



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION JANUARY 2001

Stafford College

SUMMARY

The off-the-job theory sessions at Stafford College are, generally, effective and maintain trainees' interest. At the first inspection, there were several significant weaknesses in care training, but these have been addressed and there are now effective links between off-the-job training and assessment. Engineering training is good and the training and support in the other occupational areas are satisfactory. A new computer system has been introduced to monitor trainees' progress in construction training but monitoring is not yet fully established. Manufacturing training is satisfactory, although 80 per cent of trainees have been on programmes for seven weeks with informal training arrangements. The management of the training is satisfactory, but there is a lack of data to guide decisions and set targets. Staff are well qualified. The cross-college equal opportunities group is effective and maintains a high profile. There is extensive cross-college quality assurance work. This did not cover work-based training sufficiently at the time of the first inspection. However, specific procedures and paperwork do now cover quality assurance relating to work-based trainees and New Deal clients.

As a result of the reinspection of Stafford College, the original published report text for health, care and public services and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	2
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	3
Hospitality	3
Health, care & public services	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Health, care & public services	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality off-the-job theory sessions
- ◆ good college learning resources
- ◆ excellent support services
- ◆ excellent information-technology facilities
- ◆ effective equal opportunities work within the college



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ insufficient awareness by employers of NVQs in occupational areas
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of work placements
- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ inadequate quality assurance of documents

INTRODUCTION

1. Stafford College is a large, general further education college based on three sites in the centre of Stafford. The catchment area extends to Wolverhampton and into Shropshire. At the time of the first inspection, the college had 252 academic staff and 225 support staff, and this had changed to 251 academic staff and 197 support staff by the time of the reinspection. The college offers government-funded training mainly to those living in Stafford, Stone and Rugeley. These contracts are managed from within the business development unit by the deputy business development manager and the programme manager. The unit works across the college with a remit to manage all work-based training. The deputy business-development manager liaises with staff in the occupational schools to provide training sessions by college lecturers. The unit has 13 trainer/assessors who also give work-based training, on and off site, and liaise with staff in the occupational schools.

2. At the time of the first inspection, the college had the equivalent of 2,000 full-time students, with 366 trainees and New Deal clients on work-based training programmes taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The following tables show the numbers in each occupational area and programme, at the first inspection and the reinspection. New Deal clients are following the full-time education and training option. The occupational areas with fewer than 10 trainees and clients at the time of the first inspection were not inspected*. The 44 meat-processing national trainees in manufacturing at the first inspection were funded by Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). All other trainees were funded through Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), which acted as the co-ordinating TEC for the first inspection. Currently, the college has four contracts with Staffordshire TEC. New Deal clients are funded through the Employment Service.

Numbers of trainees at the first inspection

	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other youth training	Other adult training	New Deal	Total
Construction	27			1	6	34
Engineering	134	13	10		4	161
Manufacturing		44	11			55
Business administration	40	9	1	4	16	70
Retailing & customer service*	5	1	1			7
Leisure, sport & travel*					1	1
Hair & beauty*					1	1
Hospitality	10					10
Health, care & public services	3	2			6	11
Media & design*					7	7
Foundation for work*			7		2	9
Total	219	69	30	5	43	366

Numbers of trainees at the reinspection

	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other youth training	Adult training	New Deal	Total
Construction	39	2		1	3	45
Engineering	126	18	3		2	149
Manufacturing		169	6			175
Business administration	43	11	4		8	65
Retailing & customer service*	42	2	3	1		48
Leisure, sport & travel*					1	1
Hair and beauty*					2	2
Hospitality	4	3		1	1	9
Health, care & public services	1	3			2	6
Media & design*					2	2
Total	257	209	16	7	21	510

3. Stafford is 20 miles north of the Birmingham and West Midlands conurbation and has a population of 60,000. Less than 2 per cent of the local population is from minority ethnic backgrounds. The main employment sectors include engineering, manufacturing, service industries, agriculture and tourism. The general decline in manufacturing across the country has been mirrored locally. Engineering has seen a substantial reduction in the numbers employed. In 1999, the area had an unemployment rate of 2.3 per cent, compared with a national average of 5.1 per cent. The unemployment rate for men, at 3.1 per cent, was substantially higher than the unemployment rate of 1.3 per cent for women. There were areas of significantly higher unemployment. For example, in the Highfields and Common Wards, the rate was 8.5 per cent. These areas still have higher unemployment rates than other local areas. In January 2001, the unemployment rate in the locality of Stafford was 3.1 per cent compared with a national average of 3.5 per cent.

4. There are 63 schools and 21 special schools in the Staffordshire area which offer education to children between the ages of 11 and 18. Six are in Stafford. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Staffordshire was 48.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above in Staffordshire was 48.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

5. At the time of the reinspection, the college had made changes to the senior management team. The vice-principal (curriculum and quality) is the acting

principal. The college has increased the number of TECs it contracts with since the first inspection. The table below shows the differences between the contracts.

TECs	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other youth training	Adult training	New Deal	Total
Staffordshire TEC	255	39	16	3	21	335
Sandwell TEC		93				93
Northamptonshire CCTE		25				25
Milton Keynes and North Bucks CCTE		51				51
Total	255	208	16	3	21	503

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. In preparation for the first inspection, the business development unit's managers and staff attended training and workshops on self-assessment arranged by the TEC. Stafford College produced a self-assessment report and action plan in September 1998. In June 1999, the business development unit produced self-assessment reports on each occupational area and generic aspect. These were consolidated into one report which was validated by the college's quality assurance manager and approved by the senior management team at the end of August. The college drew up a detailed action plan following the publication of the first inspection report in April 2000. An updated action plan with revised self-assessed grades was submitted in November 2000 in preparation for the reinspection. The grades in the self-assessment report were decided upon during discussions between the quality assurance manager and the deputy manager of the business development unit. They considered feedback from trainees and the views of the subcontractor on the way the action plan had been implemented.

7. A team of 12 inspectors spent a total of 33 days at Stafford College during November 1999. All aspects of the training were inspected, including training sessions, trainees' induction, assessments and progress reviews. Twenty-two formal training sessions were observed and the grades awarded for these sessions are shown in the following table. Trainees' records and portfolios, records of assessments, contract information, awarding bodies' reports and the college's policies were examined. Inspectors interviewed 145 trainees and 31 work-placement providers. Forty-three interviews were conducted with staff.

8. The reinspection of health, care and public services and quality assurance was carried out in January 2001 by two inspectors. They were at the college for a total of six days, and visited five work placements, where they interviewed six workplace supervisors. All health, care and public services trainees were interviewed and two off-the-job training sessions were observed, both being awarded a grade 3. Inspectors interviewed 10 of the college's staff and the subcontractor for the manufacturing training. They inspected trainees' files, NVQ portfolios and the college's paperwork, including policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		1	1			2
Engineering	2	11	1	1		15
Business administration	1	1				2
Hospitality			1			1
Health, care & public services		1	1			2
Total	3	14	4	1	0	22

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

9. Stafford college has 34 trainees in this area. Six are New Deal clients, 27 are modern apprentices and there is one trainee on the work-based learning for adults programme. Trainees work towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in wood occupations, brickwork and electrical installation. Induction takes place in the college. The induction is mainly generic with specific areas, such as health and safety, delivered in the construction department. Attendance at college is on a day-release basis with additional training provided where additional learning support is needed. New Deal clients following the full-time education and training option have a 30-hour-a-week programme which includes jobsearch activities. All assessment takes place in the college. Trainers are experienced in the industry and qualified both occupationally and as assessors. The trainees' overall programme is co-ordinated by a member of the business development unit who is occupationally qualified. The proportion of trainees achieving an NVQ has increased from 57 per cent in 1997-98, to 61 per cent in 1998-99. The percentage completing the programme has risen from 14 per cent in 1997-98, to 84 per cent in 1998-99. The self-assessment report failed to identify some significant strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality on-site training
- ◆ good integrated delivery of key skills
- ◆ excellent resource centre
- ◆ great improvements in retention to 84 per cent

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ employers unaware of the NVQ process
- ◆ no formal planning of assessment
- ◆ no integration of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment

10. Off-the-job training takes place in the construction department of the college. Workshops are well resourced. The woodwork machine shop is equipped with machinery which exceeds the requirements of the NVQ. Trainees are able to gain machine experience at an early stage, allowing them to build confidence quickly and to progress well. Theory training in brickwork is good. The trainer in this area has wide industrial experience and uses this to relate training activities to the workplace. A resource centre is used by trainees and is situated within the construction department. It contains a wide range of learning materials. Trainees use computers to access CD-ROM training packages and manufacturers' information website on the Internet. There is a well-stocked library which enhances workshop learning packages. Construction trainers have developed occupation-related key skills assignments. Trainees use the assignments to gather key skills evidence as an integral part of the NVQ process. This helps the trainees to see the relevance of key skills to their occupation. The quality of work-based learning is very good. Trainees are supported by skilled operatives and are expected to produce high standards of work by employers. Trainees are often involved in work that exceeds the requirements of the qualification that they are following. For example, one employer involved trainees in the restoration of Windsor Castle. The work completed by the trainees was highlighted in a local newspaper.

11. Little on-site assessment takes place and there are missed opportunities to use evidence gathered in the workplace. The college has developed a recording sheet to use for work-based evidence but this system is not much in use. Employers are not sufficiently familiar with the NVQ process to be helpful to their trainees. Assessment plans are not used to help trainees to prepare for assessment. Trainees, prior to assessment, are sometimes unaware of which unit is to be assessed. Some of the workshop areas used for assessment are cramped and do not reflect conditions found in the workplace. Assessment practices to meet the requirements of the new NVQ framework for brickwork have only recently been developed by two new trainers. Assessment was delayed until this work was completed. New Deal clients following the electrical installation programme receive 22 hours of directed training. The remaining eight hours are made up by periods of private study. Training activities carried out in the college are not co-ordinated with the skills used at work. Employers are unaware what trainees are learning during off-the-job training, so are unable to give trainees tasks on which to practice newly learnt skills. A computerised progress review system has been introduced which will help to address this problem. This tracks what trainees have completed in their training, what they are currently working on and what they are about to do, so employers can have full access to the trainees' schedules of work.

Engineering

Grade 2

12. Stafford College has 161 engineering trainees. Training is offered in motor vehicle, which has 18 trainees, construction plant engineering with 34 trainees and mechanical and electrical engineering with 109. Of these, 134 are modern apprentices, 13 are national trainees and 10 are on other training programmes for young people. The remaining four are New Deal clients following the full-time education and training option leading to units of an NVQ, and including jobsearch activities. Trainees attend the main training site on block and day release. All modern apprentices and national trainees and 60 per cent of youth trainees are employed. Approximately 60 per cent of trainees are employed by a number of large local employers and the remainder are with small local companies.

13. Motor vehicle trainees normally attend college one day a week and on short weekly blocks for training and assessment. Construction plant engineering trainees attend college, from sites throughout the country, on a series of block-release programmes with all NVQ level 2 assessment carried out by the college's staff. One large employer conducts NVQ level 3 assessment for its trainees, and the remaining trainees at level 3 are assessed by the college's staff during block-release periods. Mechanical and electrical engineering trainees attend college either full- or part-time for one or two years for engineering manufacture (foundation) level 2. NVQ level 3 training for these trainees is delivered in the workplace. The unit employs four engineering trainer/assessors who carry out monitoring visits and some workplace assessment. All engineering work-placement officers are qualified assessors and internal verifiers. In 1998-99, 67 per cent of modern apprentices and 35 per cent of trainees on other work-based training for young people achieved NVQs. There were no national trainees or New Deal clients leaving in 1998-99. The self-assessment report accurately identified key strengths and inspectors highlighted two additional strengths. Some weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were no longer applicable. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and -delivered off-the-job training
- ◆ well-structured on-the-job training
- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ good range of off-the-job workshop facilities
- ◆ excellent key skills integration in engineering and motor vehicle
- ◆ comprehensive induction process with regular tutorial support
- ◆ specialised technology study centre
- ◆ high achievement rates for modern apprentices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of awareness of NVQ programmes by employers

- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment
- ◆ no agreement sought from some trainees and employers regarding NVQ target-setting

14. The college delivers carefully planned off-the-job training. This is provided by experienced staff, who have a good knowledge of industry standards. Training sessions are within good-quality classrooms and well-equipped workshops. Theoretical and practical sessions are taught in a manner that maintains trainees' interest. Workshops have a wide range of well-maintained equipment and there has been investment in modern motor vehicles and construction plant equipment. The motor vehicle department has sophisticated diagnostic equipment on loan from a manufacturer. This ensures that trainees experience state-of-the-art technology. The construction plant workshop has excellent links to a major equipment importer, which provides modern engines and other components to ensure that training is related to current industry technology. College tutors from construction plant maintenance attend technical training courses at a major employer to ensure that they are familiar with technical developments and can incorporate this information into training sessions. Trainees demonstrate a high degree of commitment to both the theoretical and workshop training. They work productively in college without close supervision.

15. Key skills are effectively integrated into the engineering foundation NVQ training and into motor vehicle NVQs at level 2. This process begins with initial assessment and continues throughout the programme. Many trainees have achieved between three and five key skills certificates by the end of their first year of training. No separate key skills are included in construction plant maintenance courses for trainees who began before 1 July 1999, as they are considered nationally to be an integral part of their qualifications without a need for separate certification. Most work placements, particularly with the larger companies, are extremely good in providing ample opportunities for trainees to practise skills and collect evidence, as well as providing clearly structured training themselves. Trainees with large employers are encouraged to obtain additional qualifications such as first aid certificates, computer-aided design skills and other vocational qualifications, in addition to the modern apprenticeship or national traineeship. A number of employers continue to support apprentices through Higher National Diplomas or full- or part-time degree courses after they complete the modern apprenticeship. There is an excellent induction and pastoral support programme, including an assessment of prior achievement and of individual needs. All trainees are encouraged to make full use of the college's wide range of facilities, including the 'technology link centre' which offers information technology, technical support, Internet access, key skills and other support. Trainees regularly use these facilities. All trainees are given a tour and explanation of the 'technology link centre' as part of their induction. Modern apprentices' achievement of NVQs is good at 67 per cent for 1998-99.

16. Some on- and off-the-job training is unco-ordinated. Employers in a number of smaller companies are not aware of their trainees' college timetables and NVQ

programmes. When visiting employers to review trainees' progress, work-placement officers and assessors do not carry out any work-based assessments. Opportunities to record and credit the learning that takes place at work are missed. Trainees and employers are not informed of trainees' progress towards their NVQ qualifications. Action plans are not agreed during monitoring visits. Trainees are not set challenging NVQ targets. Workplace supervisors who do not hold assessor qualifications witness 70 per cent of motor vehicle evidence for the NVQ at level 3. Evidence consists mainly of paperwork completed during routine workplace activities. Little workplace observation or assessment is carried out, and opportunities are missed to gather diverse evidence to enhance the NVQ portfolios.

Manufacturing

Grade 3

17. There are 44 national trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in meat and poultry operations. These trainees are employed at two factories in Northampton which process chickens for sale by supermarkets. The employer has a history of encouraging employees to gain NVQs, and achievement of the NVQ is linked to pay schemes within the factories. Stafford College trains work-based assessors at the factories. The organisation of the training for national trainees is subcontracted to a training provider which is responsible for managing the induction, training and assessment. The first 44 national trainees were enrolled onto the programme at the end of September 1999 and so the programme is very new. Trainees receive an induction in two sections. Part is delivered by the college and the sub-contractor and part is delivered by the employer. All training is delivered and assessed on-site by six work-based assessors, with internal verification being undertaken by the subcontractor. All training takes place on-the-job with any additional theory or revision training delivered in the factory away from the trainee's workstation. A further 11 trainees on other training programmes for young people work for a circuit board manufacturer with sites at Tamworth and Telford and are taking NVQs at level 2 in performing manufacturing operations. The programme has been running at Tamworth since March 1997 and at Telford since February 1998. Trainees' progress is reviewed against the company's standards after three, six and 12 months by the company's staff.

18. The self-assessment report was written before the meat processing training started. Inspectors identified strengths and weaknesses particularly relating to meat processing and awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong commitment to work-based training by meat-processing employer
- ◆ good, one-to-one electronic-assembly training by workplace supervisors
- ◆ high retention rates for electronic-assembly trainees
- ◆ high levels of support for employers by college and subcontractor's staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of trainees basic literacy
- ◆ informal training and assessment arrangements for meat processing trainees
- ◆ training sessions insufficiently structured
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training

19. The meat-processing employer demonstrates a long-term commitment to work-based training. For a number of years, employees have been encouraged to achieve NVQs and some have become work-based assessors. The company has gradually extended the opportunity to all employees and links the achievement of an NVQ to pay scales. There is an excellent level of guidance and support from the college and subcontractor in adopting NVQs as a key part of the company's strategy for staff development. Outline plans for offering national traineeships at the company were agreed between it, the college and the subcontractor. The first group of national trainees was enrolled at the end of September. During induction sessions, basic needs were assessed. Individual training plans were generated. The subcontractor and work-based assessors were due to meet in early November to allocate trainees to assessors, agree programmes of training and discuss the workbooks that trainees would use. This meeting did not take place and no revised date has been agreed for it to happen. The company is aiming to recruit a full-time lead assessor to co-ordinate the onsite training and assessment. All training is to be delivered initially in the workplace. Any additional help, theory or remedial training will take place at the factory away from the trainees workstation. No formal timetable or structured lessons have been agreed for training and assessment. The training so far has enabled trainees to produce ready cooked meals which fully satisfy the factory quality assurance requirements. Delivery of key skills has been discussed with the employer, whose primary focus is the NVQ, but no formal plans have been made and resources have not been allocated.

20. At the circuit-board manufacturer, college assessors fit into shift patterns to carry out assessments. The college's staff are successful in persuading trainees to complete their NVQ, even when their motivation drops. Only one trainee out of the 31 who started training has not achieved his NVQ. All training is delivered on-the-job with trainees learning new skills from experienced staff. All assessment is undertaken by the college's staff, who guide and help trainees to gather evidence from work to construct their portfolios. However, there are no training session plans, task analyses or structured training sessions. There are no work-place assessors on either site, with all NVQ activity being supported by college assessors.

Business administration

Grade 3

21. Stafford College runs the administration training from the business development unit's site in central Stafford. There are a total of 64 TEC-funded trainees taking administration-based courses, of which 40 are modern apprentices, 9 are national trainees, one is on a work-based training programme for young

people and four are on programmes for adults. All the trainees are employed or on work placements in a wide range of businesses in the Stafford area. They are following NVQs in business administration, accountancy, or information technology at levels 2 to 4. A variety of methods is used for delivering the training, with some attending weekly training sessions, while others are trained and assessed by the college's staff in their workplaces. Reviews are carried out on a 13-week cycle with the involvement of employers. Training staff are well qualified and have occupational experience. There are 16 clients following the New Deal full-time education and training option. Clients are based on the main college site and have use of the excellent facilities recently opened there. In 1996-97, three trainees left programmes early and in 1997-98, two left early. In 1998-99, 11 trainees left early and 11 NVQs were achieved. The self-assessment report identified several strengths and weaknesses, but self-assessment lacked rigour. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality information technology and accountancy training sessions
- ◆ good learning facilities for New Deal clients

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ delayed training in key skills
- ◆ poor initial assessment
- ◆ some weak individual training plans

22. The business administration trainees who are not employed attend weekly training sessions at the business development unit where they are given one-to-one advice and guidance about building their portfolios of evidence for the NVQ. This advice is given effectively, with trainees' understanding checked by verbal questioning. The trainees value these sessions and find them helpful. They are set targets at these sessions, and some assessment also takes place at the unit. All trainees use equipment that may not be available in their workplace to enable them to enhance their skills. This need is identified at the start of each work placement when the training staff carry out an assessment of workplace activity and facilities. Opportunities for group work, formal training sessions and peer support are infrequent in business administration. The work in the portfolios is well presented and is of the required standard. Some of the modern apprentices do not attend the unit-based training and are visited in their workplaces on a monthly basis, when guidance and assessment takes place. They can request assessment between visits whenever necessary. This is done by agreement with the employer. If any shortfalls are identified, arrangements are made to rectify these either by changing the job role or by completing a work-related project to provide evidence of skills.

23. The accountancy and information technology trainees all attend structured and scheduled lessons at the main college site. Lessons are clearly delivered, with trainees encouraged to take an active part. During the third year, most accountancy trainees are given study leave to prepare for assessments and examinations.

Employers are supportive of this arrangement and are also involved in the choice of optional units that are best suited to their trainee's job role. Trainees use past test papers and textbooks to help prepare for examinations.

24. All trainees are given an induction lasting a morning, which includes time taken to complete application forms. A basic skills screening test is applied to the trainee, but it does not provide enough specific information to form an accurate individual training plan. Trainees now also take a key skills test on entry. The results are not used for benchmarking against key skills levels to establish current levels of competence but the results indicate any support required. Different tests are used for the different courses across the administration sector. The tests are not demanding and only cover communication and application of number. Some trainees have not been tested and many have not yet started their key skills training and assessment. The accountancy trainees do not do any work towards key skills until the second year.

25. The rooms at the business development unit contain good computer equipment with modern software, but the rooms are rather small and do not have enough space to provide adequate work surfaces. Some trainees are not permitted time off work to attend the college for off-the-job training by their employers. The unit's staff are flexible in scheduling training to ensure trainees receive all the training they need despite this. The unit's staff visit the trainees at their employers' premises to deliver planned, incremented training and to assess their skills. The trainees are well supported by the unit's staff through one-to-one coaching and visits. However, they do miss out on important aspects of training, such as meeting their peers. Achievement rates are slow, with just 11 NVQs completed last year. The delay in key skills training is a factor. The clients on New Deal are based on the main site and are totally integrated with college students. They have access to all the college's facilities and also have the benefit of some small group sessions. The New Deal clients receive specific jobsearch on a six-week cycle during college holidays, but do not have any while in their work placements.

Hospitality

Grade 3

26. There are 10 trainees on catering programmes. All are modern apprentices and are employed. Trainees normally attend the college one-day each week for off-the-job training. They are integrated with other students attending the college. Trainees work in the college's two commercial restaurants, which are open to the public five lunch times and four evenings a week. They are approved by the awarding body as realistic working environments, and some assessments are undertaken here. Most other assessments take place during off-the-job training. Very few assessments take place in trainees' workplaces. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Trainees have the opportunity to complete an additional qualification in food hygiene. In 1997-98, 13 trainees left early and 15 NVQs were completed. In 1998-99, 7 trainees left early and 2 NVQs were completed. The self-assessment report lacked rigour. Many of the 13 strengths represent no more than normal practice, did not affect the trainees' experience, referred to generic areas or

were not supported by evidence. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed additional qualifications
- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ well-planned theme events enhance learning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inappropriate assessment arrangements for NVQ level 2
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous internal verification
- ◆ trainees unaware of appeal procedures

27. Training leading to an additional certificated qualification in basic food hygiene enhances the hospitality programme. Trainees are given the opportunity to complete this qualification early in their programme and are motivated by the achievement of a certificate at this early stage. The college provides trainees with a wide range of resources to help them develop their skills and knowledge. There is a number of well-equipped kitchens, two restaurants and two bars available for training and assessment purposes. They are all well equipped and maintained. A staffed resource centre, which is well equipped with information technology facilities, is used by trainees on a regular basis. The college arranges for themed events in the restaurants to promote trainees' awareness of different foods from various cultures. The trainees are involved with the planning and costing of these events. Food preparation trainees are integrated into the kitchen group preparing and cooking food, and food service trainees are involved in the organisation and setting up of the restaurant for these events.

28. Assessments for the NVQ at level 3 are carried out in the college's restaurants where trainees work to gather evidence to meet the requirements of assessment. The level 2 food preparation trainees attend college for off-the-job training and are assessed during a practical session where they all prepare four to six portions of a set menu, none of which is for sale in the restaurants. This method of assessment does not meet the awarding body's requirements, as it does not take place under normal working pressures.

29. Internal verification lacks systematic planning and rigour. Internal verifiers do not observe assessment practice. Little feedback is given to assessors by internal verifiers about their approach, and what is given is unfocused and not qualitative. Internal verification has not identified a need for trainees to be assessed under real working conditions at their places of work instead of in the more sheltered environment of the college's restaurants. Trainees are not aware of the appeals procedure for the assessment decisions made. Opportunities to record work-based activity or to obtain witness testimony from work-based supervisors are missed.

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

30. The college offers training towards NVQs and BTEC awards in care to young people and adults on the New Deal employment and full-time education and training options. There is one advanced modern apprentice working towards an NVQ in care at level 3 and three foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs in care at level 2. The two New Deal clients are on the full-time education and training option. One client is working towards an NVQ at level 2 in care and the other towards a BTEC diploma in care. At the time of the first inspection, there were two national trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in care, three modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3 in care, and six New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. Four were taking general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in advanced health and social care, one was following a course in childcare studies, and the other was working towards a holistic therapy diploma. All trainees and clients work in care establishments, which include schools for children with special needs, residential and nursing homes and community homes for people with mental illnesses. The TEC-funded trainees are employed full time and attend the college for one day each week for off-the-job training. The New Deal clients work for one or two days each week and attend the college for the remainder of the week. Two of the college's staff are responsible for the work-based assessment, internal verification, off-the-job training, mentoring, progress reviews and liaison with employers. They also do most of the administration of the programme. These two staff are also responsible for 46 trainees on other work-based training programmes who are not funded by the TEC. This has changed since the first inspection, when there were two part-time staff assessing trainees and internally verifying the programmes.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ slow NVQ progress
- ◆ employers unaware of their responsibilities to NVQ trainees
- ◆ inadequate vetting of work placements
- ◆ no integration of key skills
- ◆ poor, unstructured training

31. All the weaknesses identified at the first inspection have been addressed, either in part or in full. The rate of achievement of NVQ units has increased, although there are too few trainees to consider any meaningful data on retention and achievement. Staff discuss the responsibilities employers have to trainees but are not always clear about providing on-the-job training for trainees. The quality of work placements is partially monitored through collecting feedback on trainees' perceptions of their training, and work has been done by the college to teach key skills to trainees. Elements of the training are now effective. For reinspection, the

action plan submitted was based on the original inspection report and the college had given a revised self-assessment grade based upon action completed since the first inspection. Inspectors identified new strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective links between off-the-job training and assessment
- ◆ good security system for portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ late introduction of key skills
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of workplace activity

32. There are good links between the training given at the college and the assessment activities which take place in the workplace. Each assessment includes a discussion about topics covered during off-the-job training, to test the trainees' knowledge thoroughly about the theoretical aspects of their work. The training is cross-referenced to key skills requirements. All the trainees except one attend the college for at least one day each week for off-the-job training. The training sessions are well planned and are taught to a satisfactory level. A good variety of equipment is used for practical demonstrations of care techniques. Trainees often work in pairs and groups. They try out equipment such as wheelchairs to experience how their patients might feel. Training staff have a broad range of occupational experience and are well qualified. Guest speakers are invited to enhance the training. The trainees' portfolios are of a satisfactory standard. The quality of feedback from assessment for trainees is good and all trainees understand how their workplace activities relate to the requirements of their NVQs.

33. There is a rigorous system to monitor the whereabouts of trainees' NVQ portfolios. This was designed in response to an aspect of a weakness identified at the first inspection in the area of quality assurance. A two-part carbonated form is completed each time a trainee hands over a portfolio to a member of staff. The form gives the course title, the trainee's name, and the date when the portfolio was handed over and states where the portfolio will be stored. The trainee retains a copy of the form and one copy is kept in the trainees' file. There is also a list showing the whereabouts of all portfolios as an additional security measure. All portfolios are kept in locked cabinets when not being used.

34. Key skills training and assessment is introduced late in the training programmes, even for some trainees taking NVQs at level 3. In care, the assessors are working towards awards for teaching key skills. The application of number training sessions are scheduled at the end of the trainees' college day, and so they have to stay later than the college's other students to complete this session, which is inconvenient for some trainees. Most trainees have little awareness of how key

skills relate to their workplace activities. The planning of assessments for the care NVQs does not include opportunities to gather key skills evidence, and little evidence has been collected by the trainees.

35. There is insufficient monitoring and recording of workplace training undertaken by the trainees. Some trainees have training in the workplace while others receive no formal training from their employers. Some work-placement providers do not realise that they need to offer on-the-job training. The new progress-review forms do not encourage on-the-job training to be recorded, although they do facilitate the recording of new skills gained. This has been identified by the college and a new draft form remedying this is ready to be introduced. All employers allow the college's staff good access to the trainees to enable them to assess trainees' practical skills, although there is a lack of formal planning of assessments. There is poor attendance at assessors meetings by work-based assessors. To address this, the college plans to introduce a revised employers' agreement requiring that assessors attend to keep them up to date with current practice.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

36. Stafford College's mission statement contains a commitment to ensuring that no trainee should receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, or physical or other disability. A copy of the full equal opportunities policy statement is available on request, but extracts are contained within the student handbook, trainees' training agreement and student charter which are issued to every trainee on enrolment. In addition, the college's Internet site promotes its commitment to equal opportunities. The college catchment area contains 1.5 per cent of people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Employers and work-placement providers are asked if they have a policy for equal opportunities during the college's initial discussions with them. If they do not, then the college supplies them with a copy of the college's policy. Workplaces are checked informally every 13 weeks. If there is a problem then this is recorded and action is taken, but no record is kept of premises being considered suitable. Recording is by exception. There are a few occasions of trainees being found alternative placements owing to breaches in equal opportunities practice, and this has been carried out promptly. The college states it welcomes comments and complaints as a way of checking the quality of its service. A 'Help us to help you' card is available to encourage trainees to record a concern if they feel uncomfortable about approaching a staff member directly. The card can be deposited anonymously in a box outside the client services department. Trainees who feel they have been discriminated against or harassed can seek advice and assistance from their course tutor, client services or the equal opportunities officer. All complaints are reviewed each term, with recommendations being made to the governing body and senior management of the college. Specialist help can be arranged for people with disabilities or sensory

impairments and individual or group support is provided for dyslexic trainees. A day nursery is available for trainees' young children, along with an out-of-hours playcare scheme for older children. There is good access to most parts of the college for trainees with mobility problems. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses, most of which are no more than normal practice. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than indicated in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ high levels of staff participation in equal opportunities training
- ◆ good staff recruitment procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no analysis of trainees' applications
- ◆ no use of data to inform and influence decisions

37. Bi-monthly meetings of the equal opportunities committee are held and minuted. Discussions take place covering a wide range of issues relating to aspects of equal opportunities. Current topics include the production of a leaflet designed to inform and advise students and trainees who have left home on how to find support to enable them to continue their training; and the acquisition of large keyboards for trainees with visual impairments. It also includes equal opportunity monitoring of trainees and devising a strategy to address gender imbalances within programmes. The construction and engineering departments of the college are currently involved in an initiative to attract more women to apply for the courses. The committee has drawn up a plan for the year 1999-2000, identifying issues that require attention. Timescales have been agreed in which to complete the work. The plan includes the production of a college disability statement for issue to all trainees.

38. Comprehensive equal opportunity training has been arranged for all staff and includes a session delivered by the Staffordshire TEC ethnic minority development officer. This training covers disclosure of offenders' information, dyslexia and equal opportunities in general. A detailed list of videos on equality of opportunity has been circulated so that staff can use specific ones to enhance their own training of equal opportunities topics.

39. Advertisements for staff vacancies are placed with the *Asian Times* in addition to the more traditional newspapers. This ensures a wider circulation to potential applicants and invites a response from a broader cross-section of the population. In addition, the front sheet of the application form is detached prior to short listing. The recruitment panel is therefore unable to identify gender, race, and age of the potential applicants.

40. An analysis of applicants by course is available but it does not identify them by occupational route, gender, ethnicity, or disability. It is therefore impossible to gauge whether the recruitment process disadvantages applicants from a particular background or with a disability. The college does attract applications from a wide section of the minority ethnic population but this is not reflected in the take-up of training places. Information is not provided to inform management whether advertising is reaching all potential applicants within the catchment area. Recent attendance at a job fair resulted in a number of inquiries. There has been no analysis of how many inquiries turn into applications.

41. Management-information data are not available to inform and influence decisions. Without data, there is no method of knowing if the activities of the college generally, or the equal opportunities committee specifically, are successful.

Trainee support

Grade 2

42. Stafford College has a dedicated client services centre open to the public and to trainees. Impartial careers guidance is available from a number of sources and the careers service has an office at the college. Trainees with personal difficulties can use a confidential counselling service. Responsibility for initial assessment and induction is devolved to departments who use a variety of approaches and diagnostic tools. There is an open-access resource at the college providing computers, Internet access, information and library facilities. Each occupational area has its own specific equipment with specialist staff available for advice and support. An area is dedicated for key skills development. Trainees from all programmes are encouraged to integrate with students from other courses. The trainees who attend college have access to all its facilities, including the student union which has a range of recreational services. New Deal clients are assessed at the college as part of the Gateway and are guided towards one of the options. The college's involvement continues with those who chose the full-time education and training option. The self-assessment was an accurate and realistic reflection of the support provision. The grade given in the self-assessment report was confirmed by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive careers guidance service
- ◆ good range of initial assessment services
- ◆ excellent college-based learning support resources
- ◆ counselling services for trainees who attend college
- ◆ mentoring service for New Deal clients

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in trainees' reviews

- ◆ some trainees enrolled on inappropriate programmes
- ◆ some trainees unable to use learning support resources

43. Potential and existing trainees visit the client services office. It has well-qualified and friendly staff who provide a wide range of information services. Careers information booklets, course details and databases are used to provide impartial guidance. New Deal clients have systematic interviews with basic skills and dyslexia assessment. They are then guided towards an appropriate option with the output of the assessment being passed to the next link in the training chain.

44. Induction to college courses is well planned and supported with detailed information booklets which are tailored to individual training programmes. However, trainees who start courses part way through the academic year are often given a shorter and less thorough induction. New Deal clients are given an additional induction programme prior to normal course induction to help them integrate more effectively into courses.

45. Once training has begun, the college makes every effort to encourage trainees to integrate with students on other programmes. Each occupational area has dedicated open-access rooms available from 9am to 9pm. Trainees have access to computers, the Internet, occupational information, library facilities and a specialist advisor. Group training sessions in areas such as key skills are sometimes delivered in these rooms to help trainees become familiar with the area and be comfortable to work independently there. The college employs 28 learning support officers of whom three are specifically employed to help those students and trainees who have additional learning needs. The school of technology has two specialist tutorial support staff who spend 60 per cent of their time dedicated to helping approximately 150 modern apprentices and national trainees. They provide well-focused initial assessment and diagnostic testing. The outcomes of these are then used to guide teaching staff, such as in selecting appropriate key skills projects for individuals. Senior programme managers have timetabled sessions with trainees to review their key skills progress and provide additional support. Trainees can see a full-time counsellor if they have personal difficulties and they are directed to appropriate specialist support services. New Deal clients are linked with individual mentors who are not college staff. Their role is to provide additional support for the client, particularly at the early stages of their training.

46. Trainees' reviews are undertaken at regular intervals but the records of these are imprecise and unhelpful. They do not inform trainees and employers in an objective way and lack clarity in advising trainees on how to progress. A small number of trainees is enrolled on inappropriate programmes. There are two examples of trainees enrolled as modern apprentices despite it being clear at an early stage that they were not able to achieve the NVQ at level 3. Over half of the trainees are employed and are not always able to use many of the good support facilities that the college provides. They may live too far away, or may not be given time off work by their employer. The college does make efforts to address

these issues, but levels of support on key skills and additional learning needs is variable for full-time employees.

Management of training

Grade 3

47. Stafford college has a well-defined management structure. Overall responsibility rests with the vice-principal (curriculum and quality) who is supported directly by the quality assurance manager and the deputy manager of the business development unit. The unit produced its own business plan covering the period 1997 to 2000. The unit's targets and activity are focused on supporting the overall college business plan. There are written procedures for staff recruitment, induction and development. An annual appraisal system for all full- and part-time staff has been in operation since 1989. Staff development activity is identified directly from the appraisal. Staff development is evaluated annually. All new full- and part-time staff working 15 hours or more have a one-day induction. There is one external subcontract for training and support covering 44 meat processing (manufacturing) trainees. There are systems to monitor and evaluate the performance of the subcontractor. All other off-the-job theory training occurs in the college. The college achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1995 and was successfully re-accredited in April 1998. The unit holds course and staff meetings every five weeks. Course teams meet in the vocational schools two or three times a term. The discussion and recommendations from these meetings are formally reported to senior management for consideration.

48. The self-assessment process did not reflect the management of the programmes. Many of the strengths quoted in the self-assessment report did not closely impact on trainees' experience, though two of the weaknesses were accurately identified through self-assessment. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ exemplary staff recruitment, induction and appraisal procedures
- ◆ excellent staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no setting of measurable targets to improve training
- ◆ insufficient use of data to inform management decisions on training
- ◆ no formal arrangements with college schools for training and support
- ◆ insufficient management of training and assessment given by employers and work-placement providers

49. The business development unit follows the college-wide procedures for staff recruitment, induction, appraisal and development. Recruitment procedures are

effective and well recorded. A detailed job description and person specification is drawn up by the department manager. Questions to be asked in the recruitment interview are agreed before hand, and all interviewees are asked the same questions. Introduction to the college is carefully managed. Staff induction is comprehensive. Appraisal links closely to the departments and college's business plans and to the individual's future needs. Staff development is extensive and is evaluated annually.

50. Valuable data are collected on a variety of issues but there is insufficient analysis of trends at individual course levels. Trainees' progress is monitored and expected achievement dates are closely reviewed. Reasons for leaving early are recorded but the information is not used to inform improvements. Targets are not set in the individual vocational areas, for example, to reduce the levels of early leavers. A new database system was purchased nine months ago, which has started to improve the flow and scope of data. The information on achievement and retention required by inspectors could not be produced by the business development unit and was supplied by the TEC. There were some errors in this information.

51. The business development unit delivers the training and support in some of the occupational areas and the curriculum schools in the college deliver others. All other training takes place at the subcontractor, employers or work-placement providers' premises. There are no formal agreements setting out the roles or responsibilities of either group. No internal 'contracting' arrangements are made to detail the services required of schools' staff. No monitoring takes place of this work by the business development unit's managers.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

52. The college has a quality assurance manager who is responsible for college-wide quality assurance systems. The college's quality assurance plan for 2000 to 2001 was revised in July 2000. The college's quality assurance manager reports to the vice-principal (curriculum and quality), who has recently been promoted to acting principal. The deputy manager of the business development unit is responsible for the quality assurance of work-based training and the New Deal, which involve four contracts with the TECs and the Employment Service. The business development unit's staff report to the college's assistant vice-principal (collaborative provision and business development). Further changes to the college's management structure are anticipated. Departmental policies and procedures relevant to work-based training and the New Deal supplement the college-wide quality assurance policies and procedures. These include arrangements for quality assurance with the subcontractor which provides training and assessment in the food and drink industry. This is for contracts with the three TECs of Sandwell, Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes and North Bucks, and involves 169 foundation modern apprentices. Many new systems and procedures have been implemented since the first inspection. The college meets the requirements of its contracts with the Employment Service and the TECs.

53. An annual self-assessment is carried out across all areas of the college. This is in a standardised format and takes place between June and September. Each course and unit team carries out a self-assessment. Issues arising from the self-assessments contribute to the school or unit's operational plans, which contribute to the college's strategic plan. Self-assessment reports which are required by external agencies are extracted and collated from the self-assessment process.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no effective arrangements to ensure a consistently high standard of training
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of effectiveness
- ◆ underdeveloped use of achievement data
- ◆ no procedures for control of trainees' portfolios

54. Since the first inspection, some work has been done to address these weaknesses. Staff are observed conducting training and some feedback is collected from trainees to monitor training and its effectiveness. Data on achievement are now collected separately for work-based trainees, and a particularly good security system for monitoring the whereabouts of trainees' portfolios is used. Inspectors found new strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that given in the updated action plan.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of collected information
- ◆ good procedures for quality assurance encompassing work-based training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ delayed action to address identified weaknesses
- ◆ inadequate quality assurance of paperwork

GOOD PRACTICE

The new report form about early leavers is good. It not only records the reason for leaving in detail, but asks staff questions about what efforts have been made to encourage the trainee to stay in training and what actions have been taken to avoid a similar situation. The form has space for the quality assurance manager to record discussions with staff and action agreed on.

55. Since the publication of the first inspection report, the college has introduced a range of systems and procedures to collect information about work-based training and the New Deal. Since April 2000, information has been collected about those leaving early and the detailed reasons for their departure from programmes are discussed at the business development unit's monthly staff meetings. If it is possible to address any of the arising issues, then staff develop strategies to do this. So far, these have included revised application and interviewing processes and new procedures for the vetting of work placements. These procedures increase the chance of matching a trainee to a suitable work placement. The college keeps records of delayed achievement, and has introduced questionnaires to collect feedback from trainees and employers or work-placement providers. These were introduced in May 2000 and are specific to different TEC and Employment

Service contracts. Similar questionnaires, with appropriate questions, are also used for the subcontracted training. The introduction of teaching observations was introduced across the college, and the business development unit's staff have been involved since July 2000. The observations encompass the training the business development unit's staff conduct on the employers' premises as well as in the college. The results are discussed with staff and, as appropriate, staff are required to attend training and development sessions to improve their performance.

56. Further quality assurance systems have been introduced since the start of the academic year in September 2000 and some were implemented as recently as the end of December 2000. The auditing of trainees' files by the business development unit's deputy manager started in September 2000 and has been successful in identifying many inconsistencies and omissions by staff. The results of audits are discussed with the staff and notes of action required are made in the new file of notes from meetings. The business development unit trains and assesses trainees in retailing, customer service, business administration, call handling, management and key skills. To manage the training provided by other areas of the college, it introduced service level agreements in September 2000. These specify the requirements of training so that performance can be measured against these. In November 2000, the business development unit's deputy manager started to interview trainees and clients on an individual and small-group basis to find out their views on their training. The outcomes of the interviews are recorded and reported to the staff for discussion, review and action. The college-wide standardised procedure for internal verification was introduced in September 2000. Large, comprehensive plans were developed in the catering area in December 2000, and the engineering area now uses an effective mix of the college and awarding body's documents. Both these areas had new programme leaders appointed in September 2000. The construction area is currently maintaining its previous internal verification systems, which lack comprehensive forward-planning, as it is waiting for the external verifier's visit to discuss changes before implementing them. The paperwork used during progress reviews with trainees has undergone two changes since the first inspection. The most recent was in October 2000 to further improve on the initial changes after these were evaluated.

57. The college's quality assurance policies and procedures are comprehensive and well presented. In addition, there are further procedures and paperwork relating specifically to the work-based trainees and New Deal clients. The business development unit has collated a manual for the quality assurance of TEC-funded training, which contains a combination of the college's procedures and more specific documents. This was distributed to all relevant areas of the college in September 2000 and is kept in staff rooms for reference. These procedures also encompass the subcontracted training. A copy of the manual has been given to the subcontractor, and different documents have been developed, for example to collect trainees' feedback and for the external verifier's visits.

58. There has been a delay of between five and 10 months in introducing the new quality assurance procedures devised to address the significant weaknesses identified during the first inspection. Many of the new procedures have not been

implemented long enough for there to be an effective review and evaluation of their effectiveness. The action plan was not prepared and circulated until after discussions following the inspection and the publication of the inspection report in April 2000. The first action plan did not address the weaknesses or suggest ways of building on strengths sufficiently, and so the college had to produce a second action plan. Many of the new procedures were not introduced until the start of the new academic year, which was 10 months after the weaknesses were identified. Some of the tasks on the action plan were completed ahead of schedule or on time, whereas others have had completion dates altered, have been late in being completed, or are still outstanding.

59. There is inadequate quality assurance, much of which has been introduced in the past few months, of documents used in training, assessment and quality assurance. The audit of documents is identifying some inconsistencies in the way paperwork is completed and a lack of implementation of procedures by staff. Many of the forms completed by staff and trainees have dates, signatures, names and details of training schemes uncompleted. This makes a thorough analysis of the information difficult, which in turn causes difficulties in using systems effectively to establish necessary improvements beyond the correct completion of forms. The effectiveness of the document cannot be established. Some of the new forms do not have a designated space for the date or name to be inserted. Some staff have added this type of useful information, but this is done inconsistently. Many forms have not yet been reviewed to address these deficiencies or to evaluate the type and quality of information they currently collect.