



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION MARCH 2001

West Cheshire College

SUMMARY

West Cheshire College offers good work-based training in business administration, and satisfactory training in hair and beauty and engineering. Trainees in sport, leisure and travel are now given good training in college and have good opportunities for learning at work. Training and assessments are well planned. Retention rates are high. Progress towards qualifications is good, but reviews of trainees' progress do not focus sufficiently on progress towards qualifications. Employers provide good working conditions in all occupational areas and support trainees well. Resources for off-the-job training, and the experience and qualifications of teaching staff are good, although there is some poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. The college ensures that trainees are treated fairly and provides good facilities for trainees with physical disabilities. Trainees receive good pastoral support but, in most occupational areas, there is no initial assessment of basic skills, and key skills are not yet fully integrated with other aspects of occupational training. The management of training is satisfactory. The college has good-quality assurance arrangements and its self-assessment process is rigorous.

As a result of the reinspection of West Cheshire College, the original published report text for leisure, sport and travel has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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	2
Leisure, sport & travel	4
Hair & beauty	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Leisure, sport & travel	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of additional courses undertaken by trainees
- ◆ well-structured and well-recorded progress reviews for trainees
- ◆ modern resources for college-based engineering training
- ◆ comprehensive staff appraisal process linked to staff development
- ◆ well-documented policies and procedures
- ◆ rigorous self-assessment
- ◆ high retention and achievement rates in leisure, sport and travel



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient integration of key skills with other aspects of training
- ◆ no assessment of basic skills in most occupational areas
- ◆ some ineffective co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient use and analysis of management data

INTRODUCTION

1. West Cheshire College was established in 1993 and has been offering work-based training since 1994. The college recruits students mainly from the local area, which includes Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston, and the Wirral. It also recruits nationally and worldwide for some of its programmes. At the time of the first inspection in 1999, the college had approximately 2,000 full-time students, and 20,000 part-time students, studying across a range of academic and vocational courses. At the time of reinspection in March 2001, the college had 2,035 full- and 16,064 part-time students. The college is located on five sites, three in Chester, one in Ellesmere Port, and one, a recently opened site for engineering, in Capenhurst. At the time of the first inspection, the college employed 130 full-time and 225 part-time academic staff. Staffing levels have increased since the first inspection and at reinspection there were 142 full- and 378 part-time academic staff. Additional teaching and training is provided at 10 outreach centres owned by Cheshire County Council. The college has established six learning centres at strategic locations, based at the sites of local companies and at public libraries. Most of the college's work is funded through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The work-based learning, funded through a contract with CEWTEC, the Cheshire, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise Council, represents only a small proportion of its work.

2. The college offers TEC-funded training for advanced modern apprentices, foundation modern apprentices, and trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people, across a wide range of occupational areas. These include retailing and customer service, management and professional, hospitality, health, care and public services, business administration, engineering, hair and beauty, and leisure, sport and travel. Inspectors did not inspect the former four occupational areas, however, because of the low numbers of trainees. The college's business-development unit manages all work-based learning. At the time of the reinspection, there were 20 New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. New Deal clients are funded through the Cheshire and Wirral Units of Delivery, and are placed on similar learning programmes to those followed by TEC-funded trainees. At the first inspection, the college had 40 TEC-funded trainees in all occupational areas. At the time of the reinspection, the number of trainees had increased to 54, of whom 22 were advanced modern apprentices, 14 were foundation modern apprentices and 18 were on other work-based learning programmes for young people. A team of 10 full-time staff operates the business-development unit. Four of the team have direct responsibility for the co-ordination of work-based learning.

3. At the time of the first inspection, Chester, the Wirral, Ellesmere Port and Neston had a working population of approximately 240,000 with an average unemployment rate of 4 per cent, compared with a national rate of 3.8 per cent. At the time of the reinspection, the size of the workforce had not significantly

changed. However, the average unemployment rate for Chester, the Wirral, Ellesmere Port and Neston had increased to 4.2 per cent, compared with a national average in March 2001 of 3.8 per cent. The local economy in this area of the Wirral and west Cheshire is very strong, largely owing to the retail, leisure and tourism, and care sectors, and a recent growth in the service sector. At the time of the first inspection, 1 per cent of the total population of approximately 240,000, was from minority ethnic groups. At the time of the reinspection, this proportion of the working population remained the same. During 1998, 70 per cent of year-11 school leavers went into full-time education.

4. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 54.5 per cent in Cheshire and 46.9 per cent in the Wirral, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, these proportions had increased to 59 per cent in Cheshire and 47 per cent in the Wirral, compared with the national average of 47 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Self-assessment is well established at West Cheshire College. The college had prepared two self-assessment reports before the first inspection. As part of its self-assessment process, all staff with an important role in training were consulted, and information was provided by all the curriculum areas. Feedback was sought from trainees and evidence was gathered from external verifiers' reports. The quality assurance panel, which is a subcommittee of the college's board, oversaw the process. The TEC also helped the college prepare for the process of self-assessment. The college prepared a separate self-assessment report for the FEFC. At the time of the first inspection by the Training Standards Council (TSC), a team of 12 FEFC inspectors and an auditor were also carrying out an inspection across five curriculum areas. These included engineering, business administration, and hair and beauty, which were also inspected by the TSC. In preparation for the reinspection, the college prepared an updated action plan showing the current progress in implementing the measures agreed on after the first inspection. This plan was sufficiently detailed to demonstrate the progress which had been made. During the reinspection, the college provided the inspection team with all the relevant information for training in playwork, including detailed information about the college's self-assessment report for the child-development section, quality assurance procedures for playwork training, records of assessment and verification and details of arrangements for internal verification.

6. For the first inspection, a team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at the college in November 1999, inspecting work-based training. Inspectors visited 13 work placements, and interviewed 13 workplace supervisors and managers. They also interviewed 42 trainees and 18 trainers. A wide range of documents was examined, including the TEC contract and audits, trainees' portfolios, trainees' files, records of progress reviews, records of internal verification, reports by the awarding body, and written policies and procedures. Inspectors observed seven learning sessions and four progress reviews. The FEFC's inspection team observed 77 learning sessions, examined students' work, and evaluated documents held by the college. Where it was appropriate to the TSC's framework for inspection, evidence gathered by the FEFC's inspectors was taken into account when grading work-based learning.

7. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days reinspecting leisure sport and travel during March 2001. Inspectors interviewed 12 trainees and four employers' staff. Four of the college's managers and two trainers were interviewed. Inspectors observed one trainee's progress review, one assessment and one learning session. Inspectors examined data on trainees' achievements, contractual arrangements, course monitoring information and data on feedback from trainees and employers.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		1	2			3
Business administration		1				1
Leisure, sport & travel		1				1
Hair & beauty		1	1			2
Total	0	4	3	0	0	7

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Leisure, sport & travel		2				2
Total	0	2	0	0	0	2

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

8. There are currently 17 trainees on electrical installation and electronic engineering programmes, and nine New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. Thirteen trainees are studying electrical installation, and four are studying electronics. On the electrical installation programme, one trainee is a modern apprentice, and the remainder is on other work-based training schemes for young people. On the electronics option, one trainee is a modern apprentice, one is a national trainee, and the other two are on other youth training. In addition to their NVQs, all trainees also study for a first-aid qualification. There are currently four full-time members and one part-time member of college staff responsible for teaching and assessing on these programmes. All trainees are employed and receive training in the workplace. In addition to this, trainees attend college for one day a week to gain the theoretical knowledge they need to support their on-the-job training. College tutors are responsible for assessment, verification and helping trainees to build portfolios of evidence for their NVQs. A business development unit co-ordinator visits trainees every eight weeks in the workplace to carry out progress reviews. The college opened a centre of excellence for engineering at Capenhurst in September 1999. Inspectors identified two additional strengths and one additional weakness to those mentioned in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced, modern, college-based training facilities
- ◆ solid commitment of employers to training and trainees
- ◆ well-presented NVQ portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ employers' lack of understanding of NVQs

9. Trainees' progress reviews are carried out in the workplace by the business development unit co-ordinator, with the participation of trainees' employers or workplace supervisors. These reviews are regular and well recorded, and the co-ordinator offers good additional support to the trainee. Teaching staff at the college are well qualified and highly skilled. All staff have assessor awards. Two staff are qualified as internal verifiers, and one member of staff is also qualified to accredit prior learning. The college's engineering and technology department has recently moved from the main college site at Hambridge to a purpose-designed technology building at Capenhurst. This building has state-of-the-art equipment. Each workshop has an adjoining classroom, full equipped with computers and modern learning materials. The Capenhurst building also has a main resource centre, with an open learning area equipped with up-to-date electronic teaching and learning systems, including specialist engineering testing equipment.

10. Training off the job is of a high standard, and training in the workplace is satisfactory. Trainees' portfolios are well presented and the standard of work is high. All assessments are carried out by college staff at the training centre. Employers are keen to be involved in the training programme and would like to be included in the assessment process, but few have a full understanding of the NVQ system. Employers are also unaware of the content of off-the-job training, and the training provided in the workplace is poorly co-ordinated with that given off the job. A recently employed member of the college staff has already visited a number of employers with a view to implementing on-the-job assessment.

11. Retention and achievement rates for the past three years have been poor. The college has identified this as an issue to be tackled, and there was an improvement in the achievement rate last year. Retention rates for the past three years are as follows: 71 per cent in 1996-97, 70 per cent in 1997-98, and 28 per cent in 1998-99. Three out of seven trainees (43 per cent) achieved their qualifications in 1995-96, five out of 10 (50 per cent) achieved their qualifications in 1996-97, and four out of 14 (29 per cent) achieved their qualifications in 1997-98. There was an improvement in 1998-99, with 64 per cent achieving the qualification for which they were registered. Internal verification of portfolios was delayed by the move to the Capenhurst site and a change of internal verifier, but has now resumed.

Business administration**Grade 2**

12. West Cheshire College offers modern apprenticeships and national traineeships in business administration, information technology, and accounting. There are currently 10 trainees in these programme areas, of whom nine are modern apprentices and one is a national trainee. Trainees take a variety of additional qualifications in information technology. All the trainees are employed, and work in a range of organisations, including leisure centres, financial consultancies and manufacturing companies, as well as in various college administration departments. Trainees attend college one day a week for training workshops, which include sessions on portfolio-building, key skills, customer service, and accounting. FEFC inspectors observed 22 lessons covering business administration, information technology, accounting and management. TSC inspectors observed training in business administration and information technology. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses to those identified by the college, but awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong links between employers and college staff
- ◆ effective use of college resources
- ◆ good progression opportunities for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor internal verification

13. The college's staff have established good links with employers and work-based supervisors, links which are strengthened by the review process. Progress reviews are well structured and clearly recorded. The reviews are conducted in the workplace at eight-week intervals, more frequently than is required to satisfy the contractual agreement with the TEC. Employers and workplace supervisors take part in reviews, and share in the process of setting targets for trainees with the reviewer and the trainees themselves. The reviews help to ensure that employers are kept well informed about trainees' progress and about how they can best support their trainees in developing their skills.

GOOD PRACTICE

The college has established links with two neighbouring colleges, to share good practice in business administration. They have called this a 'best practice scheme'.

14. All trainees have access to modern resources at the college's learning resource centre, where trainees can pre-book computer time. The college's business administration workshops are also well resourced. Computers in the workshops offer a range of up-to-date software. Trainers encourage trainees to use computers imaginatively. For example, one trainee is designing an internet web page, which will demonstrate health and safety in the use of computers. Projects like this allow trainees to demonstrate a range of skills, including the use of a scanner and the manipulation of computer graphics. They also allow trainees to collect evidence of key skills while doing work for their NVQs.

15. Trainees are well motivated and enjoy the programmes they are on. Although none of the present trainees have fully completed a modern apprenticeship, they are making good progress. Four of the 10 trainees have completed NVQs at level 2 and have now started NVQs at level 3, and one is nearing completion of an NVQ at level 2. The other trainees are making good progress with their NVQs, but are relatively new to the programme. One trainee has progressed to a modern apprenticeship programme after completing an NVQ at level 2 while on New Deal. Another trainee has recently completed a modern apprenticeship and is now working towards a higher national certificate in business and finance. All trainees are offered the opportunity to gain additional qualifications and skills according to their needs, and the needs of their employers. These supplementary courses include additional NVQ units and qualifications in using computers. One information technology modern apprentice is also working towards an NVQ at level 3 in customer service, after it was identified at appraisal that he would benefit from this programme.

16. Internal verification is not planned effectively. Many trainees do not understand the internal verification process and do not know who will verify assessment within their programme area. The sampling of assessment is not always planned. Internal verification is delayed until all trainees have completed all units of their NVQs. Internal verification records do not indicate clearly which trainee's portfolio has been verified. There is no observation of the assessor conducting assessments. However, the internal verifier and assessor benefit from working in the same office, and discussing matters informally.

Leisure, sport & travel (playwork)

Grade 2

17. At the time of the first inspection, the college had seven trainees in this occupational area. All were working towards NVQs in sport, recreation and allied occupations. Of the seven trainees, five were modern apprentices and two were national trainees. One company employed all the trainees. The trainees were based in a multifunctional public leisure centre. Since the first inspection, the seven trainees have ceased to receive support from their employer for modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. However, the college has continued to support the trainees and six of the original seven trainees are now FEFC-funded students at the college working towards an NVQ at level 2 on a day-release basis. The college, in discussion with the TEC, has identified a particularly low demand in the region for work-based learning in leisure, sport and travel and has subsequently decided not to renew its training contract for this occupational area. However, the college has a separate contract with the TEC to provide training in playwork under the Department for Education and Employment's national early years development and childcare partnership. The 25 trainees in playwork recruited to this initiative are managed and co-ordinated by the care curriculum area of the college rather than the leisure, sport and travel curriculum area.

However, the trainees come under the TSC's occupational area of leisure, sport and travel. The scope for the reinspection was the training given to these trainees.

18. The early-years development and childcare partnership recruits unqualified care workers and, in this case, employees in playwork. They come to college and work towards NVQs at level 2 or 3 in playwork. The college has held this contract since June 1999 and began to offer training in September 1999. Since then, 35 trainees have started the programme. Eight started in 1999, five started in September 2000 and 22 started in November 2000. Twenty-five trainees are still in training, seven have left early and three have achieved an NVQ at level 2. Of the 25 trainees who are still in training, 17 are working towards level 3 NVQs and eight are working towards level 2 NVQs. Twenty-one trainees are women and four are men. Trainees funded by the early-years development and childcare partnership attend the college on a day-release basis throughout their training. While the training contract does not specify the duration or length of training for each trainee, each trainee completes an initial action plan and pledge which identify the qualification aim, and eight-weekly progress reviews, involving the college trainer and the trainee, are used to monitor individuals' progress towards these aims. Trainees are assigned a trainer and assessor when they start training and progress reviews and assessments are held at college and at work. Trainees and employers' views are collected through questionnaires and the results are analysed by the college. The retention rate for the 35 trainees who have started training during the past two years has been 83 per cent.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficient key skills training
- ◆ poor understanding of NVQs among trainees
- ◆ unqualified assessors and internal verifier

19. Since the first inspection, the college has resolved many weaknesses in key skills training. It has nearly completed a cycle of improvements which include staff training for the key skills practitioners' award and a research project in all the relevant curriculum areas within the college to identify opportunities for assessing key skills. Targets are now set for all trainees who require training in key skills, and the targets are routinely monitored and reviewed during progress reviews and learning sessions. Trainees funded by the early-years development and care partnership do not require key skills training. At the first inspection, the seven trainees on the programme had a poor understanding of NVQ requirements. However, the trainees funded by the early-years development and care partnership are fully aware of the NVQ requirements and their own progress towards the qualification. Arrangements for internal verification have been reviewed throughout the college. The current internal verification arrangements for leisure, sport and travel are satisfactory. Internal verification is well planned, and meets the awarding body's requirements. All assessments and internal verification are carried out by qualified college staff and are recorded.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and -structured learning
- ◆ good assessment practices
- ◆ high retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient focus on progress towards qualifications in progress reviews

20. Each learning session fits into a comprehensive scheme of work covering the whole academic year. Each lesson is planned in detail, with clear learning objectives which are closely linked to the requirements of the qualification. These objectives are communicated to trainees at the beginning of each learning session. The trainer uses an appropriately wide range of learning methods to maintain trainees' interest, develop knowledge and reinforce understanding. These methods include individual and group work accompanied by clear, well-informed input from the trainer. Trainees are encouraged to identify their own learning needs and have the opportunity to restructure the learning sessions to meet these needs. For example, one trainee identified the need for training in dealing with bullying. The trainer carefully integrated this training into the normal course work without disrupting the training plan. The trainer used her own experiences as well as the anecdotal experiences of trainees to assist the group's learning. The trainer also effectively relates the off-the-job learning to real work situations, which helps trainees to contextualise the skills and competencies learnt in college and to understand the relationship between theory and practice. Employers are appreciative of how the learning sessions improve and develop trainees' work practice.

21. The trainer has appropriate qualifications and experience in the occupational area and this knowledge and understanding is used effectively in the training. Trainees, through questionnaires, evaluate their training every six months. The college analyses the results and uses them to inform trainers of trainees' perceptions of the course and to shape the college's policy and planning.

22. Trainees have a good understanding of the requirements of their qualification and the standards they need to achieve. Evidence in trainees' portfolios is good: trainees use a wide range of methods to record naturally occurring workplace evidence. Assessments are well planned and recorded. As trainees progress towards their qualification, the assessor plans specific observations if necessary to ensure that trainees meet the requirements for the qualification. The assessor provides each trainee with written and verbal feedback after each assessment. Trainees value this feedback, and trainees and the trainer use the feedback to identify further action or learning needed. During each off-the-job learning session at the college, the trainer provides time for trainees to have one-to-one sessions involving a review of and advice about their portfolios of evidence.

23. The assessor carefully monitors the progress of each trainee towards their qualification and records the completion of each full and part unit of the NVQ as it is completed. The procedures for internal verification are satisfactory. Arrangements for observing and sampling the assessment process are good and exceed the awarding body's requirements. The internal verifier works closely with the assessor to monitor the consistency of assessments and trainees' progress.

24. Trainees' retention rates are high. The retention rate for the 35 trainees who have started training during the past two years is 83 per cent. Of the eight trainees who started training during 1999-2000, one left the programme early without any qualification, three gained an NVQ at level 2 and four were due to complete their NVQ at level 2 during March or April 2001. Of the 27 trainees who started training during 2000-01, six left the programme early without any qualification and 21 are still in training. The rate of progress for the 17 trainees working towards the level 3 NVQ is good, with over 75 per cent of these trainees making very good progress. The four trainees working toward NVQs at level 2 are progressing satisfactorily.

25. On joining, trainees funded by the early-years development and care partnership complete an action plan and a pledge, both of which were devised by the TEC. The pledge is an agreement between the trainee, their employer and the college, setting out roles and responsibilities. The action plan is basic and does not identify specific targets for achievement. The college recognised the inadequacy of this document and redesigned it. The college used the first progress reviews, after four weeks of the programme, to gather more information for the new form. However, the new form does not contain sufficient information about individual trainees' aspirations, target dates for qualification and milestones to be a useful reference for trainers and trainees. Most trainees have established their own target dates for completion and some of these timescales are overly optimistic. This information is not recorded on the action plan or progress-review forms and these targets are not agreed between the trainee, their employer and the college.

26. Trainees' progress reviews take place every eight weeks and involve the assessor and the trainee. Employers are not fully involved in the progress reviews and they are not given the opportunity to record their own views regarding trainees' progress. Progress reviews are not used to set long-term targets and tend to focus on feedback from the trainer regarding the most recent NVQ assessment. The forms used by trainers to record the progress reviews are inappropriate for work-based learning programmes. They do not allow the trainer to record any progress made by the trainee against previous action points, nor does it provide trainers with a means of recording trainees' progress towards achieving their action plan. It does, however, provide trainees with a clear view record of what they are expected to achieve before the next progress review.

Hair & beauty

Grade 3

27. There are currently 11 trainees on hairdressing programmes. Seven are national trainees, three are modern apprentices and one is following other training. NVQs are offered in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3. Most trainees attend the college one-day a week on Monday or Tuesday for theory and practical sessions. College co-ordinators visit trainees in the workplace and attend training nights in the salons. Five trainees are being assessed entirely in the workplace. They attend college for key skills workshops in information technology.

28. During the current year, there have been a number of changes among the college's staff responsible for this programme. A member of the college's business development unit co-ordinates the programme and interviews the trainees, giving them their induction and reviewing their progress. A full-time member of staff oversees the occupational training programme, and two part-time members of staff organise the day-to-day running of the programme. Programme team meetings take place once a term (every 12 weeks) and involve the business unit's training co-ordinator and operational staff. Unrecorded meetings take place on a more regular basis. At present, employers are not involved in any of these meetings.

29. Inspectors from the FEFC observed 12 college-based lessons in hair and beauty. The inspectors regarded most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They identified additional strengths, found the same weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced work placements
- ◆ well-planned on- and off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement rates
- ◆ some missed opportunities for assessment

30. Work placements used by the college are of a good commercial standard. They have modern facilities and stock a full range of current hair creams, gels and preparations. They are widely spread around Cheshire, in locations ranging from rural districts to the city centre. Trainees receive good instruction and have the opportunity to practice on a variety of models. In addition, off-the-job training nights for all trainees are provided in two of the work placements. These are well organised and well attended, and are often attended by the business unit's co-ordinators, who work with the salons' trainers. Where a salon's trainer does not have the relevant assessor qualifications, the college's assessor supports the trainer

in assessing the trainees. Trainees' assessment and progress records are kept at the salons.

GOOD PRACTICE

All trainees participate in an annual hairdressing show called 'Hair-Raid'. Trainees are integrated with full-time hairdressing students in the college, and are given the opportunity to develop their skills further. Employers and other college students are also encouraged to participate. The proceeds are given to a local hospital charity.

31. Trainees have the opportunity to achieve additional qualifications in areas such as first aid and health and safety, and to take units towards an NVQ in manicure. As most trainees are new to the programme, however, these options have yet to be taken up. In the contract year 1998-99, the programme suffered from poor retention and achievement rates. Although retention rates have now improved, the programme still suffers from poor achievement rates. In 1996-97, 10 trainees out of the 12 who started left the programme early, with the remaining two (17 per cent) achieving qualifications. Thirty-one per cent achieved the qualification for which they were aiming in 1997-98, but in 1998-99, no trainees achieved an NVQ. The college has tried to address the poor achievement rate

32. There is no initial diagnostic testing of trainees' key skills or vocational skills. Trainees are aware of key skills, but key skills training is not yet an integral part of the programme. A science teacher provides key skills training at the Grange campus, but this is not related to the trainees' vocational work in any way. Work-based trainees who do not have access to a computer travel to the college to use the computers there. Trainees attend off-the-job training for seven hours each week at the college during term time, joining day-release classes. The classes include some theory and practical work. The salons and theory rooms used at the college have satisfactory resources.

33. Some workplace assessors have assessor qualifications, and the college is encouraging other trainers to train for assessor awards. Peripatetic assessors visit and carry out assessment of trainees in workplaces where there is no resident assessor. Opportunities for assessment in the workplace are being missed, however, and progression for some trainees is slow. In one salon, where there is no qualified assessor, trainees are not being assessed in the workplace on a regular basis.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

34. The college has an equal opportunities policy and procedures for its implementation. The policy and procedures are reviewed and updated annually. Two versions of the policy have been produced, one for staff, and one for trainees. Trainees are introduced to the policy as part of the initial departmental induction programme, when attention is focused on the student handbook. Equal opportunities are referred to in the college's mission statement and the college manages its commitment to equal opportunities through the equal opportunities policy and strategy group, and through three implementation groups for managing, respectively, diversity, inclusive learning, and widening participation. The senior

executive chairs the policy and strategy group. The college has a policy on harassment and bullying. It also has a complaints and grievance policy. Complaints and grievances are dealt with by student services. Inspectors identified strengths and weaknesses in addition to those mentioned in the self-assessment report. They awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ good access to college buildings for those with little mobility
- ◆ effective use of newsletter to promote equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in trainees' workplaces
- ◆ no analysis or use of equal opportunities data to guide planning or promotion of training

35. The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, which specifies how it will ensure equality of opportunity for trainees, students and staff. The policy document also includes procedures to protect trainees from bullying and harassment. Trainees are informed of the college's policy on equal opportunities at induction and a statement on equal opportunities is included in the student handbook.

36. There is good access for those with little mobility to the college's sites. The college has a complaints and grievance procedure which is explained in the student handbook. Complaints must be dealt with within a fixed time span and the complainant signs to indicate satisfaction with the outcome.

37. The college is active in promoting equal opportunities. It provides the resources to enable trainees with disabilities to play a full part in training and celebrates their successes. The college publishes a quarterly newsletter entitled 'News West', which is distributed within the college and the local community. 'News West' publicises the college's equal opportunities policies to potential trainees and highlights the successes and achievements of both students and trainees, including those with disabilities. For example, 'News West' recently carried a story about a visually impaired trainee at the college who won CEWTEC's 'Learner of the Year' award. His tutor gave him additional support on a one-to-one basis, and the college provided him with all necessary learning materials on audio cassette. Despite this good practice, however, the college fails to ensure that its commitment to equal opportunities is explicitly stated on all its promotional materials.

38. The college does not obtain a contractual obligation from trainees' employers to subscribe to its equal opportunities policy, though reference to such a policy is

included in the employers' induction document. There is no recorded monitoring of employers to check that they have their own equal opportunities policy and procedures.

39. Information gathered at enrolment on ethnicity, disability, and gender is not analysed, and cannot therefore be used to guide the planning of recruitment and training.

Trainee support

Grade 3

40. Most trainees are employed before they start their programmes and are told about the training available at the college by their employers. Employers learn about the training by word of mouth and through advertisements in the local press. The college also runs an employers' forum. College staff regularly visit trainees in the workplace to carry out progress reviews. These reviews usually take place every eight weeks, which is more frequent than is required by the TEC contract, which specifies that reviews must take place every 12 weeks. Employers and workplace supervisors take part in trainees' progress reviews. In all occupational areas, trainees have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications to enhance their training. Trainees have access to the college's counselling service and the trainees' handbook lists the addresses and contact details for a range of external agencies which can provide specific help and support with a variety of pastoral and personal problems. There is a 'job board' in each of the occupational training areas, which is a notice board where local employers advertise their job vacancies. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but found additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured and well-recorded reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ good pastoral support from college staff for trainees in the workplace
- ◆ good opportunities for additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient initial assessment of trainees
- ◆ insufficient integration of key skills with occupational training
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning for work-based trainees

41. The systematic procedures governing trainees' progress reviews ensure that the trainee, the employer and the college's co-ordinator work together to monitor the trainee's progress and to establish appropriate performance targets for the

trainee. Employers and trainees are well supported by college staff. Most trainees are making good progress towards achieving their targets.

42. In all occupational areas, trainees are offered the opportunity to gain additional qualifications, according to their needs and the needs of their employers. The additional courses available include training in the use of computers, first aid, and additional NVQ units in subjects complementary to the trainees' main occupational specialism. In some programme areas, trainees can also take additional health and safety courses.

43. Key skills training is not yet properly integrated with vocational training. Trainees in most occupational areas have only recently started collecting evidence towards their key skills units. Trainers are now encouraging trainees to look for this evidence in the evidence which they have already collected for their NVQs, and there are signs that key skills are being integrated with vocational training in some occupational areas. In business administration, for example, some assignments have been designed to encourage trainees to collect evidence for both key skills and their NVQs. There has been no such progress in the leisure, sport and travel programme, however, where no attempt has yet been made to see how evidence for the NVQs can also be used to demonstrate key skills. The college has, however, organised computer workshops for these trainees.

44. There is insufficient initial assessment of trainees' abilities, basic skills or key skills. All trainees are placed on standard training programmes and although they are given the additional help they require when the need is identified, opportunities are missed to provide that additional support from the very start of their programmes. West Cheshire College has policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning, but no such accreditation takes place within any of the work-based training programmes. One trainee in leisure, sport and travel, for example, had previously attained a degree in sports management, but this was not considered when he started his level 2 NVQ programme. The trainee was placed on the programme at the insistence of the employer, and left the course early.

45. The college provides all trainees with an induction, which covers aspects of health and safety, the use of the learning resource centre, college rules, grievance and disciplinary policies, an introduction to NVQs and an overview of the training programme they are embarking on. However, the induction for some trainees is too brief, and trainees lack a basic understanding of their programmes. The induction for business administration trainees, for example, takes only one or two hours to complete.

Management of training

Grade 3

46. West Cheshire College is a general college of further education. The current contract with CEWTEC is to train 40 modern apprentices during 1999-2000. The previous contract was for 19 trainees. Training for national trainees and those on

other TEC-funded programmes is offered under the banner of 'Skills+'. These TEC-funded programmes represent only a small proportion of the college's overall work. The college's management structure comprises six divisions, reporting directly to the principal. Responsibility for the co-ordination of the TEC-funded training lies with the Business Development Unit. The Business Development Unit is a semi-autonomous unit within the Learning Development Division. It has a manager, an administrator, a part-time administrative assistant, and two training co-ordinators. There are also other staff, who are responsible for areas such as obtaining international funding, but who are not involved in TEC-funded training. Inspectors identified two weaknesses in addition to those mentioned in the self-assessment report, and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive staff appraisal and development
- ◆ extensive induction programme for staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination and management of most on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no systematic analysis or use of management information in order to guide programme development

47. All full-time staff undertake a comprehensive appraisal with their line manager once a year, which is then followed by a review. Appraisal is linked to the college's strategic aims and objectives, and the personal development needs of staff. Staff induction is extensive, and covers both new and existing staff who are changing roles. Staff who are new to the college receive a standard induction, co-ordinated by the staff development unit, followed by a programme designed to meet their individual needs. All new staff receive an induction pack containing policies and procedures, guidance on health and safety, and employment details. They are also assigned to a mentor, who explains their roles and responsibilities. During the induction process, staff complete an induction workbook. After 10 weeks of employment, they are asked to complete an induction evaluation form, which is evaluated by the staff development unit. If existing staff change their role, they have an induction interview with their line manager and are then allocated a guide who gives advice on the new role.

48. Employers often have little knowledge of the content of off-the-job training at the college, or of the NVQ framework. On- and off-the-job training are co-ordinated effectively in engineering, but this is not the case in other occupational areas. Often, it is left to staff in the workplace, who are not always experienced trainers, to provide the guidance which trainees need. In business administration, for example, the work-based supervisors who instruct trainees have little understanding of NVQ requirements. Employers are not always informed of trainees' needs, and do not always cover the requirements of the training programme.

49. The college has an efficient management information system, recently updated, which operates alongside the TEC's information system. At present, however, information is not fully analysed. It cannot, therefore, be used to guide training and the development of the training programmes.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

50. The college's quality assurance system has been in operation for six years and has recently been refined. The college achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1996. It has also achieved ISO 9002 as well as other external quality assurance awards. These awards are maintained and updated annually. The college has written policies and procedures for quality-assurance, covering all areas of its work, including work-based training. Managers and members of the quality assurance team have regular meetings to discuss quality assurance issues and concerns. Various mechanisms are used to collect feedback from programme areas. The quality assurance manager is developing a database of action points highlighted in self-assessment and internal audit reports. The college uses an external consultant to analyse data relating to feedback from trainees. The analysis has recently been extended to cover TEC-funded trainees. There is regular observation of teaching and learning. Information on retention, achievement, early leavers and destinations is collated and analysed. The college's self-assessment report identified the key strengths in this area, although inspectors identified an additional strength and a further weakness. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and regularly reviewed quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ rigorous self-assessment
- ◆ effective use of feedback from employers and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of work-based assessment in some occupational areas
- ◆ some poor internal verification

46. The college has a comprehensive quality assurance process that effectively involves students, staff, employers, and trainees. Procedures are fully recorded in the quality assurance manual. They are reviewed annually and updated or modified as necessary. Procedures cover all aspects of programme management. The quality assurance system has been refined over the last year. It now includes regular observation of teaching and learning, and an analysis of staff training needs, carried out when staff are appraised.

47. Self-assessment forms an integral part of the quality assurance framework and there is a comprehensive review of the quality assurance process on an annual basis. The self-assessment report on work-based training made useful reference to a range of evidence against which inspectors could check the judgements made. Inspectors agreed with the main judgements in the report, although some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were not identified by the college. In some cases, the strengths claimed were no more than would be expected as normal practice. Although a separate report was produced for the FEFC inspection, the two reports were based on the same process of self-assessment. Trainees and employers' views were collected both formally and through informal discussion, and contributed to the report. External verifiers' comments and individual teams' assessments were also taken into account in the drawing up of the self-assessment report. The accompanying action plan was detailed, and many of the actions had already resulted in improvements by the time the inspection took place. The college has taken steps to improve the monitoring of the action plan.

48. Trainees and employers are given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire every six months during the trainees' programmes. This allows them to comment on any matters of concern. The results are analysed thoroughly and issues that arise are dealt with promptly by the business development unit's co-ordinators and by college tutors. For example, as a result of feedback from the questionnaire, engineering trainees now have a booking system for the use of computers. A member of staff has been given additional time to help trainees to prepare for assessment, and additional funds have been made available in hairdressing for textbooks and small equipment.

49. Work-based assessments are carried out successfully in business administration, and have been introduced recently in engineering. In the other occupational areas, there is no assessment of trainees in the workplace. The college has identified this as a weakness in the self-assessment report, and in order to address the problem has launched and is currently promoting a programme to help employers and workplace trainers to become qualified as assessors. The college has also taken action to address the lack of integration of key skills with vocational training. Staff are planning to buy a computer program which relates NVQ requirements to the evidence required to demonstrate key skills. CEWTEC has agreed to pay part of the cost, but the college has not yet bought the program. In business administration, trainees are now given assignments to carry out in the workplace which generate evidence for both NVQs and key skills. This is only a recent innovation, however.

50. The college has written procedures for internal verification. However, these fail to ensure that internal verification is carried out consistently across all occupational areas. In some cases, internal verification is only carried out at the end of the programme. In other areas, there has been no observation of assessment by the internal verifier.