



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION FEBRUARY 2001

Solihull College

SUMMARY

Solihull College offers good training in hairdressing and foundation for work. Hairdressing trainees demonstrate good practical skills. The learning environment for trainees on foundation for work programmes is stimulating and purposeful. Retention rates are good. Engineering training is satisfactory and the college has effective links with local employers. Business administration training is satisfactory and trainees have good opportunities to learn in the workplace. Witness testimonies, however, are not used as a form of assessment. Instruction on the fork-truck driving programme is good but some assessment practice is poor. Hospitality training is satisfactory and trainees can work towards additional qualifications. Equality of opportunity is promoted satisfactorily. At the time of the first inspection, trainee support and quality insurance arrangements were unsatisfactory, and management of training was poor. Trainees now receive good pastoral support. There is an effective job-search programme and trainees make good use of developmental social activities. However, support issues are not sufficiently analysed or reviewed. Management of training is now good and both internal and external communication is effective. The college makes good use of information on the labour market and new areas of training are offered to meet identified demands. Target setting and improvement action plans are not yet effectively used in all areas. Quality assurance arrangements are now satisfactory. Good use is made of observation of training and the quality of training in the work place is monitored.

As a result of the reinspection of Solihull College, the original published report text for trainee support, management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text, which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Hospitality	3
Hair & beauty	2
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	4
Management of training	5
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced training in fork-truck driving
- ◆ good work placements in hospitality
- ◆ effective planning of on- and off-the-job training in hairdressing
- ◆ highly effective individual training programmes in foundation for work
- ◆ continuous programme of staff development in equal opportunities
- ◆ wide range of additional and learning support available to trainees
- ◆ good management of work-based training
- ◆ comprehensive staff development programme
- ◆ good arrangements for gathering feedback from trainees and employers

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress by trainees towards achieving engineering qualifications
- ◆ low retention rates on the fork-truck driving programme
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment in hospitality
- ◆ insufficient use of work placements for foundation for work trainees
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous annual review of training programmes

INTRODUCTION

1. Solihull College is a general further education college in the metropolitan borough of Solihull, close to the city of Birmingham in the West Midlands. It opened in 1954. The college has three main sites. Students and trainees are from the local area and from Birmingham. The Blossomfield Road site houses the majority of the college's work and is the main administrative centre. Recent major building work has been carried out to produce an attractive main building which houses a central guidance and support unit, as well as library and information technology suites. Sharman's Cross, about a mile away, is a former secondary school. Chelmsley Wood, another former secondary school, is in the north of the borough.

2. Solihull College contracts with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide training. There were 203 TEC-funded trainees and 24 New Deal clients at the college at the time of the first inspection. There are now 134 TEC-funded trainees and 88 New Deal clients. Solihull College offers training and courses leading to a range of vocational qualifications in administration, food preparation, fork-truck driving, engineering, hairdressing, hotel reception, and information technology.

3. The metropolitan borough of Solihull was created during the local government reorganisation of 1974, and comprises two distinct parts which have sharp socio-economic differences. The southern part is suburban and prosperous, with a population of about 135,000. It stretches from the Birmingham boundary on the west, to the border of Warwickshire and Worcestershire. The southern part of the borough of Solihull is an area of high employment, especially in the service industries and motor-vehicle manufacturing and related industries. The unemployment rate in 1999 was 2.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. In January 2001 this had increased to 3 per cent compared to a national average of 3.5 per cent. The northern part of the borough has high levels of deprivation. It has a population of 65,000 and is primarily an overspill area for Birmingham with a number of very large housing estates and a higher rate of unemployment, at 7.8 per cent. The staying-on rate in full-time education within the southern part of the borough in 1998 was around 77 per cent, compared with 56 per cent in the north. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Solihull achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 52.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000 it was 55.1 per cent compared with a national average of 49.2 per cent. According to the 1991 census figures, the proportion of those in Solihull from minority ethnic groups is 2.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Solihull College produced its self-assessment report for the first inspection in July 1999. College staff had attended self-assessment training sessions run by Birmingham and Solihull TEC. The director with responsibility for TEC-funded training produced the report along with a small team of other college managers. Trainers and assessors were not involved to any great extent in the production of the self-assessment report. There is little representation of the views of trainees and employers in the report. Eight of the 10 grades awarded by inspectors were the same as those in the self-assessment report, and two were lower.

5. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 33 days at Solihull College during November 1999. The team worked jointly with a team of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectors, sharing information and findings. The occupational areas inspected jointly were engineering, business administration and foundation for work along with the generic areas. Inspectors examined college and awarding body documents. They interviewed a range of college staff. Twenty-eight employers were visited and during these visits, 24 staff were interviewed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work, records of 117 trainees' progress reviews and 50 portfolios. They observed monitoring or assessment visits and instruction sessions and they interviewed 95 trainees.

6. Reinspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors, who spent a total of nine days at Solihull College during February 2001. They interviewed 22 trainees. They examined documents relating to trainees, including 12 portfolios and assessment records, and management and quality assurance documents, and interviewed Solihull College's staff. They observed off-the-job training sessions at the Blossomfield Road and Chelmsley Wood sites, as well as trainees' progress reviews. They visited six employers' premises and interviewed five employers. The tables below show the grades awarded to the on- and off-the-job training sessions observed by inspectors at the first inspection and the reinspection:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		2				2
Business administration			3			3
Retailing & customer service		4				4
Hospitality		2	2			4
Hair & beauty		2	2			4
Foundation for work	1					1
Total	1	10	7	0	0	18

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Instruction Sessions	0	4	3	0	0	7
Totals	0	4	3	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

7. The Solihull College engineering department operates on two of the three college sites. Training in motor-vehicle and some electronics is offered at Chelmsley Wood and the remainder of the engineering training is offered at the main Blossomfield Road site. At the time of inspection, there were 55 engineering trainees. Forty-seven are modern apprentices in engineering, one is a modern apprentice in refrigeration and seven are motor-vehicle trainees. Four of the motor-vehicle trainees are national trainees, two are youth trainees and one is on an adult training programme. There are also nine New Deal clients. Thirty trainees are working towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2, and 25 towards NVQ level 3. All the training programmes commence with a foundation course leading to an NVQ at level two and a further education course. At one major employer, all trainees work towards a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in engineering manufacturing as well as an NVQ. Trainees are based in the workplace and attend college on day-release for the relevant theoretical knowledge and further education content of their courses. Level 3 assessments are carried out in the workplace by suitably qualified staff from the college, and progress reviews are planned on an eight-week cycle. Modern apprentice trainees are based with nine local employers. There are no work-based assessors. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths stated in the self-assessment report and considered some to be no more than normal practice. They found both strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified and they awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training at college and work
- ◆ trainees' high retention rates on refrigeration and air conditioning and mechanical engineering programmes
- ◆ wide range of good course documentation
- ◆ close and effective links with employers
- ◆ good resources for motor-vehicle training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees' slow progress towards achievement of NVQs
- ◆ poor resources in refrigeration and air conditioning and mechanical engineering
- ◆ failure to update individual training plans use them as working documents
- ◆ motor-vehicle trainees' low retention rates
- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of key skills

8. Trainees receive good training at college and work. Many become highly skilled in their occupational area. The NVQ level 2 foundation training is well planned and trainees receive one-to-one training where required. Trainees make a range of test pieces to the requisite NVQ level 2 standards. They are thoroughly assessed, and receive good quality, accurate feedback from assessors. Training is also good in the workplace. Here, the trainees receive more specific training on specialist machinery, and in some cases are working on the manufacture of aerospace components machined to the tightest of tolerances. The trainees are based at some excellent employers and value the training that they receive. At level 3, trainees make arrangements to be assessed when they are ready. Trainees are able to use the college facilities during normal college holidays. In some cases, specific courses are run to enable trainees to meet particular requirements of the NVQ. Arrangements are made with external bodies for trainees to acquire requisite competencies that they are unable to cover at college. Trainees have a good understanding of the engineering components of their programme.

9. Both at college and at most workplaces, there is a wide range of good course materials. In the motor-vehicle training programme there are workshop manuals, NVQ workbooks, task sheets, CD ROMs, data sheets and microfiche. The standard of presentation of college-produced work sheets is high. There is regular contact between college staff and employers representatives in the workplace. College staff aim to ensure that the trainees meet the specific needs of employers and they monitor trainees' project work in the workplace closely. Accommodation for motor-vehicle training is clean and airy. Resources are good and there are plenty of vehicles, parts and equipment.

10. Trainees' retention rates are high. Most trainees achieve their qualifications. Of the total intake of 53 modern apprentices since 1995, only two have left the programme. Of the remainder, 23 have achieved NVQ level 2 and the remainder are continuing to work towards either with level 2 or 3.

11. Resources in the engineering workshops are poor. Both in mechanical engineering and the refrigeration departments, the conditions are cramped and too small for the numbers of trainees on programme. In the refrigeration department, the workshop area is shared with practitioners of another trade. There is no separate classroom. Conditions in the area are often very noisy with some trainees carrying out practical work in the same space where other trainees are doing their

theoretical work. The equipment that trainees are working on is old, and in many cases does not reflect the modern equipment currently available. In the engineering workshop, there is a shortage of milling facilities, and trainees often have to wait for up to a day for these resources to become available.

12. Employers recruit the trainees, and in some instances, give them initial assessment tests. The results of these tests are used for selection purposes, and are not recorded on individual training plans. The college gives initial assessment tests to New Deal clients, but not to other engineering trainees. Individual training plans are not used as a working document and are not regularly updated. They lack detail, and in some cases there are sections which have not been completed. In most cases, the detail of which NVQ units are being followed and target dates for completion are not entered. There is no accreditation of trainees' prior learning, and there are examples of trainees whose prior achievements have not been recorded.

13. Some trainees make slow progress. Some trainees have been on programme for almost three years and have not yet obtained their NVQ level 2. The programme is being extended for some trainees who have failed to qualify within the initially identified time scale. Trainees are often not registered with the awarding body for NVQ level 3 until the end of their third year. Reviews of trainees' progress are carried out both in the workplace and at college, and usually occur every eight weeks. The reviews do not focus on trainees' progress towards achievement of the NVQ and trainees are not set targets. In some instances, the review only involves the employer and a member of the college staff who discuss the trainees' general progress; the trainees in question then receive a separate progress review at the college. Trainees and employers have a poor understanding of key skills, and some modern apprentices in their third year do not know of what they are. Individual training plans do not give details how trainees will be trained in key skills and they do not specify targets for the acquisition of competence in key skills.

13. The New Deal programme at the college operates on a roll-on, roll-off basis for clients. It covers motor-vehicle and electrical servicing. There are currently five new deal clients in motor-vehicle and four in electronics. Motor-vehicle trainees attend college initially for a 10-week block of practical training, followed by day-release when on placement. Work placements are in short supply, and both the college and the clients make efforts to find them. Assessments are carried out in the workplace, and clients work towards achieving some units of the NVQ level 2. Clients in motor-vehicle also receive good workshop experience. Of six clients last year, two obtained NVQ level 1 and one obtained NVQ level 2. There are low retention rates on the engineering programmes. Half of the New Deal clients failed to complete their training.

Business administration

Grade 3

14. Solihull College runs administration and using information technology programmes. There were 36 trainees on these programmes at the time of the

inspection. Of these, 13 trainees were working towards NVQs in administration. There were two modern apprentices, seven national trainees and four on other training programmes. One modern apprentice was working towards NVQs in accounting. The remaining 22 trainees were all working towards and NVQ in using information technology. Of these, three were modern apprentices and three were national trainees. There were also 16 adults on the adult training programme. All the youth trainees are employed in companies. These include small independent companies, local authorities and public service organisations. Most of the administration youth trainees attend weekly day-release sessions. The youth trainees on the information technology programme remain at work. The adult trainees spend the first six weeks on a block course and then go on work experience placements. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. They considered that others were more relevant to generic areas. They found weaknesses the college had not identified and they awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ work-based assessments for youth trainees
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to gain additional qualifications
- ◆ good learning opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ clear action plans for trainees' progression

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no use of witness testimonies
- ◆ no provision of key skills training as an integral part of training programmes
- ◆ insufficiently individual programmes for adult trainees
- ◆ youth trainees' lack of understanding of the extent of their progress

15. Assessment of trainees' performance is carried out mainly in the workplace. Day-release trainees receive some assessment during their time at college but this is usually related to their theory work or because there are obstacles to assessment in the workplace. There is a designated workplace assessor who identifies assessment opportunities at work and, where appropriate, liaises with supervisors to plan assessment. Portfolios belonging to trainees on the youth programme contain significant amounts of evidence gathered in the workplace. Trainees attending on a day-release basis have good opportunities to take word processing qualifications. Priority is given to building trainees' self-confidence, and developing communication and team working skills. Trainees in the workplace have wide-ranging responsibilities that are appropriate to the specifications for their qualifications. Employers are supportive towards them and readily provide help when needed. Work environments are good. Many employers provide good on-the-job training, mainly through work shadowing and mentoring. Trainees value the training opportunities they have and feel they are significantly improving

their skills and employability prospects. In particular, the adult trainees are highly appreciative of their programmes and very clear about what they are learning. Staff make regular visits to the workplace to carry out assessment and reviews of trainees progress. At the end of each review session, an action plan is discussed and agreed between trainee and assessor. The plan includes challenging targets to be met by the next visit. Trainees are clear about what they need to do and most fulfil their interim objectives. Some data on trainees' achievement and retention rates are unreliable. In 1998-99, these rates averaged 50 per cent.

16. Workplace supervisors and trainees' colleagues do not use witness testimonies for assessment purposes. Trainees are not aware that they can be used as a form of evidence. Opportunities for workplace assessment are being missed. Some assessors are uncertain of the difference between records of the observation of trainees' performance and witness testimonies. National trainees and modern apprentices have made no progress in key skills. In general, assessors and trainees have a poor understanding of how trainees can acquire competence in key skills. In one training session, an assessment task involved the trainees in giving short presentations about their employers. The assessment, however, did not cover communication skills even though these were essential to the exercise, and a good opportunity to assess trainees' key skills was lost. The adult programme requires all trainees to follow the same learning programme that is mainly based on assignments and projects. The content of all trainees' portfolios is very similar. The trainees are not allowed to choose an optional unit but they must all take the same unit. Their training programmes are not differentiated to reflect the needs and aptitude of individual trainees. The portfolios for those on youth training do not contain any detail of which units the trainees have completed. Assessment is continuous but the process for monitoring trainees' progress does not include feedback to trainees. Trainees are uncertain of what they have achieved to date and they are vague about when they expect to complete their qualifications.

Retailing & customer service (fork-truck)

Grade 3

17. Training is provided in fork-truck operations. Unemployed adults under a work-based training scheme and clients under the New Deal training option are referred to Solihull College by the employment service. New Deal clients undertake the same training programme as the trainees on the work-based training programme for adults. Following induction and initial assessment, trainees and clients follow a one-week, off-the-job training programme, and take the practical test which leads to the fork-truck operator's certificate. College staff at the Chelmsley campus provide the instruction and supervise the tests. The instructional staff are qualified to supervise both the theoretical and practical tests. Following the practical off-the-job training, clients and trainees are placed with suitable local employers for work experience and to gather work-based portfolio evidence for assessment for the NVQ in lift truck operations at level 2. Placements last for six or seven weeks. Trainees and clients attend college on day release for theory work. During the academic year 1998-99, there were 104 work-based adult

trainees and 33 New Deal clients. At the beginning of the inspection, there were seven work-based adult trainees and seven New Deal clients. During the inspection, an additional four work-based trainees and one New Deal client were recruited. Inspectors considered many of the strengths in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice and that some were more relevant to the management of training. They agreed with only one of the weaknesses and found other weaknesses the college had not identified. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality of instruction
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ large and well-equipped premises for training
- ◆ extensive range of modern trucks

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in the assessment process
- ◆ inadequate recording of the accreditation of prior experience
- ◆ trainees' and clients' poor attendance rates
- ◆ trainees' and clients' low retention rates

GOOD PRACTICE

There is good practice in preparing trainees for work. Trainees who pass the test for the fork-truck operator's certificate, trainees are able to attend the centre the following day to receive additional training. This additional instruction includes accessory and attachment training, side shift instruction and some external training on a diesel truck. If trainees require additional training on a reach truck to help them in their job or work placement, this is also arranged. Such additional training helps the trainees to become more employable.

18. Accommodation is of good quality. The premises where off-the-job instruction in fork-truck driving takes place is in a large modern building with a high ceiling which was especially adapted for this training. It is well lit and airy. The premises are well equipped with three new large racking bays, two chicanes, and with ample space for turning and for pivot training. Between the racking, there is an aisle for reach truck training. There is a large and a small training room. Outside there are disused tennis courts where additional training takes place when the weather permits. The training equipment is of good quality, modern and well maintained. There are two reach trucks, three electric counterbalance trucks all of different manufacture, one diesel truck and two pedestrian mobile carriers, one of which is electric. The college owns one electric counterbalance truck and the others are leased to the college and maintained by the supplier. Although there is no gas operated vehicle, trainees have a wide range of trucks available on which to learn and practise. Some of the counter balance trucks have side shift on the forks, but trainees are not allowed to use these until after they have taken their tests. The pallets are of good condition and the practice loads have been especially designed and produced by the college.

19. Instruction is particularly good. Training is usually given on a one-to-one basis. Instructors are well qualified and suitably experienced. Considerable care is taken with safe working practices. Care is taken to ensure that trainees develop good and safe working habits. Explanations are given of the particular procedures

POOR PRACTICE

The following is an example of poor practice in assessment. In order to speed the assessment process assessors have prepared pre-printed witness testimonies. These were issued to trainees for use by work placement supervisors in providing evidence of trainees competence. They are identical, cover the complete element and give no scope for the supervisor to write a full statement of what has actually been observed. Supervisors are only required to insert the trainee's name and sign the document.

to be followed and methods of operation to be used. Trainers go over important points again and encourage the trainees to ask questions. At the end of each session, the trainer summarises what has been taught and checks the trainees' understanding through directed questions. Oral and practical instruction is reinforced by written material. Practical tests are carried out well and they meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. Clear marking schedules are used and detailed feedback is given to trainees after each test.

20. The college selects good-quality training placements with local employers who have a firm commitment to giving practical and relevant work experience to clients and trainees. Employers are also selected because they are able to offer a wide range of work-based training opportunities with a significant fork-truck element. Current placements include large high street retail stores, builders' merchants and large general warehouses. Trainees and clients are carefully matched to local employers. The employers display enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the training programme. Their enthusiasm for training infects the trainees and clients. Most employers provide one-to-one coaching and support day-release training. Many trainees have obtained employment with the employer who provides their placement. Most employers actively support the trainee by providing good individual coaching and a strong commitment to day-release training. Many placements have previously employed trainees following their training programme.

21. The assessment process is weak. There is little work-based assessment and where it does take place, it is towards the end of the programme. The college relies on witness testimony from placement supervisors. These are pre-prepared letters and identical. The awarding body guidance logs are used as the main record of assessments. There are no action plans or evidence of following assessment and trainers do not systematically discuss assessment decisions with trainees. The content of portfolios is similar and it is insufficiently individualised. Individual training plans are prepared, but they are not maintained as a record of trainees' or clients' progress. Trainees' and clients' prior achievements and experience are given some degree of recognition. This is not formally recorded, however, or reflected in individual training.

22. The trainees' attendance record at the college is poor. Trainees frequently do not attend or are late. Instructors do not know how many trainees or clients are expected until the session actually commences. Traditional registers are not maintained. Each trainee is logged onto a computer on arrival and at departure. Although the attendance record of individuals can be traced, the lack of manual register makes it difficult to keep track of the attendance record of the group as a whole. The computer data in respect of trainees are not easily obtainable after the academic year to which it relates. Trainees' retention rates are low and can be as low as 30 per cent. From the beginning of October 1999, 26 trainees and New Deal clients were recruited. Of these, 18 were successful in achieving the forklift truck operator's certificate. Eight left within the first three weeks without taking the certificate. Three trainees left the scheme after taking the certificate and without completing work for their NVQ. The remaining fifteen trainees and New Deal clients are still attending. In 1998-99, the proportion of trainees and clients known to have obtained jobs was only 6 per cent. This low proportion, however, was

arrived at on the basis of the number of returns from trainees and clients who send proof of employment after leaving. College staff maintain that there is local demand for fork-truck drivers and they believe that, in reality, a higher proportion of trainees and clients obtain jobs. The college does not follow up former trainees and clients systematically to find out whether they have obtained appropriate employment.

Hospitality

Grade 3

23. There are 16 national trainees in this programme area. Eight female trainees are undertaking reception training at NVQ level 2. One female and seven male trainees are working towards an NVQ in food preparation at level 2. The trainees spend one day a week in the college and four days per week in a work environment. Most of the assessment is work-based. Trainees work in a range of top quality establishments, including national group companies, chain hotels and owner-managed establishments. There are currently three full-time and three part-time college-based staff and two work-based assessors. All staff are occupationally qualified and also qualified as trainers, assessors and verifiers. Assessment is also undertaken through third-party observation and witness statements. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report but considered others to be no more than normal practice. They found both strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified and they awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and innovative training
- ◆ strong commitment of support staff to training
- ◆ enthusiastic and highly-motivated trainees
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to work towards additional qualifications
- ◆ good learning materials
- ◆ good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment
- ◆ some work placement providers' poor understanding of NVQs
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ poor use of learning materials in catering
- ◆ trainees' low retention rates on food preparation programme

24. When preparing food as part of their training at college, the trainees are put under considerable pressure, comparable with that found in a commercial establishment. The food they cook is blast frozen for sale at a later date. The

hospitality staff are fully committed to ensuring the trainees receive good work-based learning. Training is well planned and effectively implemented. Training schemes are clear. In training sessions, trainees are given carefully planned activities that engage their full participation. A variety of different teaching methods is used, including the recording the presentations by video camera. Staff undertake a variety of roles and functions in the training, assessment and verification processes. On the food preparation programme, little work-based assessment is carried out by work-based assessors. Trainees' make good use is made of training diaries to record evidence both on and off-the-job. Witness testimonies are used by some trainers in the workplace to provide a breadth of evidence for assessments. Several key staff roles are being covered by new staff. Staff have strong professional working relationships with the work placement providers. They visit placements at times that fit in with shift work patterns.

25. Care is taken to provide trainees with placements suitable for them. For many of the trainees aged 16 or 17 years of age, it is the first time that they have been in a top quality hotel. College staff help trainees ensure that they develop good communication and social skills as well as vocational skills. Trainees are given help with their training support and good pastoral support. Trainees on the current programme spent the first three weeks based in college, prior to starting the work-based element of the programme. In general, the trainees are in their work placements from Tuesday through to Friday, and attend college on Monday. There are some problems over trainees' attendance and lack of punctuality, which are raised in tutorials and dummy progress reviews. In some instances, trainees' working shifts have an adverse effect on trainees' attendance. Most trainees are highly motivated and enjoy both their training and work. Trainees receive good tutorial support. Individual trainees who need it are given additional learning support. For example, trainees receive assistance with the writing up of evidence and the use of audio cassettes as a means of recording evidence.

26. The training materials are of good quality and are particularly well used by reception trainees. The catering trainees, however, are given handouts but they are not told how to use them in the workplace. Trainees achieve additional qualifications, including basic food hygiene certificates and information technology awards. They can also obtain additional qualifications through work placement in-house training schemes. Previous trainees successfully completing the programme have been given full-time employment by their placement provider and a number have now gained promotion. The placements are all of a particularly good quality. The work placements are visited initially by a college work-based assessor or trainee placement officer and employers receive a well-documented information pack.

27. Although employers support trainees and are strongly committed to helping them succeed, they have a poor understanding of NVQs and the assessment process. There is a lack of work-based assessors and opportunities for assessment in the workplace are missed. The number of trainees who have failed to complete the food preparation programme has been high. Records show that trainees dislike certain aspects of work in the hospitality industry such as shift work, evening and weekend work. In 1998-99, all trainees who completed programmes achieved their

qualification. The achievement rate, however, for all trainees who started the food preparation programme was only 29 per cent. The achievement rate for all trainees who started the hotel receptionists' programme was higher at 67 per cent. The work in some trainees' portfolios is not of a high standard and measures for checking the quality of portfolios are not effective enough. The internal verification process lacks rigour and it is not standardised. Assessments are not recorded in enough detail.

Hair & beauty

Grade 2

28. Solihull College has 50 trainees on hairdressing programmes. Forty-eight trainees are national trainees and all are employed. They are on NVQ level 2 hairdressing programmes. Trainees also have the opportunity to obtain an additional qualification in ear piercing. There are two clients on New Deal programmes. One is on the full-time education option and attends the college's holistic therapy programme. The other client attends the college one day each week for hairdressing training on day-release. This trainee works for four days in a local salon and receives appropriate work-based training. Currently, the trainees work in one of 30 hairdressing salons in the area. All trainees attend the college for one day each week for theory and practical training. The college's hairdressing tutor/assessor usually visits them in the workplace, usually every eight weeks. This tutor is responsible for all areas of off-the-job training and the progress review process. Most assessments are carried out during practical sessions at the college but some assessments are implemented in the workplace by the college assessor/tutor. Currently, only one employer has a member of staff who is a qualified assessor. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report but they considered others to be no more than normal practice. They found both strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified and they awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective planning of on- and off -the-job training
- ◆ effective integration of key skills with the vocational content of programmes
- ◆ good-quality training in the salons
- ◆ trainees' good progress in acquiring practical skills
- ◆ highly productive links with employers
- ◆ enthusiasm and commitment of staff to helping trainees to succeed

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no progression available to NVQ level 3 hairdressing
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of individual attention for trainees in large off-the-job training groups
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous and poorly planned internal verification

29. The training is planned effectively to ensure that there are clear links between work in college and work in the salons. There is a clear year planner that identifies all the work to be completed during the 48-week programme of off-the-job training in the college. This planner also has a column for the salon work that has to be completed, to aid co-ordination of the training programme. Alongside this is a column for the homework to be completed by the trainees with details of the reading they have to do. This year planner is distributed to all employers and trainees and employers are very appreciative of this document. One large employer has re-designed its salon-training programme to ensure that the training in the college and the salon are fully co-ordinated. Employers are also given a salon-training guide identifying a series of tasks which trainees completed in the salon and through which they can gather as additional evidence for their portfolios. The trainee and the trainer sign this document. This salon-training guide is an integral part of the year planner. There is also a report sheet, which is used to record any practical work completed by the trainee in the salon. The employers and college tutors have good working relations. All employers are involved in the reviews of trainees' progress. They are also kept informed about their trainees' attendance record at the college.

30. All salons provide training for their trainees, usually in the form of specific model sessions and demonstrations. Trainees work on models and practise a wide variety of hairdressing techniques. There are few opportunities, however, for this work to be subject to NVQ assessment. In the salons, trainees receive good-quality training and have the opportunity to observe high-class stylists in action. Trainees are able to attend specialist demonstrations and national hairdressing events. Most employers are firmly committed to training and to ensuring the welfare of their trainees.

31. Much of the off-the-job training is good. Some groups, however, are large with more than 20 trainees and trainers find it difficult to give individual trainees the help and support they need, particularly in practical sessions. Some trainees feel that time is wasted while they are waiting for the tutor to attend to them. The tutor also has to carry out assessments during these sessions with large groups. Trainees, however, demonstrate a high level of practical skills. They are encouraged to acquire skills quickly and training at college is carefully planned to help them do this. There are good demonstrations of hairdressing techniques and appropriate use is made of hairdressing videos to complement the demonstrations. Key skills training is well integrated into the hairdressing programme from the start. Following initial assessment, trainees additional help with key skills if they need it. Trainees demonstrate their competence in key skills for the purpose of certification, by carrying out a series of key skills projects. They are also required to demonstrate key skills as an integral part of their hairdressing assignments and they do so with confidence. They demonstrate a clear understanding of key skills and their assessment. All trainees have information technology skills built into their programme. There are systematic arrangements for accreditation of trainees' prior learning of information technology. College staff have undertaken much work in the past year to make key skills training an integral part of hairdressing

programmes. There has been a wide range of staff development related to key skills.

32. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that there were problems with the internal verification process in 1998-99. There was little planning of internal verification to ensure full coverage of all areas and assessors and little verification of work-based assessment was carried out. A new internal verifier was appointed in June 1999 and considerable work has been completed to improve the internal verification process. Currently, there are no progression routes for trainees to NVQ level 3 hairdressing. The NVQ programme, however, is run over one year and most trainees are achieving NVQ level 2 in 12 to 18 months. In the last two years, trainees' retention and achievement rates have averaged 69 per cent and were higher in 1997-98.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

33. The programme is provided at the Chelmsley campus, an outreach site of the main college. The programme has two main strands. First the prevocational element of adult training and New Deal, which is aimed at helping long-term unemployed adults back to work, with an added focus on the use of new technology. Second, the bridge and new start programme, for disaffected young people who are unclear of their vocational aim and require additional support. At the time of the inspection, there were 18 prevocational trainees, five New Deal clients, 13 bridge trainees and four new step trainees. New step has superseded the bridge programme and in future all trainees will follow this. Attendance varies in length. Trainees attend the prevocational programme for 26 weeks and New Deal clients attend for 20 weeks, prior to joining the full-time educational and training programme. Bridge lasts 10 weeks and new start 12 weeks. The course covers personnel effectiveness, confidence building, vocational guidance, and job-search activities, as well as help with literacy and numeracy needs and an introduction to computers. Work tasters and work placements are offered. Trainees work towards a range of qualifications, which include literacy and numeracy, national skills profile, information technology awards and NVQs in administration and information technology at level 1 and 2. Trainees also have access to the varied range of vocational courses offered within the college. Trainees attend for an in-depth interview and basic skills test. Their options are discussed and a training plan is agreed. Trainees attend full-time for five days, except when on work tasters or work experience, when attendance is adapted to suit the individual. The main tutors act as mentors and carry out progress reviews. The business and community development team finds work placements and matches trainees to them. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found both strengths and weaknesses, however, which the college had not identified. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective individual training programmes

- ◆ well-taught personal development sessions
- ◆ good range of learning resource materials
- ◆ stimulating and purposeful learning environment
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to work towards additional qualifications
- ◆ good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work placements
- ◆ inadequate arrangements for reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ lack of appropriate variety in some teaching sessions
- ◆

GOOD PRACTICE

There is good practice in using real life situations to develop the life skills of trainees. The trainees have set up a luncheon club. They plan the menu, work out the ingredients, and calculate how much it will cost, purchase the food and prepare the meal, which is sold to others in the group. They practise and gain valuable skills in an enjoyable way. All profits are then used to purchase something that will benefit the group, such as games for their quiz sessions. This helps trainees to learn how to balance budgets and manage their own finances.

34. The initial assessment process is good. Following initial assessment, an individual training programme is devised for each trainee. This is updated as the trainees make progress. Trainees who develop an aptitude for a subject, are given more complex training, while trainees who are not progressing quickly enough are given intense one-to-one coaching to overcome any barriers they have to learning. The tutors have extensive experience of working with people who need help getting back to work and they are responsive to trainees' needs. Trainees who have never touched a computer but show aptitude are enabled to work successfully towards a full NVQ. Someone with a back problem was provided with a specialist chair, another had the manual handling course added because of difficulties they had encountered with lifting in the past. Many trainees have deep-seated problems, affecting their employability. These difficulties range from personal, behavioural or attitudinal problems, and many trainees have a lack of self-worth. The personal development sessions are designed to help tackle many of these problems. The programme is demanding for trainees. Some trainees have to face up to difficult issues, but they do so in a learning environment which they find safe and supportive. All trainees benefit greatly from their training programmes and they say that through their training, their self-esteem and confidence are increased. They feel positive about the future, ready to expand their horizons and confident that they can overcome barriers to learning.

35. There is a comprehensive range of learning support materials, both for basic skills and information technology. Basic computer skills have been grouped into seven levels of difficulty, with a small number of tasks for trainees at each level. Trainees feel that they are making progress as they move to the next level. The same approach has been taken with the skills for information technology awards and the NVQs. Trainees carry out small manageable tasks which build upon one another at different skill levels, and as they move from one level to the next, they can identify the extent of their progress. They are encouraged to organise their own learning and they use learning packs that have model answers against which they can check their own work. Basic skills work is based on real life situations such as planning a trip to a local point of interest, manufacture of craft items to sell and a number of other examples for the national skill profile. Trainees work for literacy and numeracy qualifications.

36. At the learning centre, trainees work confidently and are well motivated. Their success spurs them on to further achievement. Trainees work well on their own, knowing that one-to-one support is available to them if they need it. There is a good tutor to trainee ratio of one-to-seven. All trainees, including new trainees who join the group, understand what they have to do and they work diligently. Trainees of all ages foster a caring spirit towards one another. Younger trainees help older trainees to master computer skills, and older trainees promote the benefits of training. In 1998-99 only twenty nine per cent of trainees left the programme early. As well as achieving the requisite milestones, trainees are able to work towards additional qualifications to make themselves more employable. They can gain additional skills profile units, extra NVQ units or they participate in additional short courses. Sixty per cent of trainees in 1998-99 and 83 per cent of trainees in the current year have obtained at least one milestone.

37. There are not enough work placements for trainees. At the time of the inspection, only 12 per cent of youth trainees and 5 per cent of adult trainees were placed with an employer. Trainees are not given enough opportunity to develop and practise skills in a real work situation. Those employers who do take trainees on work placements are given little information about them, their training programme, the qualification they are working towards, or their own role in relation to the trainees. Trainees receive reviews of their progress every four to six weeks. In 1998-99, however, only 18 per cent of trainees achieved two or more milestones, and only one per cent achieved all three. In the first half of 1999-2000, 23 per cent have achieved two milestones and fourteen per cent have achieved all three. In personal development sessions, trainees work effectively in a variety of ways. For example, they work on their own, in pairs, in groups, and as a whole class. Tutors do not employ such diversity of working methods, however, in basic skills sessions. Some teaching materials are old and poorly presented.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

38. The college has an equal opportunities committee and steering group, as well as an equal opportunities advisor. The role of these two groups is currently under review. It is intended that one group consisting of senior managers and the equal opportunities adviser, will be responsible for policy on, and promotion of, equal opportunities. The second group will involve students and ensure that the curriculum and student support arrangements further the promotion of equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities policies are reviewed every three years to ensure compliance with legislation. The last review took place in spring 1999. Staff recruitment is monitored, in terms of applicants' gender, ethnicity, age and disability, to ensure that equality of opportunity is upheld. The main college and Chelmsley sites are accessible to persons with physical disabilities. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report but they considered some of them to be no more than normal practice. They found three weaknesses

the college had not identified and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive range of policies and procedures
- ◆ continuous programme of staff training related to equal opportunities
- ◆ internal initiatives to support equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities on work-based programmes
- ◆ no specific initiatives to recruit trainees from under-represented group
- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities through marketing materials

39. The college has a wide range of policies and procedures, including equal opportunities and harassment policies, complaints and grievance procedures, and a staff code of conduct. The disability statement is available in large print, on tape and disc. A new policy on stress is available but awaiting final approval. A shortened version of the equality, grievance and complaints procedure is issued to trainees during their induction. Trainees have access to all policies, full copies of which are on display in the main college library. Staff induction includes a session devoted to equality of opportunity, and an explanation of the various policies and procedures the college provides. The staff development programme includes a half-day session to develop awareness of equal opportunities principles and practice. A more complex module is also available, either as a stand-alone course, or as part of the teacher accreditation programme. The college's annual staff development day includes seminars on equality. This year, these seminars covered equality of opportunity, student/trainee retention, developing a cultural awareness, and dyslexia beyond the basics. The management development module has a section on managing equal opportunities.

GOOD PRACTICE

There is a strong awareness of the importance of equal opportunities. In a training session for hotel receptionists, the trainees gave excellent examples of how problems related to equal opportunities were dealt with in the workplace. The tutor presented a number of actual scenarios and these led to productive discussion and sharing of ideas.

40. The learning centre at Chelmsley was relocated to aid ease of access for trainees with mobility problems. A group of persons with physical disabilities was consulted about making the buildings more accessible and on their advice, ramps were installed. The main college has a minicom system and hearing loops have been provided in the newer lecture theatres. The college puts on courses for those interested in learning sign language, and has access to part-time tutors with expertise in helping trainees with hearing impairment. At Chelmsley, the students' recreation area has a section devoted to information from different support agencies, one of which recently gave a talk to staff and trainees on mental health issues. The learning centre has built links with a charity that helps disabled people gain access to training and employment.

41. Although monitoring of equal opportunities covers all the students attending the college, there is little specific monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities for work-based trainees. Some of the equal opportunities data on trainees are incorrect. For example, data show that 0.5 per cent of trainees have

some form of disability, but tutors know that the actual proportion is higher than this. No action has been planned to make the monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities for work-based trainees more rigorous. Employers are asked whether they would be willing to accept a trainee with learning difficulties or disabilities. If the employer declines, the placement is still used. Often the placement provider is unaware of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the contracting staff do not explain this or offer advice related to it. Employers are not asked for a copy of their equal opportunities policy. In manufacturing and hairdressing, a large number of trainees are referred direct from employers, but no monitoring of their employment practice takes place to ensure all applicants are treated fairly. The employers' contracting form asks merely that employers comply with the college policy on equal opportunities but this makes no reference to employers.

42. Although the college is committed to upholding equality of opportunity, it has no specific initiatives for its promotion on work-based programmes. None of the policies refers to work placements, employers or trainers, but only to college staff and students. At induction, staff do not use a checklist to ensure trainees fully understand the importance of equal opportunities. Hairdressing, administration and engineering trainees have poor recall of equal opportunities issues. There are no targets for the recruitment of groups under-represented on programmes. Promotional literature does not carry positive images in relation to equal opportunities. The college's marketing material and charter do not state that the organisation upholds and promotes equality of opportunity.

Trainee support

Grade 2

43. Prospective trainees are referred to the college by the local careers service and the Employment Service, and some also apply direct for work-based training. All prospective trainees are recruited by the admissions staff of student services and are interviewed by the occupational specialists. Student services units are based at the Blossomfield and Chelmsley campuses. They provide all general and careers guidance, counselling, and help for those with learning difficulties. Trainees receive a general induction to their programme and NVQ programme. Additional support for trainees is provided either individually or in groups in the college's two learning centres. Trainees have progress reviews with their assessors at either two- or four-week intervals depending on their programme.

The main weaknesses identified at the first inspection were:

- ◆ no initial assessment for some trainees
- ◆ little accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ non-existent or inadequate individual training plans
- ◆ inadequate progress reviews
- ◆ poor recording systems for trainee support
- ◆ little evaluation of trainee support

44. Since the first inspection, the new vice principal has carried out a review of this area to identify any deficiencies. This review has included initial assessment, accreditation of prior learning, use of training plans and progress reviews and recording of trainee support given. New procedures have now been implemented and new staff appointed to that learning and pastoral support are provided in a consistent way across both campuses. Most of the weaknesses identified at the first inspection have now been rectified, except for the one relating to the evaluation of support, and support for trainees is now good. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the college in its latest self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of additional support for trainees
- ◆ good individual pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ effective job-search programme
- ◆ good use of social activities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor progress reviews
- ◆ inconsistencies in documents used for initial assessment
- ◆ insufficient analysis of the effectiveness of support given

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are able to complete a practical certificate in employment skills and career development which comprises four units. These include self-assessment and career development, job-search skills, job application skills and interview skills. Trainees produce a portfolio which shows how they have reviewed their own skills and achievements, reviewed career opportunities and applied for jobs in writing, using the telephone and preparing for interviews. This provides a record of their achievements to help them to progress into employment.

45. Solihull College offers a wide range of additional and learning support to trainees. This support is designed to meet the varying needs of all trainees at the college. At their initial interview and during induction, trainees are informed of these services, including the childcare facilities on both campuses, careers and general guidance, counselling and learning and additional support. Additional support is identified and recorded during the initial assessment process. It is provided, through one-to-one sessions or in groups, to improve trainees' number, communication and information technology skills. Key skills learning packs are also used to enable trainees to work at their own pace and level of ability. Trainees are issued with different coloured booklets appropriate to their learning needs for application of number, communication and information technology. Target sheets are used to identify their short-term aims and how these will be achieved, as well as the dates completed. Detailed records of their work focus on their individual needs such as spelling, punctuation and the use of dictionaries. Other records contain details relating to using addition and subtraction for number skills, or the use of graphs and charts in spreadsheet programs and how to edit data on word processing packages. Trainees receive positive feedback on their achievements and clear records of progress are kept for all additional support requirements. Support is also available for non-readers, those with severe literacy and numeracy difficulties, and trainees with dyslexia. This includes using a phonetic and structured approach to spelling to counteract any visual problems with letters and words.

46. Trainees are given help with a range of social and personal difficulties. All tutors receive training on a variety of issues, including on reviewing the learning and personal development of trainees. Tutors also have a mentor and the quality of personal support given to trainees is monitored. An incident book is kept at Chelmsley Wood containing procedural and guidance notes, any difficulties encountered with trainees and how issues were resolved. It includes details on a range of organisations or college services providing advice and guidance and counselling in areas such as drug awareness, dyslexia and housing issues. Staff are also working on a college-wide initiative on the *Abuse of Trust Code* in conjunction with social services. Several trainees have been referred to the counsellors in the college at Blossomfield, and these counsellors also visit Chelmsley Wood twice a week and make individual appointments with trainees. Trainees are able to discuss confidential issues in a supportive environment. Support is also given to trainees who are having difficulties in the workplace. Any advice given is recorded and issues are followed up, including problems with trainees working unsociable hours and relationships with supervisors. Trainees are also given any equipment needed to help with physical disabilities and, where required, chairs for those with back problems. The trainees on the Learning Gateway have a mentor who is also a youth and community development worker, to help those who are underperforming and to motivate them to complete their training programme.

47. Trainees participate in social activities which help them to gain confidence and practice the skills they have learned. These include organising transport and trips to museums, art galleries and other cultural activities. They are able to write about the events to help to improve their communication skills. Several groups are also involved in organising a lunch club where trainees plan ingredients, buy food, cook lunches and sell them to others to help to improve their organisational and number skills.

48. The college offers good job-search facilities at the Blossomfield and Chelmsley Wood campuses. Some trainees attend on a voluntary basis, while others, such as pre-vocational trainees and New Deal clients, attend as part of their training programme. A wide range of resources is used to support trainees. These include an industry directory which tells trainees which newspapers or trade journals to use for each occupational area, a book of websites for each area and directories giving an in-depth description of what jobs entail. The Internet is used to show trainees how to search for jobs, and trainees are introduced to the Employment Service's website to find a range of local jobs which are printed out and used as part of their job-search portfolios. An online service is also used to identify career paths and occupations for trainees. Trainees also have access to the college's careers officers for advice and guidance and a service which identifies and seeks to meet their requirements. Job vacancies are advertised on notice boards across the two campuses. Trainees are able to make use of the college's well-resourced learning centres, information technology facilities and the library. They are also able to complete a range of job-search modules which include job leads, analysing jobs, letters of application and job interviews in two parts. Further modules are offered such as hurdles to a return to work, managing time, starting

and keeping a job. Others contain information relating to training opportunities, self-employment and 'in work' benefits. Prevocational trainees are able to work on several of these modules and obtain a certificate in employment skills and career development aimed at those seeking employment. Staff work with local careers offices to provide the programme for trainees.

49. Solihull College has made improvements to its review process since the first inspection. All trainees are now given reviews which are carried out as required, to support them both at the college and in the workplace. Some reviews are detailed and contain short-term targets for trainees to achieve, such as specific elements of literacy and numeracy qualifications, units towards a computer literacy and information technology qualification (CLAIT) or individual goals or 'milestones'. However, some reviews are still poor and lack sufficient detail of the activities needed to enable trainees to progress towards their target qualifications. Future actions agreed with trainees on reviews include comments such as a requirement to attend the college's salon training, to complete units of an administration qualification, or the need to collect more evidence for the NVQ. However, interim targets are not set to challenge and motivate trainees. A range of documents is used when reviewing trainees' progress. The current review form being used by staff does not cover health and safety monitoring or equal opportunities in the workplace. The previous version used did contain this information but was not completed thoroughly. Record and assessment sheets are being used as review sheets and the quality of information recorded is sometimes poor. Some reviews are also not signed by employers.

50. All trainees are now given an initial assessment, and their literacy and numeracy skills are now assessed in all occupational areas, to identify any learning and support needs. However, there are inconsistencies in the way other types of initial assessments are being carried out, depending on the occupational area. In hairdressing, for example, trainees are given an occupational assessment which is designed by the local TEC. Following a college-wide initiative, all trainees were given a computerised key skills initial assessment which included information technology. The computer was insufficient to cope with the volume of data to be produced and problems occurred with diagnosing individual needs. As a result, two occupational areas have continued with this assessment while others have not. The college's TEC development group is currently reviewing ways of standardising the approach to initial assessment across all areas.

51. The college now effectively records the support provided for trainees. However, it still does not evaluate the effectiveness of the support given. Staff have not systematically reviewed the extent to which trainees receive pastoral support and whether any trends are emerging to identify whether, for example, there is an increase in the number of trainees being referred to counsellors or other support organisations in the vicinity.

Management of training

Grade 2

52. The management of work-based training has recently been restructured. It is now co-ordinated centrally from a new contracts management unit established in August 2000 and based at the Blossomfield road site. The unit is responsible for contractual compliance and for monitoring and managing statistical data. The unit is under the responsibility of the new vice principal who has been in the position since March 2000. Work-based training is provided by the college's three main teaching divisions and learning centres, and each covers different curriculum areas. Work-based training is provided at both the Blossomfield site, and a site at Chelmsley Wood. There is a New Deal co-ordinator and a TEC co-ordinator. Responsibility for the programmes lies within the divisions, whose staff are responsible for training, assessment, verification and trainees progress reviews which are carried out at least every eight weeks. The college achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1995 and was re-accredited with it in 1999. Staff have an annual appraisal. A college handbook has been produced which has been issued to all staff.

At the time of the initial inspection, the identified weaknesses were:

- ◆ weak management of training
- ◆ poor contingency management to deal with high staff turnover
- ◆ confusion over staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ little use of data in decision making
- ◆ poor communications
- ◆ little co-ordination of on-and off the job training
- ◆ ineffective arrangements for sharing good practice

53. Work has been carried out in each area and all of the original weaknesses have been rectified. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in this area. One weakness, relating to employers' awareness of on-the-job training, could not be verified. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good management of work-based training
- ◆ effective internal and external communication
- ◆ good use of information on labour market
- ◆ comprehensive staff development programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little target setting or use of action plans in one occupational area

54. Effective changes have been made to the way which work-based learning is organised, and this has been well managed. Divisions are now responsible for all aspects of the qualification, including assessments and reviews of trainees' progress. A new contract management unit has been established to manage and monitor the contract with the TEC. The college has liaised closely with the divisions and carried out regular effective action planning, and has rectified all of the weaknesses identified during the first inspection. The action-planning process is monitored weekly, and is used to identify responsibilities and set targets for completion.

55. Internal and external communications are good, and good practice is shared across the college. Weekly development meetings are held to assess the way in which the programmes are run, to monitor action-planning and some sharing of good practice. Staff from the teaching divisions and support staff attend these meetings. Enterprise co-ordinators' meetings are held every two weeks to plan and prepare for the future. An administration meeting is also held every two weeks to focus on contractual issues and changes, and monthly to assess the performance of the contract. Information about the TEC contract is shared in detail with the managers in the teaching divisions. Trainees' records are all held centrally and are regularly updated. However, not all of the divisions have good monitoring systems and so staff in some teaching divisions are not always aware of trainees' progress. Reliable data on trainees are now available, such as on equal opportunities, gender and monthly achievement rates, and these are constantly updated and widely circulated.

56. In planning its work-based learning programmes, the college takes into account local labour initiatives and developments. New work-based training programmes in retail, administration and customer service have been introduced in response to economic developments in the borough of Solihull, while motor-vehicle, refrigeration and air conditioning, and bricklaying have been removed from the programmes. This planning also covers the New Deal options. The college collaborates effectively with other agencies both to meet the needs and aspirations of local people and to serve the economic development of the area.

57. The college has a well-planned staff development programme for all staff. Substantial money is allocated for NVQ programmes and curriculum development. Some staff are undertaking NVQs in subjects related to their work. One administration assistant in the contracts department is also following a modern apprenticeship programme. A staff development brochure is given to all staff. This gives details on opportunities for development for staff. This is used in individual appraisals, team reviews and the training and development plans for each area of the college, which link to the college's overall training and development plan. There is also separate staff training for managers on relevant work-based training issues. All staff have detailed job descriptions. Staff within the divisions and the contract management unit are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Some staff have been trained in others roles to ensure colleagues' satisfactory cover during absences.

58. Target-setting and action plans for improvement are not used across all areas. In most areas, all aspects of the training are monitored on a regular basis. This includes statistics, trend analysis, trainees' progress, and achievement and retention rates. However, this process has not been extended to all areas. A small number of employers are not fully aware of the NVQ process, or of the role they are expected to play in the on-the-job training. In one occupational area, little attempt is made to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training, and trainees' progress is not routinely monitored.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

59. The college has clear procedures for quality assurance. These detail the way in which programmes are reviewed, how qualifications are internally verified and moderated, how self-assessment should work, and who is responsible for each aspect of the quality assurance system. This system was introduced in 1999. The staff development programme includes training activities which aim to ensure that the programmes are continuously improved. Overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with a steering group which is chaired by the vice-principal curriculum and quality. This committee shares information with divisional managers, who in turn share it with internal verifiers and assessors. Since the first inspection, each division has appointed a programmes and quality assurance manager, and a cross-college quality assurance manager has been seconded from one of the divisions. The policies and procedures are available to all staff through the college's intranet site.

At the first inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficiently effective quality assurance arrangements for work-based provision
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of work-based training
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment process
- ◆ no arrangements for feedback from employers
- ◆ no separate data on work-based trainees' performance

60. Since the first inspection Solihull College has made significant progress in addressing the main weaknesses identified, and three of these weaknesses have now been rectified. It now has a quality assurance system whereby internal verification is properly planned. Arrangements for internal verification are now systematic and include monitoring and observing of work-based assessors. Feedback from employers is being sought and acted upon. Data are discussed in detail on a monthly basis. Most of the targets set in the action plan drawn up following the first inspection have been met, but there are still weaknesses in the arrangements for evaluating the quality of training and self-assessment. At reinspection, inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the College in its most recent self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good arrangements for gathering feedback from trainees and employers
- ◆ good use of observation of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently rigorous annual review of training programmes
- ◆ insufficient use of data to make judgements for self-assessment report

62. The college effectively collects feedback on training from employers and trainees. A process to gain feedback from employers has been introduced, involving a comprehensive questionnaire which is issued by the college's TEC co-ordinator. Employers are also sent a letter explaining its purpose and they are invited to return it using a pre-paid envelope or by fax. If it is not returned, it is followed up by telephone. The results are thoroughly analysed and feedback is given to the individual divisions about any problems which relate specifically to them, so that they are dealt with. The college has taken action as a result of employers' feedback, on areas such as producing more written guidance on key skills, whereby a factsheet and a newsletter were sent to all employers. Feedback from trainees who are still on a training programme is gathered mainly through questionnaires and through focus groups of trainees from the same occupational area. The college thoroughly analyses any issues that are identified. Trainees also complete questionnaires at the end of their training. They are encouraged to complain if they are unhappy with anything and to make suggestions for improvements in their training. There are a number of cases where this has happened. In engineering, a response sheet was given to trainees which answered the queries they had raised in questionnaires.

63. Good use is made of observation of training as part of the staff appraisal and quality assurance processes. All teaching staff and assessors are observed and records are kept of findings. This is used to action plan and to plan staff development activities. The TEC co-ordinator now observes assessors' visits to the workplace and produces a written report on each visit. This includes an interview with trainees. This means that the college is able to independently monitor both the assessment process and the experience of trainees in the workplace. The TEC co-ordinator also monitors the quality of the records of reviews when they are placed centrally in trainee' files. Some of the weaknesses identified in reviews earlier in the year have been identified and acted upon using this process.

64. The college has standard paperwork for use when carrying out reviews of training programmes, to ensure that reviews are carried out in the same way across different occupational areas. The paperwork covers qualifications, course team members, feedback from trainees, achievement and retention rates, targets, and action plans to address issues raised. However, staff in different occupational areas carry out the reviews with varying amounts of rigour. Some include the comments from trainees and explain how any concerns will be addressed, while others make no use of trainees' feedback. Although information on retention and achievement



rates is recorded, there is little analysis of any trends. Similarly, where there have been major improvements in retention rates, these are not analysed. Equal opportunities data are also included, but trends such as the number of men in traditionally female-dominated occupational areas are not analysed. Targets are set for future achievement and retention rates.

65. The self-assessment process for work-based training has been improved since the first inspection and now involves all staff. The original report submitted for the reinspection in November 2000 was updated in February 2001. In the report the college identified much of the progress that has been made since the reinspection but it did not accurately describe the training at the time of the reinspection. There was insufficient information about how each occupational area functioned. Where a management decision had been made to close motor-vehicle training, this was not identified in management of training. Strengths and weaknesses were not expressed concisely. A small number of weaknesses from the first inspection had not been rectified. Insufficient use was made of the statistical data which were attached as an appendix to the report.