TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION FEBRUARY 2001

Bexley Training Group

SUMMARY

Bexley Training Group offers good youth training programmes in the occupational areas of business administration, retailing, hairdressing, early years care and education, and foundation for work. All training and assessments are well structured and well taught by dedicated staff. Off-the-job training in construction is good but it is restricted by the college's academic year and insufficient assessments are carried out in the workplace. At the time of the first inspection, subcontractors whose assessment practices were less than satisfactory, carried out the off-the-job training and assessment of motor vehicle qualifications. At reinspection, there are good assessments in the workplace with effective monitoring of the subcontractors. The organisation monitors and reviews equal opportunities but does not always promote them effectively. Support for trainees in all aspects of their programmes is outstanding. Trainees are given practical, constructive advice and guidance. Trainees' progress is well managed and additional support is given when required. Staff are well qualified and co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training wherever possible. Quality assurance systems result in improvements, but the quality of some subcontractors' training and assessments is not effectively monitored.

As a result of the reinspection of Bexley Training Group, the original published report text for engineering has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 the subject of reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	2
Hair & beauty	2
Health, care & public services	2
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	1
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Engineering	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- high standards of off-the-job training
- rigorous assessment and review
- good, comprehensive portfolios
- key skills integrated with vocational training in most areas
- additional learning opportunities and qualifications available to trainees

- flexible programmes to meet individual needs
- good monitoring and management of trainees' progress
- quality assurance systems result in continuous improvements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- missed assessment opportunities in the workplace
- not all employers aware of qualification frameworks

INTRODUCTION

1. Bexley Training Group was established in 1983 to provide effective training combined with support and guidance. Bexley Training Group is a company limited by guarantee and is registered as a charity. Over the years, programmes have been developed to respond to the local employment needs and it is able to offer training in all types of vocational area. The organisation recruits young people with a wide range of academic abilities, including those from disadvantaged groups. Most trainees are recruited from the Bexley and Greenwich areas and many were low achievers at school. About 85 per cent of trainees gain work placements in the borough of Bexley, with the remainder working in Greenwich, Dartford and Bromley. Most work placements are with small or medium-sized employers. Off-the-job training is mainly carried out in the group's two modern sites, though training for construction and engineering is subcontracted to local colleges. Training in printing is subcontracted to a local company. The organisation contracts with the local training and enterprise council (TEC), SOLOTEC, to provide work-based training for youths and adults.

2. Bexley Training Group offers various training courses, including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in 12 different occupational areas. At the time of the first inspection, there were 319 trainees, of whom 52 were modern apprentices, 149 were national trainees, 105 were on other work-based training programmes for young people and 13 were adults. There were 55 in construction, 48 in engineering, 90 in business administration, 16 in retailing, 43 in hairdressing, 18 in care and 26 in foundation for work. The three occupational areas of agriculture, leisure and tourism, and media and design were not inspected owing to the low numbers of trainees. At the time of the reinspection, there were 317 trainees, of whom 58 are advanced modern apprentices, 175 are foundation modern apprentices, 53 are on other work-based training programmes for young people and 18 are adults. There are also 12 trainees on the life skills programmes of the *Learning Gateway*. In engineering, the only area reinspected, there were 36 trainees of whom 12 were advanced modern apprentices and 23 were foundation modern apprentices with one trainee on another work-based youth training programme.

3. At the time of the first inspection in Bexley, unemployment was only 2.9 per cent in August 1999 and minority ethnic groups make up only 6.7 per cent of the population. In Greenwich, unemployment was 7.4 per cent and minority ethnic groups constitute 15.2 per cent of the population. At the time of the reinspection, in January 2001 unemployment in Bexley was 3.7 per cent and in Greenwich 7.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent. The percentage of 18 to 24 year olds who were unemployed in January 2001 in Bexley was 21.9 per cent and in Greenwich 23.9 per cent. In 2000, 69 per cent of 16 year olds continued in full-time education and training and in Greenwich it was 65 per cent**.** In 1998, only 5 per cent of year 11 school leavers in Bexley entered training while 73 per cent continued in education. Nationally, 10 per cent of young people enter training and

70 per cent continue in full-time education. Young men are more likely to enter training than are young women. At the time of the first inspection In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Bexley achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C exactly matched the national average of 47.9 per cent**.** In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Bexley achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 49.7 per cent compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. Trainees joining Bexley Training Group in 1999 mainly came from schools where the average percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grade C or above was 26 per cent. In 2001, the average is 33.29 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The staff at Bexley Training Group were all involved in preparing the self-assessment report. Staff meetings were held to discuss *Raising the Standard*. Each occupational area took responsibility for preparing their part of the report. This was the organisation's first self-assessment report. It clearly outlined the programmes offered and gave details on how each programme was taught. The organisation was self-critical and inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified. Bexley Training Group has started to address some of the weaknesses. Inspectors awarded higher grades in the occupational areas of hairdressing and early years care as well as the generic areas of trainee support and management of training. Only engineering was awarded a lower grade, where inspectors identified additional weaknesses. The other occupational and generic areas were awarded the same grades as those given in the self-assessment report. An action plan was produced after inspection to reinforce the strengths and address the weaknesses. A special report indicating the progress made in fulfilling the post-inspection action plan was produced for reinspection. The report was cross-referenced to sources of evidence. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than that identified in the special report.

5. The first inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors, who spent a total of 28 days at Bexley Training Group in November 1999. During the inspection, 107 trainees were interviewed, either at the training centre or in the workplace. Thirty-one employers were visited and 31 workplace supervisors/managers were interviewed. Three subcontractors were visited to review the training resources and observe training. Six staff at the subcontractors were interviewed. Inspectors held meetings with the managers and training staff as well as the local careers officer. In all, 41 interviews were conducted with full-time and part-time members of staff. Inspectors examined a wide variety of documents, including management and quality policies and procedures, TEC contracts, external audit reports, minutes of meetings, staff and trainees' personal files, trainees' portfolios, induction and training materials, and assessment and internal verification documents.

6. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors who spent a total of four days at Bexley Training Group, in February 2001. During the reinspection, 18 trainees were interviewed in the workplace and at the subcontractor. Five members of Bexley Training Group's staff were interviewed. Inspectors visited six work placements and interviewed four employers or workplace supervisors. They visited two subcontractors and observed three sessions of training of which the grades are indicated in the table below. Two assessments in the workplace were observed. Inspectors examined a wide variety of documents including trainees' portfolios, records of assessment, external and internal verification documents and minutes of meetings between the training provider and subcontractors.

Grades awarded to instructional sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		1				1
Engineering				1		1
Business administration		3	1			4
Retailing & customer service		2				2
Hair & beauty		1	3			4
Health, care & public services		1				1
Foundation for work		1	2			3
Total	**0**	**9**	**6**	**1**	**0**	**16**

Grades awarded to instructional sessions at reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering			3			3
Total	**0**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**0**	**3**

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction — Grade 3

7. There are 55 trainees on construction craft programmes. There are 13 modern apprentices, 17 national trainees and 25 youth trainees on other work-based training. Twenty-three trainees are on a plumbing scheme, 19 are training in electrical installation, eight in wood occupations, three in painting and decorating, one in plastering and one in glazing. All modern apprentices are employed and trainees on other programmes are either employed or on placements with local employers. There is a wide range of employers, ranging from sole traders undertaking domestic maintenance work to large companies undertaking projects throughout the country. Trainees attend one of nine further education colleges for off-the-job training for one day a week. Nearly half of the trainees attend one local college. A part-time, occupationally experienced representative from Bexley Training Group visits trainees both in the workplace and at college. Trainees are visited in the workplace at least once every eight weeks. Achievement has improved over the past three years, from 29 per cent of trainees leaving with an NVQ in 1996-97, to 52 per cent in 1998-99. Only one trainee has completed a modern apprenticeship, in 1996-97. Other modern apprentices, who started in 1997-98 onwards, are still in training. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified additional ones. The grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- high standard of off-the-job training
- good-quality portfolios
- trainees move between placements to gain full range of competencies
- effective co-ordination of all training

WEAKNESSES

- no assessment by direct observation in the workplace
- slow development of key skills
- progress restricted by the academic year for some trainees

8. Trainees benefit from good off-the-job training. The college responsible for the majority of trainees has good resources and the staff are occupationally experienced and knowledgeable. Trainees who need help with basic literacy and numeracy receive sensitive and constructive support from their subject tutors. Tutors have a good knowledge of the tasks undertaken by trainees at work so time at college is used efficiently and most tasks are not duplicated. Trainees' portfolios are of a high standard. They are genuinely proud of their achievements and records show that some trainees who had achieved nothing before joining Bexley Training Group have made good progress. Monitoring records contained within portfolios enable trainees to say precisely what they have achieved and what they need to do to complete the qualification. Portfolios contain records of day-to-day tasks, testimonies signed by customers, and photographs of work authenticated by managers. Tasks are cross-referenced to the NVQ standards.

9. Some of the trainees work in small family businesses or with companies that undertake only a narrow range of tasks. Bexley Training Group's monitoring officer has an excellent understanding of the nature of each employer's main business. The monitoring officer has established good working relationships among employers, trainees, and staff at colleges, and trainees are able to move between employers to gain the required range of occupational skills. One trainee, whose employer is a family business which specialises in work within the commercial gas industry, has moved to another general plumbing company for a year so that he can gain experience and evidence for the NVQ.

10. The monitoring officer and staff at the placement company review the trainees' progress every eight weeks. The monitoring officer also attends the college to discuss trainees' progress. The monitoring officer, who is occupationally experienced and well qualified in education, as well as holding assessor awards, co-ordinates the on- and off-the-job training. There are no assessments by direct observation in the workplace and there are very few visits by representatives from the college to the workplace. Opportunities to assess some of the important tasks that trainees carry out at work are missed. Trainees duplicate work at college for assessment purposes, when they carry out the same tasks

frequently at work. The organisation has plans for the monitoring officer to conduct workplace assessments, but this has not started.

11. Key skills development has been slow. Trainees are starting to be given guidance in key skills, but this is done separately from the occupational programme in many cases. Some trainees fail to see the relevance of key skills. Trainees are observed in the workplace carrying out many activities which are not used as evidence for key skills. The lack of workplace assessment has resulted in key skills being based on assignments. Some trainees are not aware that they can use evidence from the workplace to show competency in key skills. Most colleges operate within the confines of the traditional academic year. Off-the job training starts in September, though trainees may start with their employers at any time of the year. Trainees who do not complete their level 2 NVQ within the academic year attend college for an extra term. On completion of level 2, they then have to wait until the beginning of the next academic year before they can start the off-the-job training for the level 3 programme.

Engineering — Grade 2

12. There are 36 trainees, all working towards NVQ motor vehicle programmes. These trainees consist of, 12 advanced modern apprentices, and 23 are foundation modern apprentices with one trainee following another work-based youth training programme. Of these, 21 trainees are following motor vehicle repair and servicing, 11 trainees on vehicle body repair and four trainees working towards vehicle parts NVQ at level 1. All the trainees are employed and placed in local garages, some being main dealerships and others small independent garages. The organisation's qualified safety officer carries out checks on employers for compliance with health and safety legislation before trainees start their training programme. Placements are also checked to ensure that trainees have the opportunity to cover all aspects of the NVQ programme and that they have access to up-to-date resources and equipment. All trainees are visited in the workplace within three to four weeks of the start of training. This is to ensure that the employer has given a good induction and they have the relevant health and safety knowledge relating to the placement. Most training is given in the workplace, where trainees are allocated to an experienced engineer who overseas their work. Off-the-job training is sub contracted to colleges of further education.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- poor assessment practices at subcontractor
- recording of evidence lacks rigour
- weak internal verification

13. Following the first inspection, meetings were held with subcontractors to discuss improvements. As a result of these meetings Bexley Training Group developed an action plan to address these weaknesses. Improvements have been

made in accordance with the action plan. A special report demonstrating success in fulfilling the action plan with a section on engineering identified new strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some and they found additional strengths and weaknesses. A higher grade was given for engineering than that identified in the special report.

STRENGTHS

- good workplace assessment practice
- effective liaison between assessors, trainers, employers and trainees
- good retention for advanced modern apprentices
- effective monitoring of trainees attendance at off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- slow integration of key skills
- some outdated resources in subcontractors

14. At the time of the first inspection meetings were being held with the main subcontractor to negotiate the use of Bexley Training Group staff for workplace assessment. Bexley Training Group has appointed two part-time motor vehicle assessors to assess trainees at work by direct observation. This also meets awarding body requirements for the new motor vehicle 4000 series qualifications. One assessor specialises in motor vehicle mechanical repair and servicing, and the other in vehicle body repair and refinishing. Both are qualified assessors with many years' experience of working in the industry. The assessors are employed part-time and are able to maintain their occupational competence and product knowledge by continuing to work in industry. Bexley Training Group assessors are highly valued by trainees who appreciate their expertise and helpful support. Assessments at work are well planned and of a high standard. They occur regularly throughout the training programme. The flexible approach to workplace assessments allows employers to contact the assessors directly to arrange for assessments. The quality and development manager observes each assessor in the workplace to maintain the high standard of assessment. The subcontracted colleges' staff carry out assessments during off-the-job training under simulated conditions. They also internally verify the assessment process. Most trainees' portfolios are well presented with valid evidence which is cross-referenced to the performance criteria. In some portfolios neither the assessor nor the workplace witness had authenticated some job cards as proof of assessment. Some portfolio witness status lists were missing or incomplete.

15. Workplace assessors have developed strong links with subcontractor's staff and attend regular team meetings to review trainees' progress, as well as discuss standardisation of assessment. The scheme manager meets quarterly with the main subcontractor's senior manager to resolve any issues, which cannot be dealt with at department level. Employers are provided with a leaflet explaining the NVQ

programme and their individual roles and responsibilities. Their responsibilities are reinforced at each monitoring visit by the assessor. Employers and trainees are supplied with their own up-to-date monitoring sheet of the trainee's NVQ progress. Employers and trainees use a monitoring sheet to identify shortages in assessment and portfolio evidence. The monitoring sheet has increased the employers' involvement and improved assessment practices. The main subcontractor also employs the Bexley Training Group body repair workplace assessor as a lecturer. This provides good communication links for on and of off-the-job training. There is some poor use of terminology, used by the main subcontractor on tracking records, which is not recognised by employers, or in keeping with NVQ requirements. For example, the use of 'pass' or 'fail' instead of reference to competent or not competent**.**

16. Retention for advanced modern apprentices is good. Since 1997, there have only been three trainees who left the training programme with no qualifications. All those trainees who started in the year 2000 are still on the programme. The retention for foundation modern apprentices is not so good. Since 1998-99, only six trainees have completed their programme and 13 trainees have left with no qualifications. Five of the trainees who left the programme early in 2000-01 are still employed within the motor industry**.**

17. The scheme manager has developed an effective system to monitor trainees' attendance at the subcontractors for off-the-job training by using electronic communications. The subcontractor is able to inform Bexley Training Group of any trainee who is absent. The college liaison officer immediately contacts the employer to follow this up. In some instances the trainees parents or guardians are informed of their non-attendance. The monitoring system has proved successful in reducing trainees' absence and improving retention.

18. The subcontractors manage key skills training and assessment. Key skills are not fully integrated into the occupational training, but are used as stand alone units. Employers have little involvement in the key skill process and trainees have a poor understanding of the requirements and type of evidence to collect. There is a lack of workplace evidence. Bexley Training Group is working with all subcontractors to improve the use of the workplace assessors to identify with the trainees, key skill evidence, or assessing key skills in the workplace.

19. The subcontracted college staff carry out assessment during off-the-job training under simulated conditions. Some of the resources for off-the-job training at the main subcontractor do not meet awarding body requirements for motor vehicles to be less than five years old or have relevant systems. Most of the vehicles used have out of date technology. Some equipment used, for example, steering alignment gauges are not compatible with that used in a trainee's workplace.

Business administration — Grade 2

20. There are 90 trainees in business administration, of whom 18 are modern apprentices, 49 are national trainees and 23 are on other work-based training for young people. Seventy-six trainees are working towards administration NVQs at level 2 or 3 and 10 trainees are working towards information technology NVQs at level 1 or 2. Four trainees are working towards accounting NVQs, the training for which is subcontracted to a local college. Forty-three per cent of trainees are employed and the remainder all have work placements. Most trainees receive off-the-job training at Bexley Training Group's training centre for one day each week. A few level 3 trainees attend the training centre for one day each month and remain in the workplace for the rest of the time. There are eight qualified assessors, providing assessment opportunities both at the training centre and in the trainees' workplaces. In 1998-99, 76 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ, and 10 trainees achieved an additional NVQ during their programme. Progression from one level of qualification to the next is good and in 1998-99, 15 trainees progressed directly from NVQ level 2 to level 3. Inspector agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths identified were considered to be no more than normal practice and some of the weaknesses were already being addressed through action plans. The grade awarded was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- well-designed occupational induction
- rigorous assessment and review
- high-quality, well-structured portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- missed opportunities for workplace assessment

21. Trainees speak exceptionally well of the organisation and of the business administration staff in particular. Many trainees receive high levels of additional individual support, which enables them to complete the programme. All trainees receive an extended occupational induction, which lasts for at least a week. This induction includes occupationally specific activities and personal development opportunities, which prepare trainees for the workplace. The induction takes place in a supportive environment with experienced staff. Trainees learn basic business computing, letter writing and telephone techniques. Acquiring these basic skills increases the confidence of trainees before they are placed with an employer. Both employers and trainees benefit from this extended induction.

22. Off-the-job training takes place in a designated business administration training area comprising a number of training rooms which are equipped to an appropriate standard. The atmosphere is friendly and informal, and the training is structured and purposeful. Training and assessment are well planned and a variety

of training methods are used to maintain the trainees' interest. The staff's expertise and enthusiasm ensure that most trainees remain motivated. Assessments are rigorous and comprehensively recorded. Most assessments are carried out in the workplace and assessors make good use of observations of naturally occurring activities. Trainees' reviews are frequent and comprehensive and normally involve the workplace supervisor or manager. The reviews clearly record trainees' development and any issues which may have an impact on trainees' progress. Most portfolios are of a high standard. They are well structured, contain diverse and comprehensive evidence and trainees are proud of the work they have done. Trainees are able to discuss detailed aspects of their programmes and confidently explain how the off-the-job training is related to their work and NVQ.

23. There are no work-based assessors and Bexley Training Group's staff undertake all assessments. There are missed opportunities for workplace assessment. Some employers show an interest in being able to assess their trainees in the workplace and Bexley Training Group has already contacted those employers. A few trainees have not received key skills training as an integrated part of their programme. All new trainees whose programmes include key skills are now covering these areas as part of their NVQ.

Retailing & customer service — Grade 2

24. There are 16 trainees on retail programmes, of whom 12 are national trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in retail operations and four are on other training programmes working towards NVQs at level 1 in distributive operations. Ten of the trainees are employed and the remainder are in work placements. Six trainees work in a large garden centre and the rest are working in small shops in southeast London. Bexley Training Group's part-time assessor carries out all assessment in the trainees' workplace. The assessor also runs the off-the-job training. This takes place, every Wednesday, at the company's training centre in Bexley Heath. The assessor regularly updates his occupational skills and is qualified with the appropriate assessor qualifications. The number of trainees on this programme has decreased over the past three years, but achievement rates are still above average, with 75 per cent of trainees achieving an NVQ in 1998-99. The self-assessment report provided an accurate assessment of the programme's strengths and weaknesses, but inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- effective off-the-job training
- well-integrated key skills training and assessment
- interesting and comprehensive portfolios
- rigorous assessment practice

WEAKNESSES

- slow progress for some trainees
- missed assessment opportunities

GOOD PRACTICE
Trainees are all issued with a 'catch-up envelope' on the first day of their off-the-job training. If a trainee does not attend a training session, then the work they have missed is put in the envelope to make sure that they do not fall behind. Trainees also use these envelopes to leave work for their assessor to check. The whole system is used effectively by trainees as an in and out mailbox system.

25. All trainees attend off-the-job training for half a day each week in the organisation's training centre. The training sessions take place in a comfortable, well-resourced training room. The training is well planned and links directly to the units in the retail NVQ, as well as providing the extra information needed to help trainees to achieve their key skills. All the trainees attend regularly and both trainees and employers appreciate the benefits of the training sessions. Trainees are very enthusiastic and have good working relationships with their trainer. They are constantly learning new skills to help them to be more efficient and confident at work. They meet with trainees from other shops to discuss their experiences and are encouraged to develop their self-confidence through product presentations to their colleagues. The training is lively and interactive with a good mix of participation by trainees and more formal learning methods.

26. At the beginning of the training programme, each trainee has a key skills assessment as well as an occupational assessment. This is used to identify any extra support trainees need to achieve their NVQ and key skills. In the training centre there are facilities for trainees to improve and practice their information technology skills. Trainees gather their key skills evidence as part of their retail NVQ, however if they need extra evidence this is provided through a series of special projects. The trainees' key skills are regularly assessed and trainees all feel that they add value to their training programme. Trainees are given the opportunity to learn at their own pace and those with additional learning needs are given extra one-to-one coaching and support. Trainees produce a good mix of evidence which is clearly referenced in their portfolios. They take pride in their work and enjoy working on the supporting projects to provide evidence of their knowledge and skills. Evidence includes assessor observations, work-based projects, witness statements, photographs, diagrams, charts and personal statements about their achievements. The assessor often takes photographs of trainees completing day-to-day tasks in their workplaces, as well as activities related to their key skills during the off-the-job training.

27. All assessment takes place in the workplace with naturally occurring activities as the main source of evidence. Observations are well planned by the assessor with both the employer and the trainee. Trainees are given clear guidance about the observation and assessment process and are well prepared before assessment takes place. The assessor uses the review document and the trainees' personal development plans to highlight assessment opportunities. Assessments are carried out by looking at the whole NVQ rather than individual units and are clearly recorded by the assessor. Trainees are given clear and constructive feedback at the end of every assessment. They are given help to identify how their evidence can be tracked to their NVQ unit. The internal verifier samples portfolios part way through the programme and observes the assessor at work. The internal verifier then gives clear and detailed feedback to the assessor.

28. A new retail assessor has taken over the programme following the sudden death of the previous retail assessor. Off-the-job training sessions were cancelled for three months and trainees' progress was slowed. Bexley Training Group arranged for all the trainees to attend a four-day off-the-job training course at the beginning of October to catch up with portfolio-building, evidence collecting and assessment. Assessment visits to the workplace have been restricted over the past six months, and some trainees have missed opportunities for assessment. Trainees who are new to the programme have had a slow start, and trainees who were close to completion have had their achievement slowed down. Trainees and employers were kept informed of the situation and were given the opportunity of transferring to another training provider. All trainees chose to stay with Bexley Training Group. Trainees have new target completion dates and are progressing well towards these dates.

Hair & beauty — Grade 2

29. There are 43 trainees on hairdressing programmes, of whom eight are modern apprentices, 32 are national trainees and three are on other work-based training programmes. All trainees are working towards an NVQ in hairdressing. Three are working towards level 1, 32 are working towards level 2 and eight are working towards level 3. Off-the-job training for both theory and practical sessions is provided in Bexley Training Group's training centre, which contains its own commercial hairdressing salon and training room. Trainees attend these facilities for two days each month, and for the remainder of the time they are employed in hairdressing salons located in and around the borough of Bexley. Most assessments are carried out in the workplace either through qualified work-based assessors or by Bexley Training Group's assessors. Some assessments are also undertaken at the training centre. National trainees also work towards an NVQ at level 2 in customer service. The achievement rate for modern apprentices in 1998-99 was 78 per cent. Achievement rates for other youth trainees have improved from 40 per cent in 1996-97 to 64 per cent in 1998-99. Inspectors found that some of the strengths in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. However, the organisation undervalued itself in this area and the grade awarded was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- good use of additional qualifications to support key skills work
- good assessment-planning involving all parties
- good-quality commercial salon for off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- some missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace

30. All trainees have a comprehensive two-day induction programme. Initial assessments and key skills assessments are used to identify any additional support requirements. Where a need is identified, effective support is provided. The NVQ process and requirements are explained fully to all trainees, who demonstrate a high level of understanding. National trainees and modern apprentices also work towards an NVQ at level 2 in customer service. This qualification is linked to key skills. Trainees are encouraged to use it to gain evidence for key skills and this clarifies their relevance to the trainees. Most trainees have a clear understanding of the usefulness of key skills. Trainees work towards their key skills at the same time as their NVQ. Off-the-job training is carried out at Bexley Training Group's own modern commercial salon. There is a classroom alongside the salon for theory sessions. Both the salon and classroom provide a good learning environment for the trainees. Training sessions are planned to ensure a small number of trainees in each session, usually six trainees to one trainer. Theory sessions are sometimes held over a whole day and are not stimulating for trainees. However, practical training sessions are interesting and are well linked to the theory training.

31. Trainees, work-based supervisors and trainers are all actively involved in planning assessments and training. They work together as a team in order to maximise trainees' assessment opportunities. Copies of action plans are kept by all concerned and updated at monthly reviews. After each off-the-job training session at the training centre, work-based supervisors are sent a progress report. There is one full-time and two part-time trainer/assessors employed by Bexley Training Group. All the staff are well qualified and are highly experienced in training and assessment. There is a high number of work-based assessors. Over half of the workplaces employ a qualified assessor. Many have achieved their assessor qualification as part of their level 3 NVQ in hairdressing. Bexley Training Group encourages workplace supervisors to achieve this qualification in order to increase opportunities for workplace assessment. However, there are still some missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace. Where this happens Bexley Training Group arranges for the trainee to be assessed in the salon at the centre. Trainees who work in companies where there is no work-based assessor do not progress as quickly as others.

32. In 1997-98, Bexley Training Group ran a pilot for delivering the national traineeships programme in hairdressing. Retention and achievement rates in the initial pilot group were poor. In 1998-99, a total of 39 trainees started the programme, 12 left early and no trainees completed the framework. However, several trainees are now about to complete and one has recently completed. From its experience on this pilot, Bexley Training Group has improved its programme and early indications are that achievement rates are improving. Bexley Training Group has been able to advise other providers on how to structure a successful national traineeship programme based on its own experiences.

Health, care & public services — Grade 2

33. There are 18 trainees on care programmes, of whom three are national trainees and 15 are on other work-based training for young people. Two trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 in childcare and education, with 11 working towards level 2 in early years care and education. In September this year, a level 3 programme started and there are five trainees working towards the early years and education NVQ. In 1996-97, six trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2, and eight left before completing. In 1997-98, eight trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2 and only one left without completing. In 1998-99, seven trainees achieved NVQs at level 2, with four leaving without completing. To date, no level 3 qualifications have been achieved. The level 2 programme is delivered over two years with an additional two years for the level 3. All current level 3 trainees achieved level 2 before beginning level 3. Two trainees are employed and the others are in work placements. Nine trainees are in five private day nurseries, which are registered with social services, and nine are in eight local authority primary schools. A supervisor who is occupationally qualified and experienced supports all trainees.

34. All off-the-job training takes place at the training centre and is taught by an occupationally experienced tutor who has qualifications in teaching, assessment and internal verification. For the level 2 NVQ, off-the-job training takes place one day a week during the first year and half a day a week during the second. The first year consists of a structured learning programme using a combination of teaching techniques including lectures, group exercises, discussions and individual activities. The second years consists of self-directed learning, building on the first year using workbooks and assignments. One-to-one support is given to the trainees throughout this part of the programme. Off-the-job training for the level 3 programme is also delivered using self-directed learning with workbooks and one-to-one support. Trainees are encouraged to work together in their groups to share their experience and skills. The tutor and one other assessor are responsible for all assessment and verification. Both are occupationally experienced, with assessors and verifier's qualifications. Key skills have recently been introduced for level 2 trainees. A pilot project is being run, with trainees working towards most key skills at the same time as their NVQ. The information technology key skill is being taught as a block programme at the training centre, as most work placements do not have computer equipment. The activities and exercises used in this training are specific to early years care. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Additional strengths were identified and the grade awarded was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- active involvement by trainees in all aspects of programme
- robust and thorough assessment practice
- good-quality off-the-job training
- additional learning opportunities for some trainees

WEAKNESSES

- missed assessment opportunities in the workplace

35. Workplace supervisors, tutor and assessor work closely with trainees to ensure that they have the best possible experience during their time on the programme and achieve their NVQ within the agreed timescale. There are regular review meetings at six- to eight-week intervals. The meetings are used to discuss trainees' progress, identify any learning needs and plan assessments. These meetings have a positive impact on off-the-job training and workplace activities. If there are any problems or difficulties in the placement the three parties get together to identify possible resolutions. There are well-recorded procedures for assessment, which exceed the requirements of the awarding body. Trainees and their supervisors are actively involved in planning assessments with the assessor, taking the lead when the trainees are ready for assessment. This ensures that trainees are well prepared for their assessments. Observations take place on a regular basis in the workplace by the assessor. These may be monthly or as frequently as every week. Additional evidence is provided by witness testimonies from workplace staff. Written assignments and questioning are used to test the trainees' knowledge. All assessments are recorded using standard documents. Verbal feedback is given to trainees at the time of the assessment and written feedback is given at the next review meeting.

GOOD PRACTICE

A trainee was having difficulty identifying play activities for the children. The tutor ensured that when the subject was covered during off the job training a wide range of activities were discussed. The workplace supervisor arranged for the trainee to identify activities for certain days. The trainee records how the activity will be undertaken and evaluates it after the event. This is discussed with the supervisor, who suggests improvements and ways to develop the activity. The assessor uses this information as a basis for assessment planning. The trainee has developed greater confidence in initiating activities as a result

36. Off-the-job training focuses primarily on the learning needs of the trainees and then this is linked to the NVQ requirements. During monitoring and assessment visits, the tutor is able to identify what trainees are doing in the workplace and designs the training around these activities. Relevant resources for early years training are available at the training centre. The training is well designed and structured in a way that makes clear links between theory and what the trainees actually do in the workplace. Handouts, exercise and workbooks are written clearly in a way that trainees can understand. Key skills and knowledge requirements are clearly identified for trainees, especially in the early stages. As the programme progresses and trainees gain confidence, they begin to make these links for themselves. Workplace experiences are shared among trainees during the training, which develops their awareness of how other settings operate.

37. Trainees who work in primary schools are given the opportunity to work in day nurseries during the school holidays. This enables them to gain experience of working with a younger age group than is available in the schools. There is a structured programme for this, with pre-arranged on-the-job training and relevant off-the-job training. This enables trainees to gain the NVQ units related to baby care as well as experience of working in a different childcare environment. The early years tutor is currently trying to arrange a similar opportunity for trainees working in the day nurseries to gain experience of working in a school. During their time on the programme, all trainees also achieve a first aid certificate which is valid for three years.

38. Bexley Training Group's assessors carry out all assessment. There are no work-based assessors. Insufficient observations are made of naturally occurring activities. This is significant in early years work, as for many of the NVQ units, such as identifying abuse or dealing with accidents and emergencies, it is not appropriate for an external person to be present when a trainee is dealing with a particular incident. Also, the nature of the work means that the presence of an external person changes the group dynamics and the children behave differently, which can influence the success of an activity. The workplace supervisors provide witness testimonies, but do not carry out formal observation. Trainees have to write detailed reports of activities which they undertake, with the result that much of the evidence in their portfolios consists of personal statements.

Foundation for work — Grade 2

39. There are 26 trainees on foundation for work programmes, of whom 13 are youth trainees and 13 are adults. The work-based learning for youth trainees is a 16-week prevocational training programme offered by a number of SOLOTEC's training providers. It is aimed at young people aged 16 and over who have a background of social exclusion and disaffection. The programme provides trainees with skills that will provide a basis for future training and new skills that will give them confidence in order to become more employable. During the 16-week programme, trainees work towards literacy and numeracy qualifications and a foundation qualification. Trainees also participate in a week-long residential course and undertake four weeks of work experience. The work-based learning for adults programme is taught over 26 weeks, and is aimed at adults over the age of 25 who have a background of social disadvantage and need a high level of support in returning to, or obtaining work. The programme includes personal development, job search, specific information technology training towards NVQs at level 1 and a four-week work experience period. Training on both programmes is carried out within a very structured framework, but is sufficiently flexible to meet individual trainees' needs. The self-assessment report for this area was comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses but identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that given by Bexley Training Group.

STRENGTHS

- flexible programme to meet individual needs
- good attendance pattern and high motivation of trainees
- effective group-based reviews
- high progression and success rates of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- no opportunities for trainees to use work-based evidence
- missed opportunities for practical activities to reinforce trainees' learning

40. Most trainees are referred to Bexley Training Group by the local careers service or the Employment Service. There are good links between Bexley Training Group, the local careers service and the Employment Service. Careers officers participate in the youth programme both by leading training sessions, participating in mock interviews and providing advice and guidance. The Employment Service's staff visit trainees in the training centre to monitor their progress. All trainees have comprehensive initial assessment to identify individual training and personal development needs. The training plans are prepared to reflect the appropriate support required by each trainee. Trainees who do not require basic skills support are offered alternative qualifications. Training is flexible, trainees can join at any time of the year and opportunities are available to extend their time on the programme where appropriate.

41. There is a good rapport between all the staff and trainees. The majority of youth trainees had significant periods of non-attendance at school and are disaffected with the education process. Attendance is high, at 90 per cent, and trainees are well motivated. They value the structured approach towards gaining new skills. The programme is instructive and informative. Trainees take pride in recording their daily progress with basic educational achievements. Staff provide support and encouragement to individuals who lack literacy and numeracy skills. Achievement of NVQ units is recorded on a wall chart that is accessible to all trainees, and provides a visual reminder of trainees' progress. All trainees have regular reviews and training plans are updated weekly. Reviews for youth trainees are conducted with other members of the group present. Open discussion is held about the individual's behaviour and attitude. Peers are encouraged to participate in this process and reinforce areas of concern as to what is perceived as inappropriate behaviour.

42. Achievement rates are good and over 76 per cent of youth trainees progress to further training or employment. On the work-based learning for adults programme, 87.5 per cent complete their programme. Of seven recent leavers, all achieved their information technology NVQ at level 1 and four are now in employment. The adult programme follows a well-planned scheme that is measured by achieving four 'milestones' over the course of the programme. Achieving these milestones requires trainees to show good motivation, acquire work experience, and demonstrate that they have gained good presentation and job-search skills. Trainees are give the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their presentation skills while staffing Bexley Training Group's reception. Their motivation is measured through their attendance and punctuality. Targets for job-search skills include the ability to write application letters. Work experience is a significant part of both prevocational programmes, but takes place at the end of the training programmes. It is separate from the foundation programme and the adult programme. There are no opportunities for trainees to use real work-based evidence towards their qualifications. There is no opportunity for trainees to share their experiences and reinforce their learning because their work experience is gained at the very end of the programme.

43. Trainees' portfolios are clear and easy to follow. There is extensive use of witness statements, basic skills progress tests and photographic evidence. Opportunities to use community-based activities and practical activities are missed. There is an over-reliance on simulation and paper-based exercises.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities — Grade 2

44. Bexley Training Group has an 'open-access' recruitment policy. Nine per cent of trainees have learning difficulties. Data are collected on gender, disability and ethnicity. Currently, 4 per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups, which reflects the proportion in the local population, but does not reflect the situation in of Greenwich and Lewisham, where minority ethnic groups account for 15.2 per cent of the population. The two training centres are well designed, with easy access and a variety of facilities for people with disabilities. Participation of trainees from minority ethnic groups and of those with disabilities is highest among foundation for work trainees, where 15 per cent have disabilities and 11.5 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. The self-assessment report for this area correctly identified the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- comprehensive equal opportunities development plan
- effective complaints and grievance procedures
- networking with outside agencies to increase participation by under-represented groups

WEAKNESSES

- underdeveloped initiative to attract under-represented groups

45. Bexley Training Group has an equal opportunities policy which is monitored by a subcommittee made up from staff across the organisation. The group meets every two months to review and evaluate the equal opportunities development plan. The development plan leads to changes in training programmes. Changes have included the introduction of NVQs at level 1 in both information technology and hairdressing, and the use of hairdressing models from a wider variety of ethnic groups. Equal opportunities issues are reinforced through a comprehensive induction process, and a code of practice is given to each trainee at induction. The majority of trainees can recall discussions on equal opportunities, and are aware of their rights. Equality of opportunity is promoted throughout every aspect of the trainees' programme. The work placement officer reviews each company and assesses equality of opportunity and health and safety practices prior to a trainee

starting work there. All trainees are given help, encouragement and additional support to overcome barriers to success.

46. Bexley Training Group has an effective grievance and complaints procedure. Trainees are aware of the procedure and Bexley Training Group has supported trainees who have been discriminated against at work. In one case, it supported a trainee where a case of harassment ended up in court. Bexley Training Group provides personnel support as well as professional support through the company solicitor and personal counsellors.

47. Bexley Training Group works with the local authority and support groups from minority ethnic communities in an attempt to widen participation by members of local minority ethnic groups. Marketing literature has been produced in a range of languages which are used in the local community. The organisation is aware that there is a gender imbalance in the staffing of the training centre and is actively seeking to address this issue when recruiting for new staff. All staff have participated in equal opportunities awareness training and further training is planned through the local TEC. Marketing literature makes reference to the company being an equal opportunities employer, but this does not demonstrate the full commitment given to this area by the company. Overall, 54 per cent of trainees are men, though there is a stereotypical gender mix in the occupational areas of construction, engineering and hairdressing. A careers evening was held at a local boys secondary school to promote hairdressing but it generated no interest. There are currently no specific activities planned to encourage greater participation in non-traditional occupational areas.

Trainee support **Grade 1**

48. Bexley Training Group has two adjacent training centres, which are easily accessible for trainees and staff. Regular presentations are given to careers staff in order to update them on the training programmes. One of Bexley Training Group's staff regularly interviews at the local careers office. A comprehensive interviewing process is available every working day of the year. Initial assessments and key skills assessments are used to identify any additional support requirements. All trainees receive a minimum two-day induction programme and sometimes a two-week induction, depending on their circumstances. Additional learning support is arranged for those who require it. Reviews are conducted regularly, at least once each month. The first monitoring visit takes place within two to four weeks of the trainees starting the programme. Most trainees have the opportunity to study for additional qualifications. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and the weakness in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. The grade awarded was higher than that given by Bexley Training Group.

STRENGTHS

- good, constructive support and advice
- comprehensive and memorable induction programme

- frequent and effective reviews of trainees' progress
- additional qualifications undertaken by most trainees
- well-recorded trainee support

WEAKNESSES

- college-based trainees unaware of support available

GOOD PRACTICE
A pregnant trainee was encouraged to complete her level 1 NVQ. After the birth, she returned to do a level 2 qualification. Bexley Training Group gave her support and treated her with respect. The programme has been adapted to accommodate her personal situation.

49. Bexley Training Group has an 'open-access' recruitment policy and takes many trainees who have been unable to join other training providers. Ninety per cent of trainees are referred by the careers service. To attract more hairdressing trainees, a joint careers promotional presentation was held recently at a local salon. Careers officers, a local school, prospective trainees and parents attended the event. Interviews take place throughout the year. They are carefully conducted on a one-to-one basis and provide guidance on career choices. Potential trainees and their parents are supplied with helpful written information regarding the programmes available. All trainees have a simple initial assessment in order to identify any support requirements and their level of key skills. Some trainees are given a second interview by a specialist tutor to identify any specific support requirements. Some trainees are offered full-time support through the foundation for work programme before progressing onto mainstream programmes and employment. Bexley Training Group has done excellent work in some areas, offering one-to-one support over and above the normal requirements. Trainees who are unhappy in their workplaces receive support to help resolve the issues or are moved to a more suitable placement. All aspects of support for trainees are fully recorded and kept in the main administration office for immediate reference. The scheme manager is highly dedicated to trainee support and is directly responsible for overseeing the needs and progress of all trainees, paying particular attention to those with learning difficulties or personal problems.

50. All trainees receive an induction to their programme, which lasts from two days to a full week depending on the occupational area. The induction is based on discussions, videos and role-play exercises. Trainees are also given a comprehensive induction on health and safety. All trainees receive the same systematic assessment during induction. The results are recorded on an induction and assessment course report and used to define programme details and support requirements. The trainees are asked to bring in their National Record of Achievement. This is copied and the information used to assess their prior achievements. Following induction all trainees are found a work placement or start employment. Trainees are given careers and employment advice. From induction onwards, all trainees are able to access support and advice. Specialist counsellors are made available for specific cases such as alcohol abuse or psychiatric problems.

51. Trainees are visited in the workplace a couple of weeks after starting and a 'first visit' review is conducted. This ensures that the trainee and placement supervisor are happy with the arrangements and that a placement induction has been completed. Bexley Training Group has designed its own comprehensive

review documents. These record trainees' actual progress to date against each of the NVQ units and key skills, as well as detailing the actions planned for the next few weeks. Initial assessments show that most trainees are at or below level 1 when starting their programmes. Basic skills development is built into the off-the-job training and many trainees progress from level 1 to higher-level qualifications. Some trainees have the opportunity to access additional qualifications such as customer services, information technology and first aid. Over the last three years, 26 trainees in the occupational areas of hairdressing, administration, sport and recreation, and retailing have achieved customer service NVQs at level 2 in addition to their main qualifications.

52. Some trainees are not aware of the range of support available to them. This is particularly the case for trainees whose off-the-job training is at local colleges. Occupational assessors have been recruited to support trainees in the workplace though it is still too early to assess the impact of this on trainees. A part-time assessor has been allocated additional time to provide individual trainee support where necessary.

Management of training — Grade 2

53. Bexley Training Group is a company limited by guarantee and is registered as a charity. A committee of five members, including the scheme manager, meets on a quarterly basis to manage the strategic aspects of the business. The day-to-day management of the organisation is the responsibility of the scheme manager, supported by the training manager and administration manager. The scheme manager is directly responsible for the foundation for work programme, while the training manager is responsible for the training in all the occupational areas run directly by the organisation. The administration manager is responsible for the general running of the administrative functions of the organisation and the training delivered by subcontractors. The organisation achieved the Investors in People Standard in May 1999. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. The grade awarded was higher than that given by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- effective and continual development of staff
- thorough vetting to ensure high-quality work placements
- well-managed on- and off-the-job training
- good monitoring and management of all trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- some employers not aware of framework details

54. Bexley Training Group has a staff handbook, which clearly records all the procedures from recruitment through to annual appraisals and staff development. All staff attend a health and safety course as part of their development programme. Staff have detailed job descriptions and they clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. All staff have relevant occupational experience and their qualifications including teaching and assessing. Some staff have achieved their internal verifier awards and two are qualified to accredit prior learning. In addition to personal training and development such as internal verifier awards and adult dyslexia support courses, staff have a training day once a year to cover general issues such as health and safety, equal opportunities or stress in the workplace. Lines of communication are also clearly defined.

55. Bexley Training Group is selective about the type of placements and employers with which it works. The placement officer undertakes all initial visits to carry out a health and safety check and to discuss the terms and conditions of the training agreement, including equal opportunities. The placement is also assessed to ensure that the trainee will be able to cover the type of work relevant to the NVQ. If a potential placement is not suitable, it is not used. One company which discriminated against a trainee is no longer used as a work placement or for work experience. Workplace supervisors are involved in the progress review process, which helps to identify any training needs. These training needs are addressed during the off-the-job training at the centre and reinforced through on-the-job training in the workplace. All trainees are encouraged to inform their supervisors of the topics they are being taught off the job. Where off-the-job training takes place in college it is more difficult to link this to what they are doing at work.

56. Staff in each occupational area manage the progress of trainees using a two-stage system. Each trainee's portfolio has a tracking system to record evidence produced and assessments completed for each element of the NVQ. The assessors then record completed elements or units on a grid listing all trainees on the programme. This grid is usually displayed in the relevant training room. Most grids use coloured stickers or highlights so that trainees can see how they are progressing and managers can easily measure their progress. Workplace supervisors are kept informed about trainees' progress through the reviews and regular reports on what has been covered on off-the-job training. Where off-the-job training is subcontracted, Bexley Training Group asks the college tutors to complete an end of term report, a copy of which is sent to the trainees' supervisors. These reports give details of trainees' progress towards each unit of the NVQ, as well as information on attendance and timekeeping. Every six months, the scheme manager, training manager and administration manager review each trainee's file. The progress of every trainee is discussed and appropriate action agreed where necessary. The action plans are kept in the administration office so that they can be updated as required.

57. Many employers and work placements are small companies and the time constraints on supervisors mean that they are not always aware of the programme their trainees are following. Most workplace supervisors are aware that trainees are

working towards NVQs but are not always sure of whether they are national trainees or modern apprentices. Some supervisors are not clear on which units for the NVQ or key skills their trainees are working towards. Additional information packs have been prepared to help to inform employers and work placement supervisors.

Quality assurance — Grade 3

58. Bexley Training Group has written procedures and policies which cover all aspects of the business. The procedures are developed by the staff involved in carrying out the functions and are reviewed every six months by management. The scheme manager and training manager are responsible for monitoring the quality of training. The organisation meets the quality assurance requirements of a number of the awarding bodies. Bexley Training Group has arrangements with 17 subcontractors providing off-the-job training to 38 per cent of the trainees. Feedback from trainees is actively sort and a formal evaluation process has been introduced for employers. The organisation has adopted self-assessment as an additional part of the quality assurance systems. Development plans are reviewed on a regular basis. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, though some were considered to be no more than normal practice. The grade awarded was the same as that given by Bexley Training Group.

STRENGTHS

- quality assurance systems result in continuous improvements
- comprehensive and effective internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- no monitoring of quality of some subcontracted training
- no systematic analysis of reasons for trainees leaving

59. Bexley Training Group continuously reviews and evaluates the quality of its training using formal and informal methods. Any issues identified are discussed with the relevant people and appropriate action is taken to improve the situation. For example, a level 1 NVQ has been introduced into hairdressing to allow trainees who are not ready for a national traineeship to progress at a more suitable pace. In 1997, the trainees working towards printing qualifications were moved to a new subcontractor when the local college stopped offering the NVQ. Feedback from trainees indicated that the training was not satisfactory. One of Bexley Training Group's monitoring team observed the training sessions and reviewed the trainees' portfolios. Meetings were held with the subcontractor and various initiatives have been set up. The subcontractor has appointed a work-based assessor who works alongside Bexley Training Group's staff to ensure that best assessment practices are applied. Assessments are now through work-based

observation and other assessment techniques and not just witness testimonies. Training has also improved through the use of experienced and competent trainers.

60. Internal verification systems and procedures are clearly recorded and consistently applied across the organisation. There are seven qualified internal verifiers for all the qualifications offered and six working towards their qualifications. The training manager co-ordinates all verification activities. The systems exceed awarding body requirements. Sometimes, 100 per cent of all portfolios are sampled. There are regular observations, by the internal verifier of assessors carrying out workplace assessments. Feedback is given to assessors at the end of these observations and used to improve assessment practices. There are monthly team meetings to discuss issues, receive updates of national initiatives and prepare action plans. Internal verification takes place throughout the qualification and all portfolios are internally verified prior to certificates being requested.

61. Bexley Training Group has worked closely with one of the local colleges, which accounts for over 50 per cent of all subcontracted training, for the last five years to try to improve achievement rates. Earlier this year, a service level agreement was introduced and plans were put in place for the college to use Bexley Training Group's assessors to carry out work-based assessments. These assessments have not yet started. The agreement outlines what is expected in terms of support arrangements and the provision of end-of-term reports and explanatory reasons and remedial actions for trainees whose progress is slow. The agreement does not require the college to provide internal or external verifiers' reports, nor does it clearly specify how the quality of training will be evaluated. Bexley Training Group has started to formally observe its own training sessions. Such observations are not carried out for most subcontracted training.

62. Bexley Training Group collects information on the achievements and destinations of trainees. Every year, a presentation evening is held and all trainees are invited to receive their certificates. This allows the organisation to collect information on what some of their trainees do after leaving the programme. Information on early leavers is less detailed, although earlier this year one member of staff attempted to contact all early leavers to find out what they were now doing. This information is not systematically analysed to establish any trends or changes in reasons for early leavers.