprentices, 28 are national trainees and 18 are on other training programmes for young people. The occupational areas are electrical installation with 38 trainees, 10 trainees in plumbing, 12 in carpentry and joinery and two in brickwork. Off-the-job training takes place at two sites. The main college campus in Bedford has workshops for electrical installation, brickwork, carpentry and joinery. Training in plumbing is held at a second site. Trainees in all occupational areas other than electrical installation attend college for a block of one or two weeks at a time. Trainees in electrical installation attend college one day each week. Assessment takes place at the college. A recently appointed occupationally competent member of staff visits trainees on site. Employers are mainly sole traders or companies employing fewer than five people. Most of these companies' work is in domestic renovation and small commercial projects. A small number of electrical installation firms undertake national contracts. Trainees contact the provider either by referral from their employer or through the careers service. Several trainees started with the college on full-time courses and transferred to work-based training after securing employment.

7. Achievement data shows that, of the 29 trainees who have left their programmes within the last three years, six have transferred from youth training or national traineeships to modern apprenticeships and 10 have achieved their target qualification. The remainder have not completed their training plans.

8. The self-assessment report cited many strengths that were considered no more than normal practice, although many of the weaknesses were agreed on by inspectors. An action plan to address weaknesses has been produced and progress is being made towards its implementation. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by the inspection team is the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good standard of off-the-job training
- ◆ good-quality trainees' portfolios
- ◆ good use of evidence from the workplace
- ◆ extensive range of on-the-job training opportunities

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no assessment in the workplace
- ◆ poor knowledge of NVQs by employers
- ◆ some poor planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ slow progress towards achievements in some areas

9. Training at both sites is effectively planned and is good. Practical sessions in all craft areas include trainees from different levels and at different stages of the programme. These sessions are well managed. The progress of each individual is monitored closely. Trainees are aware of the learning they have achieved and the content of forthcoming sessions. Work packages explain the theory so that trainees are able to access training throughout the year. Workshop activities are carried out in a realistic working environment and all participants work to high occupational standards. Trainees value the training from college lecturers. They are occupationally well qualified and have a wide range of current industrial experience.

10. Trainees' portfolios are well organised and contain evidence from a wide range of sources. Most trainees record details or take photographs of the tasks they undertake in the workplace. These are used to illustrate the portfolios and indicate the sources of evidence to assessors. Evidence is cross-referenced to the standards and shows clear links between the theory and practical work undertaken at the college. The department has recently purchased a digital camera for use by the training officer. This enables further records of activities to be made when trainees are visited in the workplace.

11. Trainees benefit from a wide range of opportunities with their employers. Supervisors and tradespeople are conscious of the need to provide a variety of tasks for trainees. They arrange for trainees to work on a range of projects involving different crafts and with a variety of supervisors.

12. There is no direct observation by assessors of trainees' performance in the workplace. Trainees undertake many tasks in the workplace that relate directly to the occupational standards, yet the opportunity to assess them is missed. Trainees have to repeat the work at college for the purpose of simulated assessment.

13. Employers have a poor knowledge of the NVQ standards. They are committed to the development of their trainees but most lack knowledge of the occupational standards. They miss the opportunity to arrange activities at work that relate to the

qualification. This prevents a sound link between on- and off-the-job training. Employers are willing to arrange activities to complement work undertaken at college. A college committee meets three times a year to discuss industry developments. No employer has heard of this committee or is aware of its activities.

14. Recently a member of staff who is not occupationally competent has undertaken visits to the workplaces of trainees. These visits have been effective only in monitoring pastoral issues. They have not allowed the provider to discuss training with trainees and employers. The new training officer has a backlog of administrative duties to attend to and has not yet started to plan the assessment of trainees in the workplace.

15. Progress towards achievement has been slow in some areas. Key skills have been neglected in some occupational trades. This is particularly the case where trainees are nearing the projected completion date of the modern apprenticeship qualifications. Progress towards the NVQs has also been slow. The construction programme area has only awarded 10 NVQ certificates for work-based training in the previous three years. The individual needs of trainees and tracking of their progress is not recorded on the training plans. Information on progression is not always passed between the teaching staff and BCTA.

### **Engineering**

### **Grade 3**

16. BCTA has 16 trainees on engineering programmes. Ten are working towards motor vehicle qualifications. Of these, four are advanced modern apprentices and six are foundation modern apprentices. Eight motor vehicle trainees are working towards qualifications in light vehicle repair, one in vehicle body repair and one in automotive electrics. Of the six mechanical engineering trainees, one is an advanced modern apprentice and five are foundation modern apprentices. All trainees on engineering programmes are employed. Most of the motor vehicle employers are small service and repair garages or franchise dealerships. In mechanical engineering, work placements are with medium-sized companies which are undertaking a variety of engineering disciplines, and which range from organisations manufacturing and installing conveyor systems, to those involved in the fabrication of specialist hoses to be used in the oil and gas industry. A member of staff from BCTA visits trainees in the workplace to conduct progress reviews and to monitor their welfare. Assessors also visit trainees in the workplace. All off-the-job training is done on a day-release basis. Mechanical engineering trainees attend the college's main site in Bedford. Motor vehicle trainees attend a purpose-built facility in nearby Kempston. The retention and achievement rates for the past three years show that, of 41 trainees starting on engineering programmes, one has achieved an NVQ at level 1 and eight have achieved NVQs at level 2. In addition, three trainees achieved their advanced or foundation modern apprenticeship framework. Fifteen trainees left early with no qualification.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*Trainees in motor vehicle engineering attend college one day each week. Starting times are staggered so that each trainee benefits from half an hour of individual training. This time is used to consolidate the previous week's work and to plan the day's activity. This is an efficient use of time, which encourages trainees to take more responsibility for their own learning. The training at college is individualised to meet the trainees' needs, with some attending for a full day and some for half a day. Employers appreciate this initiative, which has helped to achieve the increase in work-based assessment.*

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no observed assessment of work-based practices
- ◆ little understanding of training frameworks by trainees and employers
- ◆ lack of employers' involvement in the planning of training
- ◆ slow progress in some qualifications
- ◆ poor reflection of framework requirements within individual training plans

17. Since the first inspection, BCTA has employed a part-time assessor for motor vehicle engineering. A member of the college's training staff assesses mechanical engineering trainees in the workplace. The assessor for motor vehicle engineering visits employers several times and carries out frequent observation of trainees' performance. The assessor for mechanical engineering visits trainees at NVQ levels 2 and 3 in the workplace and assesses them by observation. Visits by assessors have led to an improved understanding of NVQ frameworks by employers. Trainees demonstrate a greater understanding of their qualification aims. Details of training frameworks in trainees' files are now accurate. The achievement of milestones, such as an NVQ at level 2 is recorded. Trainees' previous achievement of key skills on other programmes is also included in the training plans. Trainees still make slow progress towards some NVQs, especially at level 3. The self-assessment report for the reinspection identified most of the weaknesses found by inspectors, although some of the weaknesses from the previous report have yet to be fully addressed. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the organisation in its self-assessment report.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ good standard of off-the-job training
- ◆ supportive employers
- ◆ well-resourced training programme

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ slow progress by some trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills assessment
- ◆ lack of co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training

18. Off-the-job training for engineering trainees is well managed. Classes in motor vehicle engineering contain trainees at different levels and on a variety of programmes. To accommodate this diversity, the teaching is flexible and the lesson contents individualised. The Kempston site has an industrious atmosphere, with adults and young people in training working alongside each other. All are engaged in set tasks, with the training staff making frequent checks on their progress and encouraging trainees with positive feedback. Some trainees undertake tests on a computer, while others research topics for practical work which is to be

undertaken later. All trainees are kept informed about their progress and the relevance of the tasks they are undertaking. Training for mechanical engineering trainees is also of a high standard. Many who have not done well in their previous education make good progress on the foundation modern apprenticeship, recognising the support they receive and the methods of training as key to their progress.

19. Employers for trainees in the school of engineering are good. Trainees benefit from a variety of tasks at work and many former trainees have progressed to supervisory positions. Good progress has been made in selecting employers in the past year. Unsuitable employers no longer take trainees. The initial monitoring of prospective new employers includes comparing their day-to-day work with the requirements of the NVQ.

20. Resources for off-the-job learning are good. Both motor vehicle and mechanical engineering trainees benefit from modern commercial equipment. The motor vehicle section has paint-mixing and spraying facilities, and engine diagnostic equipment. Opportunities are available to train in auto electrics, vehicle body repair, light vehicle mechanics and motor cycle repair. Trainees are encouraged to gather additional units from other motor vehicle qualifications to suit their future employment ambitions. Trainees benefit from visits to the workplace by qualified assessors. The motor vehicle section uses a part-time assessor, employed by BCTA, to observe trainees' performance at work, and mechanical engineering trainees are visited by a member of the college's training staff. This commitment to work-based assessment has benefited trainees by making best use of opportunities in the workplace and has allowed the time at college to be focused on training in theory.

21. There has been some slow progress towards the NVQ at level 3 for engineering trainees. The day-release element of the training has concentrated on the academic requirements of the scheme, and much of the trainees' free time at work has been spent working on assignments for college. Targets for achievement of the level 3 NVQs have not been systematically set through the progress-review process. Some trainees who are nearing their target date for completing the apprenticeship framework have yet to compile significant evidence for the NVQ.

22. Key skills are assessed using projects which have been devised by key skills staff and occupational specialists. The projects are usually occupationally focused. Despite the frequent visits of assessors to the workplace, little or no evidence is used from on-the-job activities. For example, trainees carry out communication activities at work, such as negotiating with customers. Many also use a computer at work. Despite these activities, key skills competencies are assessed using simulation at college.

23. Planning of training in the workplace is not systematic. The employers have many opportunities for trainees to gain experience in most aspects of engineering, but the rotation of trainees' duties at work is not planned with their activities at college in mind. The recent visits to the workplace by assessors have helped to

identify the competencies which trainees should be developing at work, and employers are now better informed about the requirements of the qualification. Progress reviews are still carried out by a member of staff who is not occupationally competent, either in mechanical or motor vehicle engineering. While communication between BCTA's staff and the college has improved, this has not yet resulted in firm links being established between on- and off-the-job training.

### **Business administration**

### **Grade 3**

24. BCTA offers training in the three occupational areas of accountancy, business administration and information technology. There are 26 trainees in total, 19 modern apprentices and seven national trainees. There are 16 trainees in business administration, six in accountancy and four in information technology. All trainees are employed and work in a wide range of placements, many of which are in the college. The trainees attend off-the-job training on a day-release basis, joining normal college classes with other part-time students. The training officer, who does not hold occupational qualifications across the full range of programmes, reviews the trainees in the workplace every three months. There is a 75 per cent retention rate. The self-assessment report identified the majority of the strengths and weaknesses agreed by inspectors. The inspection team gave the same grade as that proposed in BCTA's self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good learning and support materials
- ◆ effective action planning
- ◆ strong awareness by trainees of NVQ and key skill requirements
- ◆ well-resourced information technology facilities

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment
- ◆ inappropriate work placements for some trainees
- ◆ lack of employers' understanding of programmes
- ◆ apprenticeship frameworks not always followed

25. The tutors in each occupational area design their own learning and support materials. Each course has a tutor-designed handbook tailored to the individual course needs. They are highly detailed with course timetables, requirements and key personnel details, with both the staff and trainees' roles and responsibilities outlined. The tutors have designed handouts and workbooks for different areas of learning. They are written in plain English, avoiding technical language and are easy to understand. They include guides to various computer software packages that the trainees use throughout their training programmes. In addition handouts explain the technical aspects of accountancy and are broken down into simple

steps. All of the materials are easy to use and provide up-to-date information that reflects current industrial practices. They illustrate the commitment of the well-qualified staff.

26. There is an effective and frequent action planning process for each trainee during the off-the-job training. This occurs during individual tutorial sessions or during workshops when the trainees have an individual meeting with their assessor. They are encouraged to bring in evidence from work to be assessed during these meetings. The action planning is based on the evidence requirements of the units that the trainees are currently working on. After a discussion based around the NVQ requirements and the workplace activity the action plan is negotiated and agreed, with time-scales set for completion. Both the trainee and the assessor sign and date the plan and agree any extra learning that may be necessary to ensure achievement. At the next meeting the plan is reviewed. Any outstanding issues are carried forward after discussion to resolve any difficulties. This process maintains trainees' progress and helps them to achieve the qualifications within the agreed time scales. The progress of each individual is tracked and monitored by the course tutor.

27. All of the trainees have a good awareness of the NVQs they are following. They understand the terminology of the performance criteria and the evidence requirements of the units. They understand the use of portfolios and how to present evidence. They have a sound knowledge of the key skills but they are confused about the evidence requirements of the key skills. The evidence is not integrated with the NVQ.

28. The information technology workshop has just been re-equipped. The workshop has 60 powerful computers. There are always computers available for trainees to use. The computers have a wide range of up-to-date industry-standard software. Trainees learn on software packages they use in the workplace, and can transfer the knowledge they gain in the college.

29. Opportunities for assessment are often missed, which hinders the progress of some trainees. Trainees' prior ability in key skills is not always accredited. There are instances of the work-based supervisor holding, or working towards, an assessor qualification, and yet the supervisor does not assess in the workplace, or even provide witness testimonials. The training officer who reviews trainees' progress in the workplace does not carry out workplace observations of competence. BCTA has changed its approach and a peripatetic assessor for administration training has now been employed. This assessor does not assess the information technology NVQs and the accounting qualifications.

30. Some trainees are placed in inappropriate work placements for the NVQ that they are undertaking. There are examples of trainees who are working towards administration level 3, but are not carrying out level 3 administration tasks. They have no opportunity to complete certain units of the NVQ in the work environment. For instance, they cannot supervise staff or help to develop other people, both of which are mandatory elements of a level 3 NVQ. A trainee is

undertaking an information technology NVQ when the job role is focused on customer service. The trainee cannot collect the required evidence, which slows their progress towards the qualifications. There is little initial assessment of occupational skills and no matching of job roles to the NVQ requirements.

31. There is a lack of employers' awareness and understanding of the programmes, frameworks, NVQs and key skills across all the occupational areas. The employers have not seen the units of competence or the course timetable and are unaware of what their trainee is learning. The employers are not involved in this part of the training. They do not always give the most effective support or work opportunities to enhance the learning programme. The employers are committed to training and are supportive to the trainees and would like to be included more in the learning process.

32. BCTA does not have a copy of the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship frameworks for all the occupational areas. Information technology trainees have followed the wrong level of NVQs at the start of their programme. Seventy-five per cent of the information technology modern apprentices have not started on the mandatory level 2 NVQ.

### **Retailing & customer service**

### **Grade 3**

33. BCTA has five trainees who are working towards NVQs in this occupational area. Three trainees are working towards foundation modern apprenticeships in customer service. Two trainees are on other work-based learning programmes for young people, working towards NVQs at level 2 in customer service and warehousing respectively. All trainees are in full-time employment, with a range of small and medium-size enterprises throughout the local area. Occupational training is given on the job. Key skills training is provided by the college. A training officer is employed by BCTA with specific responsibility for this occupational area. The training officer undertakes assessment and carries out all reviews of trainees' progress. All assessment is carried out in the workplace. The training officer is occupationally competent to assess trainees in customer service. BCTA subcontracts with another training organisation to assess and internally verify the one trainee working towards the warehousing NVQ at level 2. The number of trainees in this occupational area has declined over the past three years. BCTA no longer promotes training in retailing and warehousing. Of the 14 trainees who have started training since 1998-99, six have left their learning programme early. The overall rate of retention is 58 per cent.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ weak assessment practices
- ◆ lack of trainees' understanding about their programme
- ◆ slow progress in trainees' achievements
- ◆ trainees unaware of support services

34. An action plan was produced to address the weaknesses identified by the first inspection. Subsequent actions have led to improvements in all areas. Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the agency's self-assessment report that trainees are well motivated as a result of having a better understanding of their learning programme. Inspectors considered the two other strengths, relating to individual planning and the setting of target dates, to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the one identified weakness, of missed opportunities for assessment. Inspectors found additional strengths and an additional weakness and awarded the same grade as that given by BCTA in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ supportive employers
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of programme requirements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment of key skills
- ◆ low achievement rates

35. There are good working relationships among the newly appointed training officer, employers and trainees. Employers and trainees are enthusiastic about the learning programme. New employers now go through a detailed vetting, to ensure that their work placement will enable the trainee to collect sufficient evidence for the NVQs. The vetting also ensures that employers are willing to commit themselves to meeting the programme's requirements. Employers make a wide range of additional training available to trainees. Three trainees from two different work placements have achieved certificates in fork-truck driving. Trainees undertaking customer service NVQs have attended employers' staff-development workshops on how to handle aggressive customers. Trainees are using evidence gained from this activity towards the requirements of the customer service NVQs. Trainees have also attended first aid training and specific product training. One trainee has attended a conference on how to meet the needs of customers who are dyslexic. Trainees have also undertaken health and safety training sessions, which were organised in the workplace. As a result of the training, trainees are able to demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety.

36. All trainees are in appropriate job roles which enable them to generate sufficient evidence for their NVQs. At the time of the reinspection, two trainees had recently been promoted to trainee management roles. This will enable them to progress to advanced modern apprenticeship programmes. Employers are involved in trainees' progress reviews and assessments and are given copies of all completed documents. All employers are issued with copies of the NVQ standards, and the training officer spends time with each employer explaining how the

trainees' job role will generate evidence for the NVQ. Employers are committed to releasing trainees to attend college for key skills workshops and portfolio-building sessions.

37. Information is now made available to trainees which outlines the programme's requirements. Trainees are visited frequently in the workplace. In addition to progress-review visits, trainees receive monthly assessment visits. The first inspection identified weaknesses in the planning of assessments for this occupational area. BCTA has introduced new procedures which have led to improvements in the assessment process. Planning of assessments now involves the employer as well as the trainee. The planning of assessments leads to short-term targets for the next assessment visit. Assessment documents have improved. There is an effective system for monitoring trainees' progress against all components of their frameworks. Trainees have a better understanding of what they have to do, and by when. They are fully aware of the key skills requirements and attend regular key skills workshops which are held in college.

38. Although assessment visits are now more frequent, there are missed opportunities for assessing key skills in the workplace. Trainees are producing evidence for NVQs which should also be assessed for the accreditation of key skills. The training officer has been allocated a mentor while working towards the required qualification in assessing key skills. This mentor is a qualified assessor and internal verifier. Regular feedback is given to the training officer on assessment decisions. Assessment decisions are not being countersigned by the qualified assessor.

39. At the time of the first inspection, no trainee had achieved an apprenticeship. Between April 1997 and March 1999, a total of 27 trainees left the training programme, of whom 15 obtained their NVQ. Since 1999, of the nine trainees who have left, three have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plan. Although achievement rates are low, trainees are now making good progress towards achieving their NVQ, the additional units and key skills. The training officer is managing this process effectively.

### **Hair & beauty**

### **Grade 3**

40. BCTA currently has 32 trainees on programme. Twenty-seven are national trainees, three are modern apprentices and two trainees are working towards NVQ level 2 on other training programmes. Most trainees work in owner-operated salons in and around Bedford town centre. A small number are based in salons in neighbouring towns in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Currently there are 30 salons in which trainees are employed. Young people in training attend off-the-job training for one day each week and spend the rest of their time learning at work. Trainees are split into two groups and attend college on different days to undertake practical training supported by theory sessions. There is a specialist salon in the college. Trainees also receive practical training in the work place. Of the seven leavers in 1997-98, two youth trainees achieved NVQ level 2.

In 1998-99 of the 10 trainees who left the programme, eight achieved level 2. There have been no achievements on the national traineeship programme as it only started in the previous year. Only two trainees have achieved NVQ level 3 during the previous three years.

41. Many of the strengths in the self-assessment report were considered normal practice by the inspection team. Inspectors agreed with a few of the strengths and most of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*A trainee from BCTA was entered in the 1999 UK Hairdressing Student of the Year Awards, organised by the Hairdressing Council. The excellent portfolio she produced gained her entry to the last eight finalists in the competition. She produced a hairstyle in front of the judges and a large audience. The support and guidance from the tutors at BCTA and her employer together with the skills she had acquired while studying for a level 3 NVQ in hairdressing enabled her to be named "Student of the Year".*

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ well-resourced off-the-job training facilities
- ◆ highly qualified and committed staff
- ◆ good-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ high standard of evidence portfolios

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ slow progress by trainees
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities in the workplace

42. The off-job-training in the college takes place in a modern, fully equipped commercially run salon. Trainees have access to all the necessary equipment. The range of tools, equipment and products available in the salon are of a high quality. The salon attracts clients from the public and the college. The range of clientele enables trainees to be trained and assessed in all aspects of hairdressing skills required for the NVQ.

43. Experienced and well-qualified staff carry out off-the-job training, assessment and verification. They all hold assessor awards and teaching qualifications and have recent industry experience. The tutor ratio is between eight and 10 trainees for each tutor. Individual support is given where the need is identified. Training is well planned. It is varied and interesting. Trainees participate in discussions. Trainees understand the requirements of NVQs. They are familiar with the routines of practical assessment and assembling a portfolio of evidence. They are keen to learn. They also have presentations by the major manufacturing companies, which enhance their knowledge of commercial products. External tutors are used to deliver specialist training, for example in health and safety. Where trainees have requested additional skills training, this has been arranged. A certificate in ear piercing is offered as an additional qualification. Portfolios are of a good quality. Assignments are well presented with imaginative use of text and images. Trainees are encouraged to enter competitions, both in the college and nationally.

44. Retention rates are poor. In 1996-97, 15 trainees were recruited, of whom two were modern apprentices. Both left early without achieving the full apprenticeship. In total 60 per cent left early. In 1997-98, 18 national trainees and two modern apprentices started. Fifty per cent left early without achieving their training plan. Trainees' progress is slow with missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace. There is a lack of liaison between the training officer and the work-based supervisors about training and assessment. Most assessment takes place in the college salon rather than at work. Employers would like to be more involved and say they would plan salon training to support the college sessions. There are qualified assessors in the workplace but they are not fully utilised. The training officer visits work placements on a regular basis and has started to put procedures in place for on-the-job training and assessment. The impact of these on trainees' progress is too early to judge.

45. Neither employers nor trainees understand the importance of key skills in achieving the frameworks. Trainees say key skills training is not related to the NVQ. Attendance at the training sessions is poor. Communication between the college's key skills unit and the hairdressing programme area is poor. The hairdressing tutors have identified this as a weakness.

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

### **Grade 3**

46. BCTA provides NVQ programmes at levels 2 and 3 in care of the elderly, and early years care and education. There are three foundation modern apprentices and one advanced modern apprentice in care of the elderly. There are 24 childcare trainees, of whom 21 are foundation modern apprentices and three are advanced modern apprentices. Trainees attend college once a week for off-the-job training and portfolio development. Trainees are employed in a range of private residential and care homes and day nurseries. BCTA's assessors assess the candidates in the workplace. Work-based assessors are used in care of the elderly, but not in childcare.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ training not effectively planned
- ◆ poor trainees' achievement rates
- ◆ a lack of rigour in targets for progression
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities

47. BCTA has addressed the weaknesses identified at the first inspection. A training officer has been appointed to co-ordinate the elderly people's care and childcare programmes. The training officer is responsible for carrying out progress reviews, supporting trainees and assessing childcare trainees at NVQ level 2. The programme team has been strengthened by the recruitment of co-ordinators for both the childcare and the elderly people's care programmes. They have responsibility for internal verification, strategy and the monitoring of trainees'

progress. In addition, a part-time assessor for childcare has been appointed and there are plans to recruit one more assessor in the coming weeks. There are good communications between the training officer and the programme team, who work well together to plan and provide the training. Trainees have recognised the improvements made to the training programme since September. They receive more support and are making better progress.

*STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective teamwork
- ◆ effective influence of trainees on pace of training

*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ weak recording of planning of assessments
- ◆ slow progress towards achievement of NVQs

48. The training officer and the programme staff work effectively together to plan and provide the training programmes. There is a good understanding of work-based training and the need to give trainees and employers control of their learning. Trainers teach the sessions in theory, and support the trainees in developing their portfolios of evidence during weekly college sessions. The training officer works with the trainees and employers in the workplace to ensure that the training programme links effectively with work-based activities. This gives the trainees some influence over the pace of their learning programme. They are able to progress at a speed which suits their personal needs and those of their employer. The training officer ensures that trainees are able to gather the necessary evidence to complete their portfolio. The training officer carries out assessments, based on observation and questioning during progress-review visits.

49. There are good working relationships among the training staff, who communicate daily to support the trainees and the training programmes. They meet on a monthly basis to discuss the trainees' progress and issues relating to the programme, and plan the training. In addition, there are monthly meetings of assessors in which they are brought up to date on issues and explore scenarios to develop their assessment practices and skills. Employers fully support trainees in the workplace. They are keen to ensure that the skills their staff acquire are recognised by a formal qualification. They provide witness testimony and help them to gain the knowledge and skills needed to complete their NVQ. In the care homes, work-based assessors carry out the trainees' assessments.

50. Employers and trainees have a good awareness of equal opportunities. When trainees have experienced problems in the workplace, they have been effectively supported by the training agency to take appropriate action to rectify the situation.

51. Key skills are introduced at the beginning of the programme. Trainees complete all key skills at level 2 while working towards their foundation modern apprenticeship. This ensures that key skills have been gained at the appropriate

level for the advanced modern apprenticeship. This encourages trainees to progress. Information technology and application of number are taught at the college and are not yet fully integrated into the NVQs. Evidence for the other key skills is generated through the assessment of the trainees' NVQ work.

52. Either a work-based assessor or an assessor from BCTA carries out assessment in the workplace. They visit trainees to complete assessments at planned intervals. While there, assessors take the opportunity to carry out assessments through observation and to gather evidence from any unplanned activity or incidents which arise. Assessment activities are planned by the trainees and the assessors. Trainees are aware of what is expected of them and the evidence they need to collect. The planning of assessments is not fully recorded in the trainees' portfolios.

53. The training officer carries out progress reviews in the workplace. Trainees' progress is reviewed and recorded but clear targets for progression are not set. This slows the trainees' progress. Employers are not engaged in this discussion. When the progress review is completed, the training officer asks employers if they wish to raise any issues concerning the training programme and gives them the progress-review form to read and sign. Copies of the form are left with the employers and with the trainees, and a further copy is put on the trainees' file.

54. Trainees are making slow progress towards achieving their qualification. In 1998-99, one national trainee in care of elderly people started training and is still on the programme. In the same year, 85 per cent of trainees in care for the elderly achieved an NVQ. In 1999-2000, two national trainees started training and both left the programme early. Only one modern apprentice has completed the course in care of the elderly. In 2000-01, five trainees started a foundation modern apprenticeship. Two left early and three are still on programme. In childcare training, one national trainee started in 1998-99, and is still on programme. In 1999-2000, of the 12 trainees who started national traineeships, four left early, two have achieved an NVQ at level 2, and six are still on programme. In 2000-01, five trainees started a foundation modern apprenticeship. Two left early and three are still on the programme. One trainee started an advanced modern apprenticeship and is still on the programme.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 3**

55. BCTA embraces all the college's equal opportunity, grievance, harassment and bullying policies. These policies are included in the trainees' handbook and are also given to all staff. The policies are reviewed and updated. There is an equal opportunities monitoring group that reviews performance against targets and implements equal opportunities policies.

56. Several strengths were found in the self-assessment report which inspectors found to be normal practice. They identified additional weaknesses which were not

identified by BCTA. The inspection grade is lower than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ regular collection and evaluation of data
- ◆ well-documented harassment and grievance procedures
- ◆ good recruitment and selection procedures for staff and trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ policies and procedures not specific to work-based training
- ◆ some poor employer awareness of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ lack of equal opportunities monitoring in the workplace

57. There are clear policies in place for equal opportunities, grievance, harassment, bullying and complaints. The policies are well publicised and are introduced to staff and trainees at induction. Copies are readily available on the college premises. The policies are continually reviewed and targets for performance are set and rigorously monitored. The results are reported to the college executive on a quarterly basis. There has been an increase in the number of male and minority ethnic staff as a result of this activity. In March 1998 3.8 per cent of the staff were from minority ethnic communities. The proportion rose to 5 per cent by October of the same year. Male staff in the college have increased from 33 per cent of the total to 39 per cent over the same period. There has been active promotion of equal opportunities practice in the recruitment and selection of staff. An extensive staff training programme has also been designed to make staff aware of good practice in recruitment and selection. In addition, advertising targeted at minority ethnic groups has been placed in a magazine whose readership is mainly Asian. Marketing information is clearly written and avoids the use of stereotypical images.

58. The college has completed an analysis of staff training needs in equal opportunities and cultural awareness. It has been reported to the college executive and has led to the implementation of an equal opportunities and cultural awareness development plan. The plan includes the installation of information on the college internal computer-based information network, a series of briefings for all governors of the college and briefings on inclusive learning for all teaching staff. There is also a programme of staff training that covers customer awareness, recruitment, inclusive learning and dealing with challenging behaviour.

59. An equal opportunities monitoring group has recently been formed to address issues facing students and trainees. BCTA has a representative on the group. The group has started to collect data on gender, ethnicity and disability. It aims to set targets and monitor achievement. The data is sent to the college executive for analysis and to plan actions. Projects to develop equal opportunities issues are encouraged by the governing body. An example is a teacher-training course in

exercise to music which is specifically targeted at young mothers, older women and people from minority ethnic groups. Twenty-six women have achieved a teacher training qualification.

60. The college equal opportunities policies are not specific to work-based training and assessment. Some work placements have no equal opportunities policy and are not aware that they need one. The contract between BCTA and the employer does not state this is necessary. Some employers have a poor understanding of equal opportunities issues and the training officers do not systematically monitor equal opportunities in the workplace during their review visits. Opportunities are missed for development of employers' awareness of equal opportunities. College data show that 68 trainees consider they are treated fairly in the workplace and nine that they are not.

61. Equal opportunities is covered at trainees' induction and is included in the trainees' handbook. There is no routine reinforcement of equal opportunities when training officers visit the workplace. Some trainees have no recall of equal opportunities issues and cannot remember any specific training or discussion of equal opportunities during their review meetings.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

62. Most trainees are recruited directly from the local careers service. Some trainees are referred directly to the college by their employer. The college's careers advisors also refer trainees. All trainees take an initial test in literacy and numeracy and have an interview. Applicants whose aspirations cannot be met by BCTA are given information on the training offered by other local training organisations and are referred back to the careers service. Trainees receive three separate inductions: to the workplace, to the training programme and to the college and its facilities. Training officers carry out trainees' progress reviews at least every six weeks. They provide pastoral support and monitor trainees' progress towards their qualification. Feedback on assessment is also given to trainees during progress reviews. When appropriate, trainees are referred to external agencies for specialist help.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ training plans not individualised
- ◆ weak initial assessment of trainees
- ◆ insufficient accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ no formal recording of additional support
- ◆ ineffective progress reviews

63. Two action plans have been produced since the first inspection to address the weaknesses. Some progress has been made towards meeting the objectives of the training agency's action plans. There are now arrangements for accrediting

trainees' prior learning, particularly with regard to key skills. Although the individual learning plans which are required by the CCTE lack individuality, BCTA is piloting various individual learning plans in an attempt to improve the links between on- and off-the-job training and to specify individuals' training programmes more precisely. The initial assessment process is now satisfactory but the results are not used to shape individual learning plans. The progress-review process has improved, but specific short-term targets are not being set. Additional support is still a weakness. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given by the agency in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good careers advice and guidance
- ◆ systematic monitoring of trainees' progress and attendance
- ◆ high level of personal support for trainees
- ◆ comprehensive induction

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no account of results of initial assessment in individual learning plans
- ◆ little planning and recording of additional support
- ◆ ineffective target-setting at progress reviews

64. BCTA has exceptionally good links with the careers service and the college's career advisors. Both services have a clear understanding of the range of work-based training offered by the agency and encourage young people to consider this route. Helpful arrangements have been introduced with the local careers service, which enable training officers to be available at the careers office one morning each week. The training officer tells prospective trainees about the training and facilities which the agency can offer. If the young person wishes to explore work-based training further, an interview and assessment are arranged at the agency's premises. Training officers work hard to find jobs for those trainees who are not employed. For example, a local university has taken three trainees as employees. An attractive new marketing brochure which is aimed at trainees, parents and other organisations, gives clear and concise information about work-based training and what the agency offers.

65. The agency has introduced three forms of induction. A workplace induction, which is conducted by the training officer during the trainee's first week, involves the workplace manager or supervisor. The CCTE's standard individual learning plan and a new individual learning plan designed by the agency are completed at this stage. Trainees complete an induction sheet a month after completing this induction to confirm their understanding of health and safety in the workplace. At their induction to the workplace, trainees are given a handout which outlines the components of their training programme. All trainees clearly understand the requirements of their programme. Trainees complete a key skills assessment at this

stage. The training manager gives trainees a half-day group induction into the college's services and facilities. Representatives from the local careers service and the college's student services give a short presentation. Of 92 trainees who have started training since August 2000, 67 have attended the college's induction. Trainees are issued with a handbook, which outlines their roles, responsibilities and entitlements. Health, safety and equal opportunities information is contained in the handbook. An equal opportunities summary and a guide to the college's services for students are also issued to the trainees. BCTA has evaluated the college's induction and most trainees are satisfied with it.

66. Training officers use spreadsheets to monitor trainees' progress on an individual basis. These give the training officers and trainees a clear picture of how far the trainees have progressed. Training officers and programme staff rigorously monitor the trainees' attendance at off-the-job training. There are effective procedures for dealing with poor attendance and lateness. The agency's staff and programme staff hold monthly meetings which are minuted. They discuss the trainees' progress and any problems and decide on actions to resolve difficulties.

67. Trainees are given a high level of pastoral support. Training officers and programme staff work closely to ensure that trainees' personal problems and difficulties do not affect their progress. Training officers have a good rapport with trainees, and make sure that trainees can contact them easily. Employers provide appropriate support for trainees when illness or personal difficulties occur.

68. The results of trainees' initial assessments are not taken into account in individual learning plans. Trainees' basic skills and key skills are assessed at interview and during induction. The results of both assessments are discussed with the trainee. Training officers identify, and some keep records of, the additional support trainees need to help them with their basic and key skills. These needs are not recorded in the individual learning plans. In some instances, training officers or programme staff are meeting trainees' additional support needs on a responsive basis, but in general no systematic additional support is provided. Sometimes trainees are found to have additional learning needs once they begin the programme. Support is provided but detailed records of the support are not kept.

69. Trainees' progress reviews are frequent and take place at least every six weeks. When appropriate, they are conducted more often to meet the needs of the trainee. Progress reviews are not used to set demanding targets which could accelerate the trainees' progress. The progress-review process has been under review since the first inspection. The revised paperwork ensures that more aspects of the trainees' programme are discussed. The new progress-review form provides training officers with the opportunity to conduct either a monitoring visit, a progress review or an assessment. This conflation of three activities is not helpful in clarifying targets for the trainee.

## Management of training

## Grade 3

70. BCTA is an integral part of one of the academic programme areas within the college. A board, which includes the college's chief executive and quality assurance manager, manages the agency. There is a director with executive responsibility for the agency and a manager who is responsible for the agency's strategic planning. Both have other senior management responsibilities within the college. There is a training manager, who deals with day-to-day operational issues and who has no other responsibilities outside the agency. Staff within the college's programme areas are responsible for all off-the-job training. Trainees in all the occupational areas attend day-release sessions at the college, where they mainly join groups of other part-time students. Trainees in some occupational areas also receive structured on-the-job learning programmes from their employers. Responsibility for assessment is divided between the college's trainers and the agency's own staff. The agency employs six training officers, who liaise with employers and the college's trainers. Training officers also assess trainees in the workplace. The arrangements for work-based assessment vary depending on the occupational area. The number of staff at the agency has increased over the past year. The number of trainees has steadily increased over the past three years. There has also been a significant increase during the past 12 months in the number of employers who support the work-based learning programme. There are now 128 employers across all the agency's occupational areas. The agency has its own business plan, which supports the strategic objectives of the college as a whole.

At the first inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ ineffective management of work-based assessment
- ◆ lines of communication not clearly defined
- ◆ poor implementation and understanding of key skills
- ◆ ineffective management-information system

71. BCTA has made extensive changes to the staff and management structure of the organisation since the first inspection. This has helped to improve the links between the agency, mainstream college staff and employers. The restructuring and recruitment programme was carefully planned and took many months to achieve. All of the weaknesses identified at the first inspection are now being addressed. Inspectors found that four of the weaknesses are no longer significant, although they have not been fully resolved and the agency continues to work on addressing them. The weakness concerning management information has not been satisfactorily resolved. The agency attempted to meet its requirements by using the college's management-information system. This was not successful and an independent system is now being developed. The agency produced a new self-assessment report in preparation for reinspection. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the agency's self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ very effective deployment of staff
- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ well-structured staff appraisal and development

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inadequate management-information system
- ◆ lack of flexibility in learning and assessment

72. The training agency has made a significant investment in staff resources during the past 12 months. A recruitment programme has led to the appointment of a team of occupationally competent training officers, who are all either qualified or trainee assessors. Training officers are specialists in their field and have a good understanding of the employers and occupational areas. The agency's management team is strong, and reporting procedures are firmly established. The college's chief executive takes a positive role in managing the agency at a strategic level. Roles and responsibilities are clear. Service level agreements have been introduced. An excellent guidance pack is given to all college trainers relating to the work-based trainees. Training officers and college staff have highly productive and co-operative working relationships. There are frequent meetings. Essential information is clearly recorded and distributed to all relevant staff. Trainees report increased satisfaction as a result of the new staff and organisational structures. Management's strategy to improve the structure of the organisation and internal communications has been very effective.

73. All staff are set individual objectives which are linked to the strategic and operational plans. Appraisals review staff members' contribution in working towards these objectives. Appraisal has been welcomed by staff and has helped identify individuals' developmental needs. The staff development offers an extensive range of training. All staff at the agency are actively engaged in personal development. The college's human resources department provides group training seminars when required. All staff have access to recreational courses. This means that, for a small fee, staff can purchase any of the extensive range of courses offered by the college. The training agency has its own budget for staff development. The human resources department monitors and analyses the use and impact of the staff-development programme.

74. The management-information system has recently been improved by the acquisition of new software. The system has not yet been upgraded to allow informative reports to be generated relating to the agency's performance. Data are difficult to access. There has been no systematic analysis of trainees' retention and achievement rates by programme. There are no key performance indicators to help improve performance. Comparisons between occupational areas are not being made. Bench marking of the agency's performance is not carried out. There is a good system for monitoring trainees' progress towards completion of their qualifications and for measuring the agency's performance against its contractual

requirements. The system does not yet allow effective interpretation of data to determine trends in the agency's performance and to set targets for improvement.

75. Training programmes in the college are primarily determined by the college's curriculum. They do not always reflect the nature or demands of the work environment, or trainees' job roles. The trainees' courses lack flexibility. The courses ensure that all the required knowledge and skills are developed during the day-release sessions at college, but these programmes are not effectively co-ordinated with the learning opportunities in the workplace. Employers, who provide on-the-job training, do not co-ordinate the learning with their trainees' college programmes. The college cannot easily change a learning programme to meet the needs of an individual trainee or employer, but there are some examples of this having been achieved in some programme areas. Trainees are mainly assessed in the workplace only to an extent which meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Work-based assessment is not widespread or fully established as the most effective way of judging a trainee's competence. Staff in some programme areas have started to realise the benefits of increased assessment visits, but this is not widespread.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 3

76. All staff are involved in administering the college's quality assurance arrangements. Programme area managers have specific responsibility for promoting continuous improvement of the quality of training. They follow set procedures for evaluating and measuring the success of their programmes and for reporting on their overall performance. A quality assurance manager ensures that procedures are followed. The procedures were last revised and reissued in 1999. The college's quality assurance system does not provide sufficient data about work-based learners. Training agency managers discuss quality assurance issues at monthly meetings. There are several new quality assurance arrangements which have yet to make an impact on the quality of work-based learning.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no quality assurance of on-the-job training
- ◆ no established feedback system for trainees and employers
- ◆ insufficient use of data to set and measure performance
- ◆ poor internal verification in most areas

77. The agency has introduced many changes since the first inspection. There is a range of new initiatives aimed at improving the work-based learning programmes. Most of these are not yet fully established. The college's quality assurance arrangements provide some discrete data relating to work-based trainees. There has been a survey of some trainees and employers, and their views have been analysed. Data are now effectively used to manage contractual requirements and to monitor trainees' progress. A new computerised management-information system

has been installed but is not yet fully established. There is a more rigorous approach to managing internal verification across the college. A single framework has been introduced to which each programme area must adhere. This is audited to ensure compliance. Internal verification has improved but the system is not yet fully supported in all areas, and some poor practice still exists. The agency has made progress in developing the key areas which were identified as needing improvement in the action plan. Targets for improvement have been met, but progress has sometimes been slow. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by BCTA in its self-assessment report.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good arrangements for assuring the quality of off-the-job training
- ◆ effective action-planning
- ◆ self-critical and accurate self-assessment process

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete written quality assurance procedures
- ◆ underdeveloped system to assure quality of work based learning

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*The college has an arrangement with another local college to observe each other's off-the-job learning sessions as part of their respective quality assurance arrangements. This is a highly effective way of bench marking themselves against the practices of a similar organisation. The arrangement has proved valuable in helping the college to identify good practice in teaching*

78. The college has a well-established and effective system to assure the quality of training and learning. Courses are evaluated and reviewed. Teaching practice is observed and graded as a staff-development tool. There are written procedures which set out how learning should be managed. Staff responsibilities are clearly defined. There is a comprehensive complaints procedure which ensures that trainees' concerns are addressed, and which helps highlight areas which need improvement.

79. The training agency has a very detailed action plan which aims to improve many aspects of the learning programme. During the past 12 months, several previously unsatisfactory areas of the agency's work have been improved. Work-based assessment has been introduced and more visits to employers now take place. Resources for the teaching of key skills are effective and staff understand what is required of them. All the college and agency's staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Communication between all the parties involved in training is good. Initial assessment and trainees' progress reviews are satisfactory. Internal verification is generally consistent and has led to good practice being shared in some areas. Early indications point to a marked improvement in trainees' satisfaction with their training and in trainees' retention rates across the occupational areas.

80. Self-assessment is an integral and well-established part of the quality assurance system. The most recent report was concise and relevant. Weaknesses are openly addressed. All staff are involved in the process and have opportunities to review and comment on draft versions of the report. Inspectors found the report

to be accurate. They found only two weaknesses which the agency had not identified. Inspectors agreed with all the new grades given by the agency in its reinspection report.

81. The college has a quality assurance manual which relates to the full-time students. This is out of date and in need of review. It does not fully cover the key stages of the work-based learning programmes. There are presently gaps in the quality assurance process. The training agency's arrangements for quality assurance have been partially integrated with the college's system. There are other quality assurance mechanisms which are specific to the work-based learning. There is an unco-ordinated approach to quality assurance. There is no overall strategy for quality assurance at the agency.

82. The arrangements for quality assurance are focused on off-the-job training. Some new quality assurance arrangements have been introduced which have an impact in the workplace. For example, employers which are considered to be suitable to support the programmes are rigorously selected. Trainees and employers agree at the outset where and when training will take place. This has led to the design of training programmes which begin to address the individual needs of the trainees. Some workplace visits by training officers are observed by the quality assurance manager. However, these new initiatives are not being applied to all the work-based training. Employers and trainees' questionnaires do not fully explore their views about training in the workplace. In general, the quality assurance system relies heavily on feedback from progress reviews as the main source of information and data about on-the-job training. This is not providing managers with sufficient data to evaluate and improve this aspect of the training.