

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
MAY 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
SEPTEMBER 2001

Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training Group



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 Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training Group was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for equal opportunities 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 equal opportunities 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).

Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training provides satisfactory training in electrical installation for modern apprentices. All training is now undertaken in either the organisation's own centres or the workplace. The organisation maintains good links with local employers. Work placements are good. They enable learners to develop a wide range of skills. Learners receive good personal support. Most learners obtain a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 but some make slow progress towards achieving this. Assessment and verification procedures are good. Reviews of learners' progress are carried out regularly. During their reviews, however, learners are not set targets and they do not draw up action plans to help them improve their performance. Staff have made considerable efforts to improve learners' understanding of equal opportunities. Data on equal opportunities, however, are not taken into account in decision-making. A comprehensive quality assurance system is being developed together with a system for monitoring and recording learners' progress. These systems, however, have not yet become fully established.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of experience in work placements
- ◆ good personal support for learners

- ◆ close links with employers
- ◆ effective management of change
- ◆ learners' achievement rates at NVQ level 2
- ◆ good assessment and internal verification processes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient use of equal opportunities data in decision-making
- ◆ no formal monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ lack of target-setting during learners' progress reviews at the training centre
- ◆ no well-established quality assurance system

INTRODUCTION

1. Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training Group (DCET) was set up by electrical contractors in the West Country in 1995 to provide apprenticeship training under contracts with the Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and it now contracts with Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The organisation became an independent training provider in April 2000 and has developed its own procedures and practices for both advanced modern apprenticeship training and adult training across the two counties. The group consists of 84 employer members and has 118 employed status learners working towards NVQs in installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems at levels 2 and 3. Thirty new learners are about to commence training. The administrative base is in Exeter. The organisation works with local careers offices, schools and employers in recruitment, selection and work-placement procedures. It also undertakes monitoring and reviews of learners throughout their training. It achieved the Investors in People Standard in March 2000 and is a preferred supplier to the local LSC. Off-the-job training is provided at recently established centres in Exeter, Bideford, Plymouth and Redruth. The organisation has been approved by the relevant awarding body as an assessment centre for its qualifications.

2. Training in electrical installation has undergone considerable change during the last decade and the company has learners following four different versions of the industry scheme. One scheme allowed all assessment to take place in a simulated, rather than real, workplace. In 1993, this scheme was revised and learners were required to carry out work-based assignments and work towards an NVQ at level 3. In 1999, the industry lead body for this occupational area established requisite standards and DCET developed its own training programme to enable learners to attain these. Towards the end of 1999, changes were made to the modern apprenticeship framework and modern apprentices are now required to achieve an NVQ at level 2. Graded electricians must have a registration card. To gain full registration, learners have to complete the modern apprenticeship framework and succeed in the industry-devised skills test or its approved equivalent. Most learners are keen to gain full registration. Within the industry, electricians who are registered can have advantageous rates of pay and benefits within the context of industrial relations.

3. The two counties of Devon and Cornwall are predominantly rural with a long coastal perimeter of 800 kilometres and a population of just over 1.5 million with a density of 151 people per square kilometre. Less than 1 per cent of businesses employ over 200 employees and 70 per cent are very small units employing fewer than five staff. Construction activity accounts for 12 per cent of all business in Devon and Cornwall compared with 77 per cent for service industries, which are mostly related to tourism. Manufacturing businesses are suffering from skill shortages particularly in engineering. In September 2000, the unemployment rate

across the two counties stood at 3.1 per cent, the lowest for 20 years. Average earnings are 19 per cent below national averages. Fifty-six per cent of the workforce are men and no change has been recorded in occupational trends between men and women during the last decade. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades C and above in Devon was 48.4 per cent and 51.6 per cent in Cornwall, which are both slightly above the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school-leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades C and above increased to 49 per cent in Devon and to 53 per cent in Cornwall, compared with the national average of 49 per cent for that year. Most newly recruited electrical installation learners are required to have at least three passes in GCSE subjects at grade C or above. Two learners are from minority ethnic groups and none are women. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the region is less than 1 per cent. Across the area, 77 per cent of female students and 68 per cent of male students stay on in full-time education after completing compulsory schooling.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. When writing the original self-assessment report, staff did not necessarily follow the guidance given in *Raising the Standard*. The TEC had little involvement with the development of the report. Instead of giving one grade for the occupational area, staff gave three separate grades for the components within it. Judgements were supported by appropriate evidence. The first self-assessment report was supplemented by an action plan for rectifying weaknesses. With one exception, inspectors awarded lower grades than those given in the self-assessment report. Following the original inspection, DCET produced an action plan which identified targets to address the issues raised. A second self-assessment report was produced in May 2001 and prior to reinspection a short report was produced outlining subsequent developments relating to equal opportunities and quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with the grading given by the organisation in its second self-assessment report.

5. For the original inspection, a team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days with DCET during May 2000. Three directors met with inspectors and all staff were interviewed formally. Inspectors also held many informal conversations with staff as they travelled with them to work placements. Inspectors visited five colleges of further education, meeting 43 learners and several members of teaching staff. They visited 22 learners in 17 workplaces and had discussions with 19 supervisors. Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including files on learners, records of assessment and internal verification, learners' portfolios, records of meetings, and files of correspondence.

6. For the reinspection, a team of three inspectors spent nine days at DCET's new premises in Exeter during September 2001. They observed three induction sessions for new learners and visited 15 other learners in the workplace. They had discussions with all members of DCET's training staff and six workplace supervisors. They studied the newly developed written procedures for quality assurance and documentation relating to equal opportunities issues. Inspectors looked at individual learners' files, records, site diaries, minutes of meetings, assessment and internal verification procedures and evidence relating to the implementation of the action plan.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. The variety of programmes being followed reflects the numerous changes that have been introduced over the last five years in the occupational area. The current NVQ at level 3 started in February 1999 while the corresponding NVQ at level 2 was only accredited in Autumn 1999 and did not become part of the modern apprenticeship framework until January 2000. Trainees are involved in the design,

commissioning and maintenance of all forms of electrical installation and most attend their local college for one day a week to gain basic knowledge. The remainder of their time is spent in the workplace. Employers using the services of DCET include large national electrical contractors, local medium-sized companies, and sole traders. Accredited assessors carry out continuous assessment at college and they assess the trainees under simulated workplace conditions. Increasingly, trainees collect evidence of their work-based competencies to meet the criteria of recently introduced awards. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified other weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

Table 1 indicates the numbers of modern apprentices being trained in electrical installation

Level	Award Title	Number of apprentices
NVQ 2	Installing electrical systems equipment	26
NVQ 3	Installing and commissioning electrical systems and equipment	41
NVQ 2 (new)	Installing electrotechnical systems	1
NVQ 3 (new)	Installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems and equipment	39

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements for trainees
- ◆ well-developed off-the-job training schemes
- ◆ trainees' good achievement rates for NVQs at level 2
- ◆ good use of diaries for recording evidence of trainees' work-based achievements
- ◆ good monitoring of health and safety practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some trainees' slow progress towards achievement of NVQs at level 3
- ◆ employers' poor understanding of NVQ requirements
- ◆ no routine testing of trainees' colour perception
- ◆ inflexible start times for training

8. Most trainees have placements that provide them with a varied work experience and good opportunities to develop a broad range of skills. Most employers help and support the trainees. They are responsive to their training needs and help them to gain confidence quickly and become useful members of a team. When trainees have a work placement that does not afford them the opportunity to develop a particular skill, they are moved temporarily to another work placement in order that they may demonstrate competency in all the skills they need in order to obtain

their NVQ. Trainees are given responsibilities at work to complete tasks on their own and are well supervised. Many employers are not aware of the activities trainees undertake at college and do not provide complementary experiences for trainees at work. There is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Some trainees make slow progress towards achieving their qualification. During their progress reviews, trainees do not engage in short-term action planning to accelerate their progress if they are falling behind in their work. Between 1994 and 1997, the trainees' average achievement rate for NVQ level 2 was 86 per cent. Of those who commenced training in 1998, 27 per cent have already achieved the award. Four-fifths of those who started training last year are still on the programme. Half of those who began their training during 1994 and 1995 have achieved NVQs at level 3 but none of those who started later has completed the programme yet. There is a lack of flexibility in the way programmes are arranged. Normally, trainees can only begin their programmes at the start of the academic year. Some trainees who join at other times find it hard to catch up on the work they have missed.

9. Training provided by most subcontracted colleges is effectively planned. Standards are clearly specified and trainees have good learning opportunities. Many of the trainees' teachers at college are not aware of what the trainees are doing in the workplace. They do not help trainees to identify opportunities in the workplace for gathering evidence of their acquisition of work-based skills. In general, college resources are good and used effectively to help the trainees. In one college, however, equipment is old and does not meet current industrial standards. Workshops are cluttered. Trainees cannot work continuously on their portfolios. They only have access to their portfolios during their day at college. Key skills training is an integral part of the trainees' programme. Trainees working towards NVQs at level 3 make good use of diaries for recording the tasks they have carried out in the workplace. Many portfolios contain authenticated photographic evidence of work trainees have completed. On all programmes, trainees are made aware of the importance of health and safety. Employers are well versed in health and safety matters. Trainees are asked questions about their colour perception before beginning training, but no medical validation of this is sought.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

10. The organisation's equal opportunities policy complies with contractual requirements and current legislation. Procedures have been established for the implementation of the policy. Copies of the policy are circulated to all staff, learners and employers. The training manager has responsibility for ensuring that equality of opportunity is promoted effectively through all aspects of the training provision. All staff have an explicit responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in their work and have attended training sessions to further their understanding of equal opportunities. Management and staff carry out regular

monitoring of the implementation of the policy. In its advertising and publicity materials, the organisation declares itself to be an equal opportunities employer.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no effective action to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ no formal procedures for dealing with complaints and harassment
- ◆ no monitoring or review of subcontractors and employers' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ stereotypical images of employees in the industry
- ◆ no training for staff on equal opportunities

11. Following the original inspection, DCET made considerable improvements to its promotion of equal opportunities through work-based training. All staff have benefited from training sessions, which has increased their understanding of issues related to equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy is explained to learners during their induction and issues related to equal opportunities are discussed with them during their progress reviews. There are now clear guidelines for staff on how to help learners who make complaints about harassment or bullying. Staff share these guidelines with the learners. A recent case of harassment has been dealt with well to the satisfaction of all parties and appropriate records of it have been maintained. Two newsletters have been circulated to employers informing them of their obligations in respect of equal opportunities and citing good case studies. These newsletters have been well received. The organisation has started to collect data on learners' gender and ethnicity. At present, however, it has no systematic arrangements for interpreting these data and making use of them in future planning. A thorough analysis of recruitment has been completed recently to identify groups under-represented on programmes. Learners have responded to questionnaires and employers have been contacted by telephone about equal opportunities issues but their responses have not been analysed. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses and the grade given in the self-assessment report prepared before the full inspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective procedures to ensure the fair testing and selection of all applicants
- ◆ effective training for staff on equal opportunities
- ◆ effective measures to improve learners' understanding of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped use of equal opportunities data to inform decision-making
- ◆ no formal monitoring of employer's equal opportunities practices

12. Applications are received from learners through careers advisers or directly from those being considered for recruitment by employers. The company invites all applicants to attend for aptitude testing and the results of this are fed back

promptly to them. All applicants are treated fairly. Very few applications are received from women or from those in minority ethnic groups. Enquiries about applicants' medical history are sensitively handled. Learners are scattered throughout Devon and Cornwall, but the company provides them with mobile telephone contact numbers so they can raise any matters of concern easily. Staff respond quickly to issues raised and often drive many miles to meet the learner and provide appropriate solutions.

GOOD PRACTICE

A small plastic card, called 'a best practice card' has been produced as a checklist, which summarises the equal opportunities issues relevant to learners. This card is issued to staff and learners and it is intended to be used as a pocket aid-memoir. It highlights the rights of individuals and the responsibility of everyone to uphold and promote equal opportunities. It gives details of a telephone help line for learners. On the reverse side and the organisations' policy statement is reproduced.

13. Specialist consultants have been employed to address the training needs of staff. Senior staff have benefited from a comprehensive training programme on equal opportunities, which has been shared with all members of the organisation. Training has raised awareness of groups affected by discrimination, and has covered the relevant legislation. Informative company newsletters have been produced to help employers understand their duties and responsibilities regarding the promotion of equal opportunities. Most employers have found these newsletters useful and informative. Questionnaires have very recently been sent to learners but not all have responded to them. New learners have issues relating to equality of opportunity explained to them during a special session in their induction programme but the learning materials for this are not entirely effective. A telephone poll has been carried out with employers to ascertain possible training needs they may have and in response to their interest, a seminar for employers is being planned. Training officers and assessors during their visits to the workplace have raised learners' awareness of the importance of equal opportunities. A 'best practice card' has been given to all learners, which contains a checklist of issues and a help line contact number on one side and the organisations' policy statement on the other. Most learners who were interviewed produced the card when equal opportunities were discussed and were familiar with its contents.

14. Various data on equal opportunities are collected from learners, employers and through the selection and recruitment procedures. Analysis of these data, however, is not carried out in order to identify ways of improving the promotion of equal opportunities. Although some employers have a good understanding of issues relating to equal opportunities, many do not. DCET staff work hard to counter the stereotypical images these employers have of some potential learners but some employers are reluctant to accept learners from some under-represented groups. The organisation does not check employers' policies on equal opportunities or employers' criteria for selecting learners. It does not monitor employers' promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace.

Trainee support

Grade 3

15. Trainees are referred to DCET through a variety of sources such as schools, the careers service, employers and personal recommendation. Most applicants complete an initial aptitude assessment and are given a general overview of the industry. Trainees without employment are recommended to employers who carry

out their own selection interviews before trainees are offered a place on the scheme. Trainees receive an induction from the DCET chairman and another when they start college. Throughout their training, staff visit trainees to carry out assessment and progress reviews. The self-assessment report identified no weaknesses and the statements of strengths were descriptive rather than judgmental. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses that the organisation had not identified. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good vocational and pastoral advice for trainees
- ◆ effective support for trainees throughout the training programme
- ◆ good additional learning support for trainees
- ◆ good arrangements for providing individual help to dyslexic trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to take trainees' initial assessment results into account in training plans
- ◆ inadequate induction process
- ◆ no systematic links between progress reviews in college and those in the workplace
- ◆ failure to set trainees' targets during progress reviews
- ◆ trainees' uncertainty about their target qualification and the role of DCET

16. The chairman has a personal commitment to ensuring that trainees receive good vocational and pastoral guidance. First-year trainees have only met with DCET's staff on one or two occasions and generally lack the confidence to contact them readily using the numbers they are given at induction. As their confidence grows, trainees contact staff more. One trainee, a young father-of-two, has received considerable help and is grateful to the company, saying that he could not have continued with his training without the support given. Many trainees have to travel considerable distances to attend off-the-job training. They receive assistance with transport costs. In one case, a taxi is provided for a trainee to get home from college as the last bus leaves before the college day ends. Initial assessment is used to determine trainees' suitability for the industry and mathematical ability. Initial assessment is not used as a means of identifying trainees' needs for additional learning support. Such support is given promptly, however, when trainees ask for it. Arrangements have been made for a self-declared dyslexic trainee to have a reader available to help him complete the initial aptitude test. Another trainee was making poor progress and DCET staff established that he was dyslexic. A reader was provided for all his future assessments. Most of the subcontractors providing off-the-job training have facilities for additional learning support, particularly for those who have weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. Trainees may use these facilities if they wish to and at one college, 43 per cent of the trainees do so.

17. There is no set procedure for recruitment interviews. All applicants receive an

initial assessment of their aptitude. The results of this assessment are not taken into account when drawing up the trainees' training plans. These are basically the same for all trainees, irrespective of their background and previous experience. However, some more able trainees have completed their work-based projects more quickly than staff initially expected. Where trainees' support needs are identified during training, they are not recorded on the training plan or in records of progress reviews. There are no arrangements for accrediting trainees' prior learning and experience.

18. Trainees usually receive an induction to the workplace on the employer's premises. A clear checklist of the content covered is held in individual files but trainees do not have any written materials to refer to later. There is no formal induction framework and no check is made on whether trainees understand the organisation's values and policies, equal opportunities, and the programme of study to be followed. Many trainees are confused about the role of DCET and what qualifications they have to achieve in order to complete a modern apprenticeship. At the start of each year, dates are set for each trainee to receive four progress reviews, two in college and two in the workplace. Those that occur in the workplace concentrate mainly on health and safety. The staff who carry out progress reviews in college are not the same staff as those who carry out the reviews in the workplace. The staff involved seldom liaise with one another to ensure that they are not giving trainees conflicting advice. Training plans are not referred to during reviews and trainees are not set targets to motivate them and spur them on. Some workplace supervisors are involved in trainees' progress reviews. Staff do not use the reviews to help trainees identify links between their on- and off-the-job training. Trainees are not given a copy of the record of any of their reviews.

Management of training

Grade 3

19. DCET is managed solely by the company chairman who is also managing director. Two operational directors are involved in strategic planning and six non-operational directors represent the industry that the organisation serves. Until recently, DCET was not accredited to carry out assessment for NVQs in electrical installation. This was subcontracted to a national provider of electrical installation training, and to six local colleges of further education. Dissatisfaction with this arrangement led DCET to seek and gain accreditation as an assessment centre. The organisation employs a personal assistant to the director, and two training officers. A systems consultant is engaged for three days each week to set up the assessment procedures previously carried out by subcontractors. Weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been rectified prior to inspection. Inspectors considered the strengths identified to be no more than normal practice. They identified further strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective action on poor practice by subcontractors
- ◆ comprehensive staff induction programme
- ◆ well-planned and clearly written training programmes
- ◆ extensive links with employers
- ◆ effective management of change

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective communication with some trainees and employers
- ◆ lack of service level agreements
- ◆ poor co-ordination of visits to trainees at college and in the workplace
- ◆ incomplete management procedures and processes

20. The organisation is owned and operated by local industry for their collective benefit. The directors are local electrical contractors with little expertise in training. The organisation maintains close links with industry to ensure that suitable applicants are found employment. Companies who cannot provide the full range of experience trainees require to achieve an NVQ often arrange alternative placements for them. They work closely together to provide trainees with periods of site experience which enable them to build up their portfolios. Following changes in the NVQs for the industry, DCET has to manage four different training schemes for its 107 trainees and it does so effectively. Furthermore, following the requirement for trainees to gather more evidence of their acquisition of competencies in the workplace, and DCET's dissatisfaction with some subcontractors, the organisation has decided to take more direct control of the training process. A systems consultant has introduced good training programmes for the new NVQ level 2 and 3 schemes. The programmes are well planned and clearly written. DCET has taken effective action over poor performance by some subcontractors. Trainees at one college expressed dissatisfaction with their progress and DCET staff intervened and discussed the problem with college management. When the situation did not improve, DCET invited employers to discuss the situation further with the college management. There was no improvement so, as a last resort, DCET agreed with employers and trainees to move the programmes to another college. All trainees expressed satisfaction with the move and with the way that it had been handled by the company. The organisation has recently been awarded the Investors in People standard and it has used the Investors in People criteria to develop systems and processes to improve operational effectiveness, facilitate continuing changes and strengthen its small team.

21. Many of the management processes and procedures used are incomplete. The business plan has not been updated to account for the current changes taking place within the organisation. The directors are well aware that DCET trainees have the fourth highest NVQ achievement rate in the TEC area. Such data, however, are not always taken into consideration when management makes decisions about action

required of staff. Staff are clear about their role in the organisation. Their job descriptions, however, have not been updated to reflect their changing roles. They are not set personal targets at appraisal. The appraisal process failed to identify that staff had a poor understanding of equal opportunities issues. Staff training on equal opportunities has now taken place but its effectiveness has not been evaluated. The organisation has contracts with trainees' employers, but these are primarily to meet TEC contractual requirements. They do not specify the training required for trainees to complete a modern apprenticeship. Agreements with subcontractors do not include clauses relating to quality assurance the required rate of trainees' progress. Trainees are unsure of the role played by DECT in their training. All could name the individuals who visit them in college or on site. Many were not aware that they were DCET trainees. Most employers and trainees interviewed are confused by the changes that have taken place in the modern apprenticeship framework. Letters to non-operational directors and employers informing them of these changes have lacked clarity, leaving employers puzzled and unable to describe these changes to their trainees. Visits to trainees at college and in the workplace are poorly co-ordinated. Until the recent appointment of a new training officer, all visits to the workplace were carried out by a part-time training officer and the organisation's chairman visited trainees at college. Trainees do not see any link between the visits. Staff meetings are regular and informal. Records of decisions taken at these are not always kept.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

22. Since the original inspection the company has developed a comprehensive quality assurance system to cover all aspects of its operation. A consultant who is also a part-time instructor for the company has developed the quality assurance system and is responsible for its implementation. Quality assurance procedures for training, assessment and internal verification are already in use. The quality assurance manual is not yet complete. The final section relating to learners attendance and travel mandates has still to be written.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no coherent and comprehensive quality assurance system
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of training
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of subcontractors

23. Following the original inspection the company produced a detailed action plan to build on the strengths and rectify the weaknesses identified by inspectors. This plan has led to development of a detailed and comprehensive quality assurance system. All staff understand the system and are implementing it. The company now has a wide range of quality assurance policies and procedures covering most aspects of its operation. The company produced a full self-assessment report in preparation for reinspection plus a short report outlining recent progress made. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment findings in respect of quality assurance

and awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-designed procedures for monitoring the quality of training
- ◆ effective internal verification procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little action to rectify identified weaknesses in learners' progress reviews
- ◆ lack of well-established quality assurance procedures

24. Since the original inspection, the company has made significant progress in developing and introducing a quality assurance system. The new quality assurance system is fit for its purpose and covers most aspects of the company's work, with clear flow charts showing the procedures to be followed. Some procedures relating to the training and assessment of learners have already been evaluated and amended. Many elements of the quality assurance system are still being implemented. Some aspects of the system have still to be developed. Responsibilities for the monitoring assessment and verification are included in the job specifications of staff who have to undertake these tasks.

25. There is a detailed and comprehensive set of procedures for assessment of learners at NVQ level 2 and 3. Assessment and verification are thorough and reliable. Good flowcharts show how assessment and verification are to be carried out. Assessment involves oral and written questioning of learners. Evidence of learners' knowledge and competences is carefully recorded and cross-referenced to NVQ standards. Work-based assessment involves the use of assessment sheets devised by the organisation and scrutiny of learners' site diaries. Internal verification is carried out with consistent thoroughness. The company has developed its own management information system for monitoring and recording learners' progress. Although not yet fully operational the system is able to provide clear information quickly about each learner's progress and what learners still need to do to complete their apprenticeship. The system has been developed on-line and when fully operational, learners will be able to gain access to their own records to monitor their own progress.

26. The company systematically seeks the views of learners about their training through questionnaires and during progress reviews. Learners are asked to complete a detailed questionnaire during and at the end of their training. They are also encouraged to record their views about their training during their progress reviews. Their responses are collated and in the last year a number of learners' comments have become agenda items at staff meetings. Learners are aware that their views are considered and their feedback has led to improvements in the training programme, such as to the recruitment and induction processes and the duration of off-the-job training. Since the introduction of the new quality assurance system the retention rate for first-year learners has increased from 68 per

cent to 82 per cent.

27. All off-the-job training now takes place at one of the company's four training centres and learners are no longer sent to a college of further education. The organisation had made this change partly because learners had commented unfavourably on the quality of training they had received at college. All learners interviewed during inspection expressed complete satisfaction with the quality of their training. Employers' views on the management and effectiveness of the training are also obtained systematically through use of a questionnaire. The quality assurance manual covers the process for learner's progress reviews clearly. The recording of reviews is thorough and detailed. All learners receive at least four reviews of their progress each year and some have five. Reviews are thorough but learners do not engage in action-planning and are not set short-term targets. This weakness was identified during the original inspection under trainee support and it has not yet been addressed.

28. Self-assessment is a routine part of the developing quality assurance procedures. An action plan was drawn up to build on strengths and rectify weaknesses identified during the original inspection. Implementation of this plan has been monitored regularly to check that action is being taken by designated members of staff within specified timescales. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the new self-assessment report and the short report prepared for the reinspection. They also agreed with the grades given by the organisation.