

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
JUNE 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
SEPTEMBER 2001

Darlington Borough Council



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 *learnirect* 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 Darlington Borough Council was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in a less than satisfactory grade being awarded for engineering. This area has 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 section of the original report dealing with engineering has 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).

Darlington Borough Council provides training in motor vehicle engineering and administration. There are good-quality work placements, both within the council and with local employers. The quality of practical and theory training in motor vehicle is good, with close links between the two. The retention rate has improved substantially since the original inspection and is now satisfactory. In administration, learners make slow progress towards their NVQs. Learners' selection and recruitment procedures ensure that there is equal access for all, irrespective of ability. Monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is inadequate. Support for learners is good, with comprehensive induction programmes and thorough initial assessment of learners' basic skills. Additional learning support is provided for those who need it. Staff training and development is strong. Management information is not fully used. Quality assurance arrangements cover aspects of the training programme but are insufficiently focused on the quality of training and assessment.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	4
Business administration	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Engineering	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ♦ good-quality on- and off-the-job training in motor vehicle
- ♦ good-quality work placements
- ♦ comprehensive and sensitive learners' recruitment and selection procedures
- ♦ comprehensive induction
- ♦ thorough basic skills assessment

- ◆ effective learning support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress of learners in administration NVQs
- ◆ little monitoring of equality of opportunity at work
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ poor collation and use of management information
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of the quality of training and assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) set up its training unit in 1981. At the time of the original inspection, it contracted with Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide modern apprenticeship, national traineeship and other work-based training programmes. The council is now contracted to provide work-based training by Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and national traineeships have been replaced by foundation modern apprenticeships. The training centre moved its base shortly before the original inspection and is located within the Arts Centre in Darlington. Training is offered in five occupational sectors, which are construction, engineering, business administration, leisure, sport and travel, and health, care and public services. Learners are all working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3. Some learners are also undertaking awards in basic skills. At the time of the original inspection, there were 66 learners and eight members of staff. Currently, there are 81 learners. DBC subcontracts training and assessment for the sports and recreation and childcare programmes, to a local college of further education.

2. The Borough of Darlington is compact, comprising the town of Darlington and its surrounding area. The river Tees and North Yorkshire lie to the south, the Teeside conurbation to the east, County Durham to the north, and rural Teesdale to the west. Formerly a district within County Durham, DBC became a unitary authority on 1 April 1997. The borough has a population of approximately 100,000, with most people living in the urban areas. There are excellent communication and transport links. Darlington has a principal railway station on the east-coast rail mainline. The motorway and Teesside International Airport are within its boundaries. Since the original inspection, the economy in the area has improved. More well-paid jobs, without training, are available. These are not necessarily secure in the long term but they attract some young people.

3. Projections suggest that the borough's population will remain fairly stable until 2011. Within the same period a number of variations are anticipated, with a decrease in the number of children and an increase in the number of people above retirement age. Average household size is predicted to fall. By 2011 there are expected to be 3,300 additional households, an increase of nearly 8 per cent.

4. Unemployment in Darlington was high at 6.6 per cent, compared with the national figure of 3.8 per cent in April 2000. By June 2001, it has reduced to 4.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.0 per cent. The educational achievement of school leavers is slightly lower than the national average. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 42.9 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, this proportion had increased to 45 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. The proportion of people in Darlington from minority ethnic populations is low, at only 1.5 per cent of the population.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. DBC produced its second self-assessment report in preparation for the original inspection. The self-assessment process and production of the report were co-ordinated by the training manager. Each occupational sector evaluated the quality of its work against the quality statements in *Raising the Standard*. The views of employers and learners were sought and taken into account. Judgements were discussed among all staff. Action plans were drawn up to remedy the weaknesses highlighted.

6. Prior to the reinspection, DBC produced a report of the progress made since the original inspection in all of the occupational and generic areas. It includes an updated action plan and a new set of grades. There is no indication of how the grading decisions were reached.

7. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at DBC in June 2000. The engineering and business administration sectors were inspected. The construction, sport and recreation and childcare sectors had nine, three and two learners respectively and were not inspected, owing to small numbers. Inspectors interviewed 23 learners and examined 20 learners' files. They interviewed six employers and 10 DBC staff. Thirteen portfolios of assessment evidence were examined. Inspectors also scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence including minutes of meetings, external verifier reports, internal correspondence and management information. Two sessions of learning were observed, both in engineering. Each was awarded grade 2.

8. For the reinspection, a team of two inspectors spent a total of four days at DBC, inspecting engineering. They interviewed 12 learners, six workplace supervisors and carried out six interviews with staff. The external verifier was interviewed by telephone. Inspectors visited five employers and the garage where off-the-job training took place. They looked at 10 portfolios of assessment evidence, external verifiers' reports, internal verification records and learners' files. Inspectors observed and graded three sessions of learning.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at reinspection

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering (motor vehicle)

Grade 3

9. There are currently 21 motor vehicle engineering learners. Eight are on a

foundation modern apprenticeship programme and are working towards a 'fast fit technician' NVQ at level 2, plus additional key skills units. A further 13 learners are on other training programmes and are working towards NVQs at level 1 or 2. The level 1 candidates are also working towards basic skills qualifications. Many of the learners who join the motor vehicle programme have a history of poor attendance at school and have shown little interest in previous academic work. Over 75 per cent of learners have additional learning support needs. Learners are either employed or they are on work placements. They attend the training centre on one day each week for theory sessions and help in compiling their portfolio of NVQ assessment evidence. One instructor is responsible for the engineering training. He is occupationally qualified and suitably experienced and is working to become qualified as an NVQ assessor and trainer. Internal verification is subcontracted to a former external verifier. Of the 34 learners who have joined training programmes since April 2000, 11 have left early without achieving a qualification.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ learners' poor retention rates
- ◆ insufficient resources for theory sessions
- ◆ lack of individuality in learners' portfolios

10. Retention rates have increased. Procedures for the initial assessment of learners have been improved with the aim of ensuring that learners are on a programme which is right for them, in terms of its level and content. Staffing problems have been remedied and off-the-job training is now satisfactory. The progress report produced prior to reinspection identified improvements made but failed to acknowledge new weakness in assessment practices.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality training
- ◆ employers' and learners' comprehensive understanding of the programmes
- ◆ close links with employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unsatisfactory assessment practices

11. DBC accepts many learners onto their motor vehicle programmes who have learning difficulties and weak literacy and numeracy skills. They are given a good on-the-job training and have the opportunity to start a career in motor vehicle engineering. The learners' needs for additional learning support are identified through a comprehensive initial assessment process which includes some assessment by the learners themselves. An experienced member of staff, who holds specialist qualifications in teaching basic skills, co-ordinates learning support for learners.

12. DBC has built excellent links with local garages and motor vehicle dealers and is now able to call upon the services of 31 work-placement providers. Companies that offer placements strongly support the training programmes. DBC held an evening presentation for the motor vehicle placement providers and eight employers attended. They were given information packs containing guidance on the structure of NVQs and the NVQ assessment process. The DBC instructor makes visits to learners on placement every two weeks and uses these occasions to update workplace supervisors on developments affecting training programmes. The supervisors' knowledge of the NVQs is impressive. Learners are also well informed about the NVQ and key skills units. They are clear about the tasks that they need to carry out to cover each unit.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good practice in overcoming a weakness in a cost-effective manner. One of the weaknesses identified during the original inspection was the lack of appropriate resources for theory work. DBC reached an agreement with a local garage to use a cordoned-off section of the workshop for off-the-job practical training, when required.

13. Training is good. Training in the workplace is provided by experienced staff who are keen to help learners develop their skills and extend their knowledge. Work placements vary considerably in terms of their size and the nature of the work carried out in them. Learners discuss with staff the type of work placement they wish to attend. They are able to change their placement during the programme for legitimate reasons, such as their need to gain a broader range of experience in order to develop all the requisite NVQ competences. Off-the-job training sessions are well planned and competently taught. The instructor carefully pitches the sessions at the right level to ensure that no learners have to struggle with the work. The atmosphere is informal and purposeful. Staff provide plenty of individual tuition and there are rarely more than six learners in attendance. Off-the-job practical training is carried out at a local garage using old cars in a working environment. In this setting, learners are able to see the relevance of theory work to their on-the-job training, such as that relating to health and safety. Staff establish close links between theory and practice. The instructor uses the two-weekly visits to each workplace to co-ordinate the on- and off-the-job training.

14. Learners' retention rates have improved substantially since the original inspection and are now satisfactory. In the two years prior to the original inspection, the retention rate was 26 per cent. In the period since April 2000, the retention rate has increased to 68 per cent. The support learners now receive from the staff has improved. It is too early to judge whether the improvement in retention rates is leading to an improvement in achievement rates but there are indications that the latter are rising.

15. Learners are visited frequently at work for assessment purposes. All assessment is carried out at the learners' workplace. Learners are assessed during the normal course of their work, or at times arranged with the employer when the learners feel ready to undergo assessment. Evidence of learners' acquisition of NVQ competences is gathered at work from completed job cards, observation of learners' performance and learners' answers to effective questioning. Assessments by observation of learners' work are conducted properly and thoroughly. Learners' evidence portfolios are well organised and now contain a varied range of sound evidence. Portfolios provide an accurate picture of the quality of learners' work. Witness testimony is used to verify the job record cards. A record is maintained of

specimen witness signatures.

16. Some assessment practices are unsatisfactory. Assessment decisions are made by a member of staff who is not yet a qualified assessor. The subcontracted internal verifier checks and countersigns a sample of the assessment decisions because there is no qualified engineering assessor in the organisation. This practice has been agreed with the awarding body. Witness testimony of good work by learners are not always signed or dated by the witness concerned. A few learners have portfolios in which evidence has not been cross-referenced to the appropriate NVQ units. These learners are not sufficiently aware of the extent of their progress towards achieving their NVQ and do not know whether they have gathered enough evidence. The instructor has no effective means of keeping track of learners' progress.

Business administration

Grade 3

17. There are 39 trainees in business administration. Ten are modern apprentices, 13 are on a national traineeship programme, and a further 16 are the other training programme. Two thirds of trainees have additional learning support needs. Trainees are all working towards NVQs in administration at levels 1 to 3. Some of those working towards the level 1 award are also undertaking qualifications in basic skills. Just over half of trainees are employed by, or on work placement with, DBC. The remainder are in a wide range of placements including a school, the TEC and a motor dealership. There are three staff in this sector who deliver off-the-job training sessions and visit the workplace to carry out assessment and reviews. They are all appropriately qualified and experienced.

18. In the last three years, 23 people have started a modern apprenticeship. Eleven are still in training, of whom nine started in the 1999-2000 contract year and are still on the programme. Ten people have achieved NVQ at level 3. In 1999-2000, 18 people started a national traineeship of whom 15 are still in training. In the past three years, 125 people have started on other training programmes. They have achieved 22 NVQs at level 3, 23 at level 2 and 5 at level 1. In the current year, 33 people have started this programme of whom 28 remain. Of the five early leavers, three obtained employment and one entered further education. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The slow progress of trainees in achieving NVQs was not identified as a weakness. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ flexible arrangements for off-the-job training
- ◆ effective use of the workplace to generate assessment evidence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards NVQ achievement
- ◆ lack of integration of key skills into some NVQ programmes
- ◆ no targets set for unit achievement

19. DBC's staff have strong links with employers and have developed a wide range of placements to suit the needs of trainees across the range of programmes. During induction, trainees are given the opportunity to consider the variety of placements available to them. They discuss the options with the tutors who try to ensure that they are matched according to their skills and career aspirations. At the end of the induction programme, all trainees have a placement arranged for them to start their NVQ training. Most work placements employ trainees at the end of the programme. Where internal vacancies arise within the council, trainees on placement are eligible to apply. Those who succeed are able to continue with their studies once employed by the council. The range of jobs available is interesting, stimulating and challenging.

20. Trainees are scheduled to attend regular off-the-job training sessions. Some employed trainees have difficulty attending each week due to work demands. Staff have developed flexible arrangements for training. Times and days for attendance vary, to suit individual trainees and their employers. Overall attendance at these training sessions is good. Trainees normally carry out individual work under close supervision and guidance from staff. Where appropriate, group sessions are held to cover background knowledge. Trainees and employers appreciate this flexibility.

21. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace to carry out assessment and reviews. Most employers are keen to help trainees learn and progress. Where necessary, arrangements are made for trainees to carry out tasks not normally within their work remit, to generate assessment evidence. Portfolios are of a good standard with all of the evidence collected in the workplace.

22. Achievement of NVQs is slow across all of the programmes. Some modern apprentices have been on the programme for two years and have not had any units formally assessed. Many of these trainees have gathered a substantial amount of assessment evidence. DBC has recruited school leavers with good GCSE results directly onto the NVQ level 3 award. In many cases the work they are doing in the first year of their employment is of a junior nature and more appropriate to a level 2 award. There is little recorded assessment until they are well into the second year of the programme. Trainees are not set targets for unit achievement in their individual training plans or during the review process. The action plans drawn up during most assessment planning sessions are informal. The frequency of staff visits to the workplace is now satisfactory following the appointment of a new member of staff.

23. DBC has been slow in introducing key skills into the programmes. Modern apprentices have concentrated on NVQ achievement with key skills assessment left to the end. Level 3 candidates have little knowledge or understanding of how

key skills link with their NVQ work. Those on the national traineeship programme that were recruited in 1999 have had key skills training from the outset. Staff are working on a set of training packs to assist trainees to identify opportunities to gather key skills evidence in the workplace.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

24. DBC has an equal opportunities policy which meets both legislative and TEC requirements. It is supported by a set of procedures which are updated regularly. All staff are issued with a handbook during their induction which includes a copy of the policy and procedures on harassment, grievance and complaints. Trainees are also supplied with a copy of the equal opportunities policy during their induction, plus information on complaints and appeals. A simplified version has been written for those with reading difficulties. Fifty-five per cent of trainees are men. There are no trainees with physical disabilities, although several have health problems such as asthma or epilepsy. There are no trainees from minority ethnic groups. In its self-assessment report DBC highlighted some strengths which are considered by inspectors to represent normal practice. Inspectors agree with one strength and the weaknesses and with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ equal access to training for less able trainees
- ◆ comprehensive and sensitive recruitment and selection arrangements
- ◆ trainees' good understanding of the complaints and appeals procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little positive promotion of equality of opportunity
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of equality of opportunity at work

25. DBC's new training premises are on the second floor and are inaccessible to those with mobility difficulties. A formal agreement has been drawn up with the Arts Centre stating that, if a trainee with mobility difficulties is recruited, training accommodation will be made available on the ground floor. There is a ramp into the building and a cafeteria with lavatory facilities on the ground floor.

26. All trainees who could benefit from the training are accepted onto the programme. Many applicants have learning difficulties and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Others have a history of poor school attendance. DBC gives the applicant a new start and a chance to succeed. Initial assessment is used to determine support needs and not as an instrument to reflect less able or disadvantaged young people.

27. There are clear procedures for recruitment and selection of trainees, which are

carefully followed by staff. Interviews are well structured and there is a standard list of questions that are asked. Records are kept of the answers given. There is also a list of topics on which staff should record information to ensure that all relevant issues are covered. This system is designed to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all applicants. A new equal opportunities monitoring form for applicants was introduced in April covering gender, ethnicity and disability. There have been 52 forms completed so far. Only one application has been received from a person from a minority ethnic background who was offered a place.

28. Trainees' knowledge and understanding of the complaints and NVQ appeals procedures is good. The complaints procedure has been used effectively. Trainees readily express any dissatisfaction or concerns to the instructors who often resolve matters informally.

29. DBC has taken little action actively to actively promote equality. There have been no efforts made to target specific groups for training. Recently produced marketing literature does not encourage trainees to consider non-traditional training areas, for example women in engineering.

30. There is insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity for trainees at work. There is brief reference to equality of opportunity in the employer contract and employers are provided with a guide to good practice on equality of opportunity that has recently been produced by the TEC. There is, however, no checking that the employer has an equal opportunities policy. Smaller organisations, which do not have a policy of their own, are not required to accept and implement that of DBC. The vetting and monitoring of employers covers only health and safety matters. Trainee reviews do not always include discussion of equality of opportunity.

Trainee support

Grade 2

31. Most young people are referred to DBC by the careers service. Some respond to advertisements placed by DBC in the local newspapers. All applicants are invited to attend an interview. During the interview an initial assessment of the applicants literacy and numeracy skills is undertaken. The results of this assessment are used to determine the appropriate level of qualification and to draw up a programme of learning support. Approximately 95 per cent of applicants are offered a training place. Those who have severe basic skills learning needs who would be unlikely to cope successfully with an NVQ are referred back to the careers service for referral to a training provider offering prevocational training. From June until September each year there are three-day group induction training programmes. For the rest of the year a one-day induction programme is provided for individuals or small groups. Each trainee has a further induction in the training sector within DBC and in the workplace. DBC identified the strengths found by inspectors for this aspect but did not mention the absence of key skills initial assessment in its self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is the

same as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction programmes
- ◆ thorough basic skills assessment
- ◆ effective learning support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills

32. All trainees undertake a comprehensive induction programme to ensure that they have full information on their training programme from the start. There are detailed session plans for the initial induction programme. The programme includes input from a variety of speakers including the training manager, TEC representative, training co-ordinator, council safety officer, a careers officer, training instructors and a local bank representative. At the end of the induction trainees are set an assignment to assess their knowledge of the main topics. They are supplied with a handbook containing the information covered for future reference. Trainees then undertake a further induction in their training sector which is given by the instructor. The content includes the structure and content of the NVQ and health and safety issues relating to the vocational area. Trainees receive and sign a copy of the NVQ appeals procedure and given copy of the complaints procedure. A further induction is provided in the work placement. All aspects of the induction programme are evaluated and checklists are used by staff to ensure that all necessary topics have been covered.

33. The initial assessment of trainees' ability in basic skills is thorough. The TEC requires DBC to administer the Basic Skills Agency screening tests for reading, writing and numeracy. This is to establish which trainees are suitable for basic skills qualifications at entry level, for which DBC receives TEC funding. In addition, a further assessment is carried out to establish any learning support needs for all trainees. This includes trainees' self-assessment of their communication, writing and numeracy skills, discussion regarding prior learning and a centre-devised assessment paper to identify specific learning needs such as letter writing, measurement and use of time. Each trainee has an individual interview with the member of staff responsible for administering the assessment to discuss the results and draw up a support programme if appropriate.

34. Learning support is available for all trainees, with two-thirds of them in receipt of such help. There is one experienced member of staff who holds a specialist qualification in teaching basic skills who oversees the work. This staff member is also an assessor for the business administration programme. A further member of staff holds a basic qualification in teaching literacy. There is a good range of learning resources including worksheets, books and specialist training packages for use during sessions. All learning material is suitable for young adults and relevant to the trainees. Much basic skills work takes place within the vocational area.

Efforts are made to link the basic skills work to the NVQ.

35. All trainees undertake a personal effectiveness programme consisting of sessions on health and safety, money management, job search and career progression. Sessions last for either a full or half day. There are lesson plans including learning objectives for each session. In addition, 15 trainees recently attended a residential team-building and personal-development course.

36. DBC does not carry out initial assessment of key skills for modern apprentices or national trainees. Plans are in place to identify and use an appropriate assessment tool.

Management of training

Grade 3

37. The training centre is an integral part of DBC within the Human Resource Management Division. The management structure, responsibilities and internal lines of communication are clear and understood by staff within the unit. There are currently eight members of staff: a training manager, a training co-ordinator, five training instructors and an administrative assistant. Training instructors are given the responsibility and authority to manage their own programmes with support and regular meetings with the training manager. DBC holds the Investor in People award. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths claimed by DBC for this aspect and found two different weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong partnerships with employers
- ◆ comprehensive staffing procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little sharing of good practice
- ◆ poor collation of management information

38. DBC has long-standing and well-developed links with local employers. Employers are encouraged to play a central role in the training programmes. All unemployed trainees have work placements. The quality of the work placements is good and DBC maintains employers' enthusiasm and commitment to training through frequent contact and an effective flow of information.

39. DBC has recently introduced a staff appraisal scheme which includes, as one outcome, identification of staff development needs. Staff within the training unit have good access to training and development. They are well qualified, possessing a range of training and NVQ assessor/internal verifier awards. Currently, four members of staff are working towards a key skills assessor award. Trainers

maintain the currency of their industrial knowledge through the regular visits to the workplace.

40. DBC has a comprehensive, written recruitment policy which aims to ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants. One week before a new member of staff starts at DBC they are assigned a mentor, and a planning meeting with both line manager and personnel officer takes place to co-ordinate the induction process. On appointment, staff take part in an induction programme which extends over a two-month period. The programme is well planned, with topics specified and target dates set for the completion of each. Topics include introduction to DBC policies on sexual harassment, grievance procedures, smoking and alcohol. Welfare and employees' benefits are also covered within the induction timetable. All staff have comprehensive job descriptions listing the job purpose, reporting relationships within the unit and all duties and responsibilities. These have recently been re-issued following a major restructuring of the unit.

41. Communication within the training unit is effective with formal monthly, staff meetings. These meetings give priority to the dissemination of management information and current issues raised by members of staff. The training manager also has six-weekly meetings with individual trainers to discuss the training programmes and trainees' progress towards achievement. Targets for trainee achievement are agreed following negotiation. These targets form the basis of future contract bids by the training unit. Trainers work together effectively and there is much informal communication. There is an open management style within the unit which allows the free flow of information and access to management by staff.

42. Good practice is not always shared between staff. In staff meetings trainers are not encouraged to discuss issues that are common to all sectors, such as trainees' review, assessment practice and internal verification. Trainers, even within the same occupational area, work in different ways. For example, not all trainees' files contain the same set of documents.

43. DBC has two management information systems running in parallel. One is required for Tees Valley TEC and a further system was required by another TEC with whom DBC used to contract. The administration assistant has received training in the use of both systems. The systems are complementary, each with its own advantages, and together form a powerful system that is capable of producing a wealth of information, including reasons for trainees leaving the programme early and the destinations of all programme leavers. Trainees' contact details and counselling notes are also put into the system. The systems are used largely to generate information required to complete TEC-funding claims. DBC makes insufficient analyses and use of the data for its own purposes.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

44. The training unit has a written quality system which is maintained by the

training co-ordinator. This is separate from the quality assurance arrangements for DBC as a whole. There are six quality manuals which cover a wide range of operational activities. Feedback from trainees and employers is sought through the use of questionnaires. The training manager carries out an annual audit of the system. The quality assurance system meets the requirements of the TEC. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and one further strength and one weakness were identified. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly written quality assurance system
- ◆ full involvement of staff in quality assurance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of training and assessment
- ◆ little analysis of data to inform continuous improvement

45. The quality assurance system is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the training programme from recruitment to departure. Links are created between DBC's policies and procedures and the separate quality assurance arrangements for the training unit. Two of the quality manuals are devoted to the process of self-assessment. All arrangements are regularly reviewed and updated whenever necessary by the training co-ordinator. The procedures accurately reflect the working practices of staff and include close document control procedures.

46. Staff are fully conversant with the quality assurance manuals and generally follow the procedures. All new staff are given an overview of the quality assurance system as part of their induction programme. Amendments to the system are carried out by the co-ordinator, but all staff are consulted and involved in changes. Staff support the system and see that it is relevant and important to their work. They also participate effectively in the self-assessment process. Trainers were responsible for evaluating their own sector and contributing this information to the self-assessment report. Judgements on the generic aspects were made through discussions with the whole staff team. Self-assessment is viewed by staff as a genuine tool for improving the quality of the trainees' experience.

47. There is little evaluation of the quality of training and assessment. Trainers are not observed training or given feedback on their performance to help them improve. The service level agreements signed by the subcontractors do not include measures to ensure that the quality of training and assessment meet an acceptable minimum standard. The college to which DBC subcontracts is not required to submit its own self-assessment report, and there is no formal monitoring of the quality of training it provides.

48. There is little analysis of data produced by the management information

systems. Not enough use is made of information on trainees' retention, achievement and employment rates to improve the quality of the programmes. For example, the poor retention rates in motor vehicle had not previously been quantified, and the severity of the problem only came to light when DBC completed the data forms required for inspection. DBC has recently introduced a system for obtaining feedback from trainees and employers through questionnaires. The feedback has not been analysed.

49. The self-assessment report is clearly presented. Supporting evidence is cited for each of the strengths and weaknesses. Many of the strengths identified in the report are no more than normal practice or contractual requirements. The report fails to take sufficient account of the low retention and achievement of trainees. In both occupational areas and in the management of training inspectors awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the other self-assessment grades.