

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT  
MAY 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION MAY  
2001

# North Birmingham College



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

### **Adult Learning Inspectorate**

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's *learndirect* provision
- ◆ adult and community learning
- ◆ training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

### **Grading**

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- ◆ grade 1 – outstanding
- ◆ grade 2 – good
- ◆ grade 3 – satisfactory
- ◆ grade 4 – unsatisfactory
- ◆ grade 5 – very weak.

## SUMMARY

The original inspection of North Birmingham College was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for management of training and quality assurance. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with management of training and quality assurance have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website ([www.ali.gov.uk](http://www.ali.gov.uk)).

**North Birmingham College offers satisfactory training in construction, with good off-the-job training at the college. Trainees can join a programme at any time and have a choice of days on which to attend. There are good construction work placements offering trainees real experience of industry standards. The foundation for work programme is satisfactory. It is well structured, retention rates are high and progression to vocational courses is good. However, not all the needs of trainees are systematically identified and there are some dull training sessions and inappropriate learning materials. At the original inspection, the accounting training was poor, with insufficient work-placement opportunities and poor standards of portfolios. Inspectors were unable to reinspect this occupational area as the Training and Enterprise Council withdrew the contract, due to the grading at the original inspection. Equal opportunities arrangements are satisfactory. There is good support for trainees with identified learning needs and frequent visits are made to work placements. The management of training and quality assurance were both poor at the original inspection. Management of training is now satisfactory and managers receive useful regular data reports. The links between on- and off-the-job training are still not good. Quality assurance arrangements for work-based training have shown improvement since the original inspection, but remain unsatisfactory. Procedures are not yet strong enough to ensure a satisfactory level of quality assurance.**

## GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Management & professional	5
Foundation for work	3

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

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

## KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and varied off-the-job training in construction
- ◆ good work placements in construction
- ◆ good retention and progression rates in foundation for work
- ◆ effective collection and reporting of data for management information

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ weak quality assurance procedures
- ◆ review processes lack rigour
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice

## INTRODUCTION

1. North Birmingham College (NBC) is a medium-sized further education college based in the West Midlands. It has a large main site, situated six miles to the north of the city of Birmingham and operates in 21 centres throughout the city. NBC is one of seven further education colleges in Birmingham and it is the only college in the north of the city offering construction courses. The college serves the north Birmingham area, recruiting 72 per cent of students and trainees from within a six-mile radius.

2. NBC became a training provider in 1992 and now offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and prevocational training, for youth and adult trainees. At the time of the original inspection the college held a contract with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide work-based training for the period 1999-2000. At reinspection, the contract had transferred to the Birmingham and Solihull office of the Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) from April 2001. The college also provides New Deal training for those aged 18 to 24, under the full-time education and training option. In May 2000 there were 121 trainees, plus 44 New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. Of the trainees, 99 were training in construction, two were taking a first-aid qualification, 11 were on foundation for work, and nine were on an accounting programme. In total, 18 of the trainees were modern apprentices, 48 were on other youth training programmes, 42 are adults, and 13 were young people on programmes provided under the government's Learning Gateway initiative. Of the New Deal clients, 22 were training in construction, and the other 22 were each following one of the 37 courses offered to New Deal clients by the college. The two trainees learning first aid and the 22 New Deal clients not working in construction were not originally involved in the inspection of the occupational areas, because of low numbers. They were included in the original inspection sample for the generic areas of the report. At the time of reinspection, there were 16 advanced modern apprentices, 45 work-based trainees, 16 New Deal clients and five adults on the Learning Gateway programme.

3. There are 24,761 companies in Birmingham, spread over all the recognised major economic sectors, and with the number of employees totalling 464,476. Birmingham is forecast to have an extra 24,700 jobs by 2010. The city has experienced a shift from industrial production to the service sector since the early 1980s. The city's employment base for manufacturing has fallen from 44 per cent in 1978 to 19 per cent in the year 2000. The construction sector is expected to benefit from the urban regeneration projects under way in Birmingham, while forecasts indicate that a major employment boost will occur in professional and computer services. Retailing is also expected to create more jobs. Sixty-eight per cent of employment in Birmingham is in these sectors, where job numbers are predicted to increase over the next 10 years. At the time of the original inspection in May 2000, the unemployment rate in Birmingham as a whole was 5.5 per cent,

well above both the regional average for the West Midlands of 4.2 per cent, and the national average of 3.8 per cent. By the time of reinspection in May 2001, the unemployment rate in Birmingham had risen to over 9 per cent, compared with approximately 4 per cent elsewhere in the West Midlands region and 5.2 per cent nationally. Certain wards within the college's recruitment area have significantly higher rates of unemployment. Local wards also figure prominently among the most deprived wards in the whole country.

4. At the time of both inspections, minority ethnic groups accounted for over 21 per cent of the population in Birmingham as a whole, although the percentage varies considerably between individual wards across the city. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers in Birmingham achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 38.1 per cent, well below the national average of 47.9 per cent. In September 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Birmingham achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 41 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. NBC produced its self-assessment report for inspection in March 2000 and produced a series of frequently updated actions plans in preparation for the reinspection. College staff had attended training sessions run by Birmingham and Solihull TEC and received support in producing the final report document from a consultant provided by the TEC. The director for curriculum and marketing compiled the final report with help from a small team of colleagues. There is no representation of the views of trainees and employers in the report. The college's staffing structure changed between the production of the report and the inspection. The construction report was written in two sections, giving different grades for the construction crafts and the training in gas services. Those programmes with fewer than 10 trainees were not separately reported upon in occupational areas or given a self-assessment grade. New Deal was reported on and graded separately in the self-assessment report, but it was integrated into the occupational areas during inspection, because of the low numbers of trainees. For three of the eight areas in the self-assessment report, inspectors awarded the same grades as those given by NBC. Three of the other areas were awarded significantly lower grades by inspectors than were given in the self-assessment report. The post-inspection action plan was updated three times before the reinspection, with contributions from all those involved in work-based training.

6. The original inspection was carried out by a team of six inspectors who spent a total of 23 days at NBC in May 2000. The team worked jointly with a team of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectors, sharing their information and findings. The occupational areas jointly inspected were: construction, accounting and foundation for work, along with the generic areas. Inspectors examined college and awarding body documentation. They interviewed a range of college staff. Nine work placements were visited and during these visits seven workplace supervisors were interviewed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work, records of trainees' progress reviews, and portfolios. They observed monitoring or assessment visits and instruction sessions and interviewed 39 trainees. The following table shows the grades awarded to the off-the-job training sessions at the college:

Grades awarded to training sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		4	2			6
Management & professional			2			2
Foundation for work			4			4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>

7. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors who spent a total of six days at NBC in May 2001. The inspectors examined college and awarding body documentation and trainees' files. They interviewed 11 college staff, 21 trainees and New Deal clients and 12 employers. No training sessions were observed, although a trainee induction session and a construction staff internal verification meeting were observed. For reinspection, inspectors used the post-inspection action plan prepared in October 2000 and the updated versions dated January 2001 and March 2001.

## **OCCUPATIONAL AREAS**

### **Construction**

### **Grade 3**

8. There are 99 trainees in this occupational area, plus 22 clients following a range of construction qualifications within the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. Details of their types of training, numbers, occupational specialisms and NVQs are given in and the table below. The manufacturing skills of producing hand-crafted furniture and woodmachining are included in this occupational area as the numbers of trainees were too low to warrant separate inspection.



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 BIRMINGHAM COLLEGE MAY 2000 ADULT LEARNING  
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SUBJECT	NVQ LEVEL	MODERN APPRENTICES	OTHER YOUTH TRAINEES	NEW DEAL CLIENTS	ADULTS	TOTAL
Gas services installation & gas services maintenance	2	1	5	3	19	28
	3	2	3	1		6
Mechanical engineering services (plumbing)	2	5	14	6	7	32
Wood occupations (construction)	1	5	4			9
	2		1			1
Producing hand-crafted furniture	1			1		1
	2			1		1
Wood occupations (construction)	2		10	3	2	15
	3	1	3			4
Shopfitting (construction)	2	1	2	2		5
Shopfitting benchwork (construction)	3	3				3
Woodmachining	2				1	1
Decorative occupations (construction)	1		1	3		4
Painting and decorating (construction)	2		1			1
Bricklaying (construction)	2		4		4	8
	3			1		1
Block paving				1		1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>121</b>

9. Trainees are able to join the programme at any time, and attend off-the-job sessions on one or two days a week on a block-release basis. On-the-job training is carried out by local firms. Employers used by the college range from large contractors involved in new-build projects to small subcontractors involved in a wide range of construction work. The self-assessment report was largely accurate and inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

*STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-planned and varied off-the-job training
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ flexible training programmes

*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of awareness of NVQs by employers

- ◆ some poor portfolios
- ◆ late implementation of key skills

10. Off-the-job training at the college is good. Tutors respond quickly to trainees and clients' needs and establish effective working relationships with them. Many of the college staff have recent industrial experience, which is used to relate training sessions to the real work environment. There is innovative use of construction projects around the college, to provide realistic work activities for trainees. Work has been completed on recreation areas, access ramps and decorative building work, and this work was also used as evidence for assessment. The standard of practical work produced for assessment is generally of a high quality. In the hand-crafted furniture department a young female trainee has gained employment with a local cabinet-making company. There is good availability of a high standard of work placements. On one project, trainees are involved in a self-build housing project, which allows them to gain occupational experience in a wide range of work activities. In cases where this range of opportunity is not available, trainees are relocated to more appropriate placements. Following recent changes in staffing there have been frequent visits to workplaces by the new placement officer and college tutors. However, these visits are not co-ordinated or effectively used. Training programmes are very flexible and are regularly adapted to suit both individual trainees and employers' needs. There is a good choice throughout the year and the college is not restricted by traditional term times. Retention rates are high. In 1998-99, 90 per cent of trainees completed their training and of these, 47 per cent achieved a qualification.

11. The number of work placements has increased recently since the appointment of a new placement officer who has a number of local contacts in the construction industry. This improvement has addressed the problem of the lack of work placements, which was identified in the self-assessment report. Some trainees are employed and others are placed by college staff with companies for work experience. The quality of work placements is good, but some opportunities to use work-based evidence are missed. In some cases, trainees regularly produce work which meets employers, clients' and industrial requirements, yet this work is repeated at college under simulated conditions, for assessment purposes. The college has recently introduced site diaries to record work activities, but the use of these diaries is not yet fully implemented. Employers lack awareness of the NVQ process and are not involved in reviewing trainees. The college staff clearly differentiate between employed trainees and non-employed trainees in work placements. Insufficient information about trainees' progress towards their NVQ is given to the workplace supervisors of non-employed trainees, as college staff feel that they would not be interested. Most employers are unaware of the content of the off-the-job programme at the college and the order in which topics are taught and assessed. There is a lack of involvement by workplace supervisors in the planning of the work-based training, and there are poor links between workplace and college activities to encourage trainees to practise their skills. There is a lack of structured on-the-job training to help trainees to achieve their NVQ units.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*In the carpentry and joinery department there is poor administration of written theory test papers. Awarding body guidelines clearly state that these papers should be completed unaided, under exam conditions. Trainees were observed using textbooks when being assessed on their knowledge.*

12. There is some poor assessment practice and no systematic approach to portfolio building. In some areas, such as gas occupations, the quality of portfolios is good, with good use of diverse evidence, such as photographs and witness testimonies from clients and employers. However, in the other construction skill areas, portfolios are merely collections of learning materials and activity packages, with no registration details, assessment of prior experience or use of cross-referencing. Few trainees can recall the planning of assessment and many are not directly involved in compiling their NVQ portfolios. Problems have been identified with the internal verification process and, although a new system has recently gained approval from the awarding body, this system is not yet fully established. There is little sharing of good practice across the various skill areas and a lack of effective management and quality assurance of the work-based trainees' programmes.

13. Key skills training has only very recently been introduced. It is not yet fully implemented, nor is it effectively related to the vocational skills and on- and off-the-job aspects of the programmes. The learning packages used for key skills work are occupationally specific, to help trainees to see the relevance of key skills to their occupational area. Key skills are offered to all trainees and are taken as additional qualifications by those trainees not on a modern apprenticeship or national traineeship scheme.

**Management & professional  
(accounts)**

**Grade 5**

*This occupational area was not reinspected as Birmingham and Solihull TEC withdrew the training contract for this occupational area, following the awarding of grade 5 at the original inspection.*

14. Nine adult trainees are working towards an NVQ at level 2 in accounting. The course is advertised in the college and in job centres. The trainees have an interview with the course co-ordinator and complete a numeracy and literacy assessment prior to starting the programme. There are two part-time tutor/assessors, one of whom is the course co-ordinator. Induction lasts for the first week of training. Trainees attend the college for off-the-job training sessions for three and a half days each week. They have one day each week for home study. Work experience is for one day each week and replaces an off-the-job training day or the home study day. The college's placement officer arranges work experience placements. Off-the-job training sessions are held at college either in classrooms, the practice office or the learning resource centre. The computers in the learning resource centre have industry-standard accounting software. The training programme lasts for four months. There is an external assessment at the end of the programme. Achievement rates for the last year stand at 62.5 per cent. Eight completed portfolios have not yet been internally verified and certificated by the awarding body. In 1999-2000, retention rates are steady at around 75 to 80 per

cent. The college identified some of the weaknesses, and identified strengths which were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified no significant strengths and further weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ no significant strengths identified

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of programme co-ordination
- ◆ insufficient work-placement opportunities
- ◆ poor assessment and internal verification practices
- ◆ poor standard of portfolios

#### **POOR PRACTICE**

*Trainees received no on- or off-the-job training for three weeks over the Easter period, as they were given a compulsory holiday to coincide with staff holidays and not placed with employers for work experience for this period.*

15. The programme is managed by a curriculum area manager and co-ordinated by a part-time visiting tutor. There are no defined roles and responsibilities and teamwork is mostly informal and not always effective. One tutor relies on the other to pass on verbally details on trainees' identified prior learning, as these are not recorded on any documents completed in the curriculum area. Tasks are not always completed when necessary. For example, eight trainees completed all the individual units of the NVQ but have not had their achievement recognised because the results from three months ago have not been reported to the awarding body. Therefore these trainees have no evidence of their success on the programme. The course is run as two distinct parts of administration and accounting and these are not co-ordinated. Evidence is only used for part or the other, with no cross-referencing. When trainees' achievements are recognised through an accreditation of their prior learning there is no planned development of their skills. The pace of training is slow and is unstimulating. Off-the-job training is satisfactory, but it does not meet the needs of individual trainees, as it is focussed on group work. No reviews are carried out for trainees who have been on the programme for two months, meaning that half the training programme is completed before trainees have their progress formally reviewed. There is no target setting and action planning with trainees to link their on- and off-the-job work. There is no structured on-the-job training or effective liaison by college staff with workplace supervisors.

16. There is an imbalance of work-placement experience and time in comparison with the off-the-job training in college. The work placements are for one day each week and the majority of the trainees have not started on the placements until at least half way through the length of the training programme. Most trainees attend work placement for eight days out of the four months of the programme. Insufficient emphasis is placed on the importance of work experience and four trainees from the last group intake of 14 trainees did not attend a work placement at all. This has been recognised by the college and a placement officer has recently been appointed who has successfully managed to gain work placements for all the current trainees. There is also a lack of work experience for adults, many of whom

have been away from the workplace for some time.

17. Some of the work placements are inappropriate and are not sufficiently related to the NVQ trainees are following, nor do they provide the necessary learning or evidence opportunities. Most trainees attend the work placements for a very short period and are not always able to demonstrate their competence over a period of time. Few assessment methods are used throughout all areas of the training programme. Direct observation is not used to assess trainees on work placements. Witness testimonies from workplace supervisors are not sufficiently explicit to use effectively for assessment. There is no recording of the oral questioning used to check trainees' background knowledge. Portfolios are based on a restricted range of evidence and do not show their competence over a period of time. There is an over-reliance on simulated evidence such as learning materials and classroom exercises. The awarding body records are not completed fully and are not always signed by the assessor. There is little use of work products as evidence. Cross-referencing of evidence within the portfolios is negligible. Portfolios are poorly presented.

18. Assessment for accounting trainees is not ongoing, and is only planned for the few last weeks of the programme. This is done by externally set assessments which are marked by the assessor. No supporting evidence is provided to reinforce the assessment decision. There is no formal action planning with the trainees. The business administration assessor holds an assessor qualification, while the assessor who has accounting experience is working towards the assessor qualification. There is no system to monitor NVQ unit achievements to date. Individual assessors do not keep any records as an overview of trainees' progress and achievements. There is no qualified internal verifier with any accounting experience or qualifications. The internal verifier is the curriculum area manager who has been included in the team in response to the external verifiers' reports. There has been no internal verification for the last nine months. There are no previous records of any internal verification. There has been no internal verification of the portfolios of trainees who left the programme three months ago. Trainees' achievements have not been accredited by the awarding body and trainees have not received certification of their achievements.

### **Foundation for work**

### **Grade 3**

19. There are 11 trainees on the foundation for work programme. The programme is designed for young people who find it difficult to access mainstream education or training. Trainees lack a clear vocational focus and may also lack basic skills in literacy, numeracy or information technology. Many need to overcome other barriers which place them at a disadvantage when seeking training and employment, such as a history of exclusion from school, of offending, or abuse of drugs or alcohol.

20. The programme aims to help trainees to begin to develop basic skills, make an

informed work or training choice and to provide additional support to enable them to build their confidence and motivation. The programme lasts for 15 weeks and includes an introductory week during which the co-ordinator works with trainees to explore vocational interests, assess their basic skills and agree a timetable for the rest of the programme. Trainees select a timetable to include 'tasters' in vocational areas, as well as literacy and/or numeracy training and an introduction to information and communications technology. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by NBC.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-structured and -taught programme
- ◆ effective use of work 'tasters' to identify aptitudes
- ◆ good retention and progression rates

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no systematic identification of trainees' individual needs
- ◆ poor links between staff in different areas of the programme
- ◆ some dull training and inappropriate learning materials

21. The foundation programme is well structured with a clear schedule and established lesson plans and course materials. Training is calm and provided at an even pace, with tutors working with small groups of trainees in a relaxed atmosphere. Tutors develop a rapport with trainees, to get to know them and to provide the options they want. The learning environment is welcoming and trainees feel comfortable. They work through a programme which includes sessions on vocational interests, career choice, decision making and confidence building. Trainees have access to training to gain qualifications in wordpower and numberpower, computer literacy and information technology and other qualifications. Training and assessment for these qualifications is competent. The basic skills tutors have recently developed new materials for wordpower and numberpower which are relevant to some construction trades, but these are not yet in full use. In addition to classroom-based training, trainees have access to residential activities which help to develop their team work and increase their confidence. Some trainees also make use of the college's 'enrichment programme' which includes sports activities such as archery, football and ski-ing.

22. Trainees attend work tasters in their chosen vocational area. Some trainees choose to sample several occupations, others remain in one only. The experience gives trainees the opportunity to work in a particular trade, test their aptitude and find out if they enjoy it. It also helps trainees to adapt to the world of work, develop attendance patterns and mix with mainstream trainees. Trainees are encouraged to work through foundation programmes relevant to their chosen occupations. Fifty per cent of current trainees are on tasters in construction trades.

The remaining trainees are sampling other occupational areas including information technology, beauty and media.

23. Progression rates on this programme are good, with 100 per cent of trainees who joined this programme since it began in October 1999 progressing to employment, further education or training with NBC or with other colleges.

24. Trainees are assessed by the careers service prior to joining the programme to identify their broad occupational interest, basic skills levels and provide some information on their educational attainment and personal background. This information is confirmed during the first week of the programme using a series of exercises including a literacy and numeracy test. The assessment is mechanistic and trainees are not encouraged to identify other training and support needs, or to access any support, guidance and training needed to help them to address them. Trainees build a programme from a narrow range of activities.

25. The programme co-ordinator maintains regular informal contact between trainees and the staff in the different areas of the programme. Recording of initial assessment, training plans and progress is limited to listing the main programme elements. The information is not easy to access and there is no system for sharing information between staff. Trainees and the various staff involved in the programme do not work to the same objectives.

26. The programme content and training methods used are not sufficiently varied or appropriately timed to reflect individuals' objectives or learning styles. For example, trainees attending tasters in carpentry and joinery find the academic content of some learning packs too advanced. Similarly, new trainees are asked to read through vocational interest exercises and careers guidance packs before completing the basic skills assessment for literacy skills. Materials are not sufficiently adapted to make them accessible to the trainees. Assessments for wordpower and numberpower make little use of work tasters and naturally occurring evidence. There are few opportunities for trainees to review what they have learnt and to recognise the confidence and skills which they have gained.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 3**

27. NBC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, which has recently been reviewed and is in the new staff handbook issued this year. The student charter given to trainees makes reference to the equal opportunities policy. The college's strategic plan includes an analysis of the ethnic mix of local communities and compares these with the college's applicants. Fifteen per cent of work-based trainees are from minority ethnic groups. The catchment area of the college is varied. Some areas are multi-cultural and in some local wards around 60 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. Inspectors agreed with the

weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The strengths were no more than normal practice, inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective response to identified equal opportunities issues
- ◆ good use of positive images of under-represented groups in promotional materials

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of understanding of equal opportunities by staff and trainees
- ◆ poor use of equal opportunities data

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Off-the-job attendance times at college can be adapted for trainees with childcare responsibilities. They can vary the start and finish times to fit in with their children's timetables.*

28. College staff respond promptly and effectively to equal opportunities issues when they are identified. For example, the college's reception area has recently been altered in consultation with a student with disabilities. This involved moving the entrance and installing ramps to connect the original reception to the new areas. The new reception is a welcoming area. It is accessible to wheelchair users, with automatically opening doors and a low reception counter. The area includes adapted toilet facilities and good access to the advice and guidance centre. The college has increased the amount of reserved parking for those with disabilities by the main reception door. Staff respond effectively to individuals' needs. The college provides a counselling service which is well established. It has provided counselling for 18 trainees in this academic year in addition to responding to a number of other requests for help. The college is involved in an 'inclusive learning initiative' and has developed an action plan for extending access to young people aged between 16 and 19.

29. Promotional materials such as the college's prospectus contain positive images of under-represented groups to promote equality. Trainees' successes in non-traditional roles are celebrated. A female trainee who completed qualifications in the traditionally male-dominated hand-crafted furniture trade was featured in the college newspaper.

30. Equality of opportunity is not included on the college's induction checklist. Few trainees remember equal opportunities or their rights and responsibilities being mentioned at induction or at other stages in their training. Trainees are unable to suggest what might be expected in terms of their behaviour or their rights in the event of discrimination, bullying or harassment. The placement pack for employers includes a paragraph about equal opportunities. Workplace supervisors have a poor recollection of the statement and do not remember equal opportunities being discussed when placements were agreed. There is no checklist to confirm that equal opportunities have been discussed with workplace supervisors. Staff involved in the work-based training have not received training in equal opportunities issues. Many of the work-based training staff are unaware of the reviewed equal opportunities policy. They have little understanding of equal



opportunities and its place in work-based training.

31. Data are collected which allow new trainees to be monitored against equal opportunities criteria. However, there is no system for monitoring progress, retention and achievement rates in relation to gender, race, disability or occupational area to establish any trends. Trainees' complaints and grievances are responded to promptly, but there is no system for encouraging feedback from trainees or for collecting and analysing this information to identify sources of problems relating to equal opportunities.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

32. Trainees are usually introduced to the work-based training unit of the college by the careers service, their employers or through the Employment Service. Most trainees have an interview with either a member of staff from the vocational area they are interested in joining or a representative of the training unit. Trainees complete an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy and results are sent to the training unit for the trainees' file. Trainees' needing additional learning support are referred to the college's learning support unit. The induction to the training unit includes completing training scheme documents with a member of the unit's staff. An occupational induction is carried out at the outset of training in the appropriate college department. Employers are responsible for the induction given to introduce trainees to the workplace. Reviews of trainees' progress are carried out by a tutor at the college, and in the workplace by a training unit representative. Tutors have recently begun to visit trainees in the workplace. Trainees who are not employed have work placements arranged by the college. Towards the end of trainees' programmes, they are given careers advice by staff from the college's careers service. The self-assessment report was accurate in its identification of weaknesses although additional weaknesses were identified by inspectors. Many of the strengths given in the report were considered to be no more than normal practice. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good support for trainees with identified learning needs
- ◆ effective support from college's careers service
- ◆ effective action taken to widen participation in training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ review process lacks rigour
- ◆ details of additional support not shared among staff
- ◆ lack of detail in individual training plans
- ◆ unmemorable induction

33. Trainees with additional learning needs receive effective help from the specialist learning support unit. Additional literacy and numeracy support is often related to vocational topics and trainees take assignments from their classes to work on with support tutors. Support unit staff have started to develop basic skills work packs to complement the vocational programmes. Trainees include young people with dyslexia and those who have achieved few formal qualifications. The work of the support unit helps them to achieve vocational qualifications and secure employment.

34. The college's career service staff offer objective advice to prospective trainees about career opportunities and qualifications. Skilled staff give further advice to trainees and work effectively with the training unit to promote vacancies and arrange interviews. An interactive computer programme is used to suggest career opportunities which link to trainees' aspirations and qualification aims. One of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report states that work placements are in short supply. To address this, NBC has appointed an experienced placement officer who works effectively with the college's careers staff to find new opportunities for trainees.

35. The learning support unit is open outside of normal college hours, including weekends. Special arrangements can be made for trainees to attend classes to suit their needs, and the childcare facility has enabled single parents and women returning to work to enrol and remain on courses. Even if trainees do not qualify for the college's hardship funds to subsidise places in the nursery, the training unit works with other agencies to secure alternative funding so that nursery places can be made available. The childcare facility is also open outside normal college hours. Most college programmes are accessible at any time of the year and links with local schools to offer vocational training to year-11 pupils have proved effective in recruiting trainees onto work-based and full-time courses.

36. Visits to the workplace have recently increased in frequency and improved in their content. Tutors now visit the workplace to monitor the progress of trainees, and there has been some assessment in the workplace, although this has yet to be established as normal practice. The volume and quality of evidence from the workplace has improved recently.

37. Information about additional support for trainees is systematically shared among staff. Trainees leave their training sessions to attend the learning support unit and the link between support staff, vocational tutors and work-place supervisors is poor. Tutors are often not aware of trainees' attendance or progress at the additional support sessions and are unclear about the way in which parties can work together to assist trainees' development. Some workplace supervisors only find out about the additional support being provided when they identify problems themselves and contact the college. Staff involved in reviews with trainees often give confidentiality as the reason for not sharing information with parties involved in training.

38. Reviews of trainees' progress are not approached in a uniform way. Details of the reviews undertaken by the tutors responsible for off-the-job training are rarely passed to the training unit and reviews in the workplace do not include input from the workplace supervisor. Agreed targets cannot be shared by all parties. Trainees and employers only receive a copy of reviews if they request it.

39. Trainees' individual training plans are often poorly completed and do not record past achievements or individual targets. Trainees with learning difficulties or additional support needs identified through the initial assessment process do not have these details systematically recorded so that tutors, employers and training unit staff can monitor their progress. Trainees with previous occupational experience or qualifications rarely have this information considered and recorded so that the learning programme can be customised to suit their needs. Many of the documents in trainees' files are incomplete.

40. Induction to the programme is carried out by the training unit's staff and this is followed by an induction to the occupational area by a tutor. Many trainees have poor recall of the content of induction, which does not effectively cover equal opportunities. Progress reviews do not reinforce the content of induction, which many trainees remember only as information on health and safety. The induction content varies according to the time of year that trainees enrol onto programmes. Trainees enrolling in September have a more comprehensive induction than those that starting at other times of the year.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

41. The training unit administration team and the funding co-ordinator are responsible for the administration of the LLSC contract. There are three administrative assistants, each having a primary responsibility for youth training, adult training, and New Deal and foundation trainees, respectively. The unit staff report to the college management information system manager, who in turn, reports to the director of finance. There is a placement officer who is responsible for placing all construction trainees who are not employed in a work placement, and for carrying out all health and safety in the workplace checks and trainees' pastoral reviews in the workplace. The placement officer reports to the curriculum standards manager, who was internally promoted to the newly created cross-college post in September 2001. The curriculum standards manager reports to the director of curriculum and marketing. Workplace training is integrated into the college's curriculum areas. The curriculum staff are responsible for the on- and off-the-job training of the work-based trainees in their area. The trainers, assessors and tutors are managed by the curriculum area managers, who meet as a team to discuss curriculum issues. All college staff involved with work-based training are employed by the college and are included in college procedures and systems. The college was accredited with the Investors in People Standard in 1998 and is now re-assessed annually.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient involvement by employers in training programmes
- ◆ unclear staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ ineffective systems for providing information on trainees' progress
- ◆ achievement and retention data not easily available
- ◆ ineffective use of appraisal systems

42. All weaknesses have been remedied to some extent following the original inspection. The weakness of management of training co-ordination has been partly rectified by the creation of a new cross-college middle management post in September 2000. This post-holder is now specifically responsible for the management of work-based training, including the construction and basic skills curriculum areas. Links with employers have been improved in a number of ways. Employers are given more information using new work-placement information packs, which were piloted with the members of the new employer information forum. These were recently sent to all construction employers, but have not yet been discussed with all employers. The construction employer forum met for the first time in April 2001 and has termly meetings planned. New standardised progress review forms have recently been introduced to be used across the college, although since July 2000 the brickwork staff have used improved progress review forms. Construction site visits by college lecturers have gradually been introduced since July 2000, starting with brickwork and by March 2001, involving all trades. These visits are aimed at bringing together on- and off-the-job training, encouraging trainees to gather evidence from the workplace and getting construction college staff to carry out progress reviews and assessments in the workplace. In addition, construction lecturers are visiting workplaces for the new work-based recorder role, which the college anticipates will be carried out in the future by construction employers' own staff. Retention and achievement data for work-based trainees are now available separately and reports are sent monthly to work-based training college managers. Staff appraisals now include work-based training issues and new appraisers have received training.

### ***STRENGTHS***

- ◆ good range of external networks with local referral and support agencies
- ◆ effective leadership of work-based training and good team-working
- ◆ effective collection and reporting of data for management information

### ***WEAKNESSES***

- ◆ ineffective links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate resources

43. Staff have a range of external networks with local referral and support agencies which advise on local employment trends and give specialist support

advice. These were acknowledged at the original inspection. Financial and learning support is made available for trainees, although some New Deal clients were unaware they that may be able to receive financial support to purchase tools.

44. The new curriculum standards manager has been active in raising the profile of work-based training. She positively supports staff, encouraging and organising cross-college activities to share ideas and to prepare standardised documentation and systems. Staff from the training unit and curriculum staff work well together. Curriculum managers meet regularly to discuss college issues.

45. The funding co-ordinator's job has grown owing to the range of useful computerised data reports that can now be generated specifically for work-based trainees and New Deal clients. Since January 2001, reports have been prepared on a monthly basis for the curriculum standards manager, to enable her to set targets and review progress against them. The human resources manager is sent reports about the ethnicity and gender of trainees to enable him to monitor the participation of under-represented groups. The director for curriculum and marketing also receives these reports and curriculum managers can request reports about their trainees and clients. The reports can be prepared in a number of ways enabling comparisons of information by qualification, qualification levels and training programmes. At the time of the original inspection, the college was unable to separate the information about work-based training participants from the rest of the college data.

46. Trainees' activities are not planned to encourage links between on- and off-the-job training. Employers receive verbal information about trainees' skills and knowledge at the start of a work placement, however, they do not receive useful written information. Employers do not understand the way that normal site tasks relate to the requirements of the NVQs and the trainees' individual training plans. The guidelines for employers have not been updated since September 1998. They still include references to previous training schemes and only refer to the NVQ, making no reference to other aspects of the trainees' individual training plans. There is still little structured on-the-job training and a lack of NVQ awareness by employers. Visits to employers by college staff are organised in a fragmented way, not making the most of opportunities to co-ordinate the training provision.

47. The contingency plans in the construction area are not adequate to deal with resources shortages, especially those involving staff, over the past few months. The impact on the trainees and New Deal clients has resulted in delays to progress, frustration and a lack of motivation. There have also been delays in introducing workplace visits, the monitoring of workplace activities, work-based evidence collection and employer involvement in NVQ training. Examples of problems in college workshops include the scarcity of tools and materials to enable trainees to start practical tasks promptly, insufficient time for individual support, including explanations of individual training packs. Groups have been combined, which has increased the trainee to staff ratios and created extra workloads for the remaining staff. In addition, there have been delays in portfolio assessment and internal

verification activities. Some staff will shortly complete their annual teaching contract hours, before the end of the teaching year. Plans for trainees' work placements during the college holiday months are unclear and do not have enough detail about meaningful activities.

## **Quality assurance**

## **Grade 4**

48. NBC has a quality assurance policy and a number of associated procedures. Overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with the personnel and quality manager. There is a quality assurance sub-committee of the academic board which has responsibility for reporting to the academic board on matters of quality assurance. Some written policies are contained in the staff handbook which is issued to all staff. A newsletter is produced to update staff on quality assurance issues. The college's quality assurance strategies include annual self-assessment, audits of training, monitoring, review and evaluation of all its work, and the use of feedback.

At the original inspection, the weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ no formal monitoring of on-the-job training
- ◆ little effective sharing of good practice
- ◆ poor analysis and use of data to make improvements
- ◆ some unsatisfactory internal verification practices
- ◆ underdeveloped systems for obtaining and using trainees and employers' feedback

49. Since the original inspection, a curriculum standards manager has been appointed to strengthen quality assurance in curriculum areas, which includes work-based training and New Deal. A number of procedures have been revised and standardised. Paperwork has been redesigned. Many of these changes have only recently been introduced and it is too early to be able to assess any improvements that they may bring. Some procedures and paperwork are ineffective and there are considerable variations in practice. Inspectors found that two weaknesses had been rectified. Internal verification is now satisfactory. The analysis and use of data to make improvements is now good, a strength which is reported under management of training as part of the effective collection and use of management information. They identified an additional strength and a weakness.

### ***STRENGTHS***

- ◆ well-established and effective arrangements for lesson observation
- ◆ well-planned initiatives to improve quality assurance

### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ weak quality assurance procedures
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice
- ◆ ineffective trainees and employers' feedback systems

#### **POOR PRACTICE**

*There is not enough sharing of good practice across the college. For example, the construction induction booklets are unattractive and dull. There is insufficient use of illustrations to add interest and emphasise learning points. The materials used in additional support areas are good and could be used as examples.*

50. The college has developed a quality assurance process to monitor the quality of the training throughout the college. This involves one occupational area being paired with another. Curriculum area managers ensure that all lecturers within the paired departments are observed teaching on at least one occasion in the academic year. Staff are trained to conduct observations and less experienced observers are mentored by more experienced ones. All observations are undertaken using clear and detailed guidelines and give detailed, written assessments of the training sessions and feedback to the lecturers. All observations are graded. There is specific guidance for work-based training. The quality assurance subcommittee has revised the procedures which now include checking and reporting on college quality audits as a standing agenda item. However, the committee has only met three times out of a planned five.

#### **POOR PRACTICE**

*In a recent survey of employers, the information was collected in such a way that the college was unable to analyse the responses of those involved with the work-based training.*

51. The curriculum standards manager has introduced a number of well-planned initiatives to rectify weaknesses in quality assurance arrangements for work-based training. A quality assurance manual describes key procedures for the initial interview and the reviewing of trainees' progress. There are informal arrangements for identifying trainees' previous learning experiences, but there is no mechanism for formal accreditation. New paperwork and procedures are introduced in a structured way. The curriculum standards manager visits workshops to ensure that the paperwork is being used correctly. Trainees' files are now kept centrally and checked that they are up to date, but the quality of the information in them is not monitored.

52. The college has made slow progress in rectifying identified weaknesses. For example, a key meeting to discuss retention and achievement issues took place less than a month before the reinspection. Despite the improvements that have taken place, quality assurance arrangements overall are still weak and have not yet led to a significant improvement in performance. The implementation of policies and procedures is not yet good enough. Some older forms are poorly copied and are almost illegible. Others encourage general comments rather than being specific to the assessment and monitoring of training. For example, an interview sheet for the construction requires interviewers to categorise potential trainees as 'confident', 'shy' or 'arrogant'. Even the better, more recent, forms show significant variations in the way in which they are completed. Some important sections, for example, agreed outcomes, are not filled in at all. The information on the forms does not always link training activities to programme assessment. Many completed forms do not have final dates for achievement of all agreed targets making it difficult to monitor progress or action points. A number of forms have no issue or revised dates.

53. The college has made some improvements to the way in which it shares good

quality assurance practices, but further improvements are needed. The curriculum standards manager's job description stresses the promotion of good practice. A recently established cross-college internal verification group considers college-wide issues and seeks to share good internal verification practices. As a result, internal verification documentation has been revised and improved. This cross-college group has generated a number of internal verification groups intended to monitor and improve the quality of internal verification within specific curriculum teams. These have met once in most areas.

54. Arrangements for gathering feedback from trainees and employers are still ineffective. The trainees' progress review and evaluation forms are complex, using language not familiar to most trainees, for example, comments relating to 'pace of delivery' or 'teaching style'. Some evaluation forms require trainees' names, this removes the advantage of anonymity in obtaining useful feedback. The student survey form is currently under review as part of the college's response to the Basic Skills Quality Initiative. One action point is to create another version of the form using clearer, more accessible language. There is insufficient structured gathering of employers' views regarding training. There are informal channels, for example, telephone calls in response to problems, but employers do not feel actively involved in the design of effective training programmes.