

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT  
JUNE 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION  
DECEMBER 2001

# West Berkshire Training Consortium



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 West Berkshire Training Consortium was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for retailing and customer service and leisure, sport and travel. 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 retailing and customer service and leisure, sport and travel 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)).

**West Berkshire Training Consortium offers good training in manufacturing and business administration and satisfactory training in engineering and hair and beauty. However, learners in engineering and manufacturing are not assessed in the workplace sufficiently often. Training is now satisfactory in retailing and customer service and leisure, sport and travel. Learners in retailing, customer service and sales now benefit from flexible, enjoyable and effective off-the-job training. Learners in sport and recreation now have frequent and purposeful assessment in the workplace. At the original inspection, few learners achieved their key skills awards. Key skills training is now good. Although West Berkshire Training Consortium promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily, it has not taken specific action to recruit learners from groups that are under-represented on its learning programmes. Learners receive good support. However, staff do not always monitor some learners' progress sufficiently closely or encourage them to complete their learning programmes. Communications in the organisation are good. West Berkshire Training Consortium's arrangements for quality assurance of in-house training are effective and lead to improvements. There is, however, insufficient quality assurance of training provided by subcontractors.**

## GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	2
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	4
Leisure, sport & travel	4
Hair & beauty	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	3
Leisure, sport & travel	3

## KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ innovative and effective learning programmes in manufacturing
- ◆ good learning programmes in business administration
- ◆ good off-the-job training in retailing and customer service
- ◆ good planning of assessments in sport and recreation
- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training in hairdressing
- ◆ good range of learning programmes to meet all learners' needs
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ open and effective management
- ◆ good use of feedback from learners and employers for planning continuous improvement

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient assessment of some learners in the workplace
- ◆ failure to ensure full implementation of all learners' training plans
- ◆ some inconsistent initial assessment methods
- ◆ some poor target-setting

## INTRODUCTION

1. West Berkshire Training Consortium (WBTC) is based in Newbury. It was established in 1983, as a result of a joint initiative by Newbury District Council and the local chambers of commerce for Newbury and Thatcham. Newbury District Council was replaced by West Berkshire Council in 1998. Each of the founding organisations nominated a member of the board, and the organisation was set up as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. WBTC's aims are to meet the demands of local businesses for training and to promote work-based learning.

2. At the time of the original inspection, WBTC contracted with Thames Valley Enterprise, the training and enterprise council (TEC) for the Thames Valley, to provide advanced and foundation modern apprenticeship, and other work-based learning for young people. WBTC now contracts with Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). At the time of the original inspection, it offered training in 12 areas of learning. It now offers training in 11 areas of learning. Some of the areas of learning have few learners and were not inspected. At the original inspection, there were 224 learners, of whom 24 were on learning programmes that were not inspected. There are now 229 learners.

3. WBTC works with various organisations. Most of these are in the Newbury and Thatcham area of West Berkshire but some are based in Bracknell, Slough, Windsor and Taplow. WBTC currently has 21 permanent staff, comprising one operations director, 11 trainers and assessors, a recruitment officer, a health and safety officer, and seven administrative staff. There is also one freelance assessor. WBTC subcontracts some of the training, assessment and internal verification to nine local colleges and training providers. The training offered through subcontractors includes training in key skills, engineering, floristry, sport and recreation, amenity horticulture, environmental conservation, accountancy, furniture handcraft and machine printing. WBTC had preferred supplier status with the TEC. In 1993-94 and 1994-95, it was named as training provider of the year by the TEC.

4. West Berkshire is the most western district of the Thames Valley. It is largely rural but contains important transport routes, including the M4 and A4 running east to west and the A34 running north to south through Newbury. West Berkshire has a population of approximately 145,000 and a workforce of 66,419 in 7,118 organisations. In March 2000, the unemployment rate in West Berkshire was 0.9 per cent, considerably lower than the national average of 3.9 per cent. By September 2001, the unemployment rate for West Berkshire had fallen to 0.7 per cent and the national average had fallen to 2.9 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school-leavers going into further or higher education increased to 61 per cent. In March 2000, only 139 young people aged 18 to 24 were registered as unemployed in West Berkshire. By September 2001, this number had decreased to 104. At 1.7 per cent, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in West Berkshire is

much lower than the average for England of 6.2 per cent. In 1999, 56 per cent of school leavers achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, compared with a national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2001, the proportion was still 56.1 per cent, compared with a national average of 50 per cent. A high proportion of young people in the local area progress to further or higher education. In 1999, 47 per cent of school leavers went into higher education and a further 13 per cent deferred their entry for one year.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The self-assessment report prepared for the original inspection was the third that WBTC had produced. All staff were involved in self-assessment. The report was drawn up by a working party set up to prepare for the inspection. The manager of each learning programme provided information. All staff received copies of the draft report and participated in the final grading decisions. Employers and subcontractors were not involved in self-assessment. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they considered some strengths to be no more than normal practice and found some strengths and weaknesses which WBTC had not identified. They agreed with three of the grades in the self-assessment report. In one area, inspectors awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report and in six areas they awarded lower grades. For the reinspection, WBTC produced a report showing how it had built on the strengths and rectified the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. It also produced a summary of the current strengths and weaknesses of the two occupational areas being reinspected and awarded those areas grades. Inspectors awarded the same grades as those given in the self-assessment report.

6. The original inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors, who spent a total of 31 days at WBTC in June 2000. Inspectors interviewed 85 learners, and 22 workplace managers and supervisors. They also carried out 19 interviews with WBTC's staff. They visited seven subcontractors and 22 work placements. Inspectors examined learners' portfolios and files, individual learning plans, learning materials, paperwork relating to assessments, the company's policies and procedures, internal and external verifiers' reports, records of reviews by the TEC, minutes of staff meetings, personnel records, and analysis of feedback from learners and employers. Inspectors observed and graded six instruction sessions.

7. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors, who spent a total of seven days with WBTC in December 2001. Inspectors visited eight workplaces and interviewed 23 learners and four workplace managers and supervisors. They carried out seven interviews with WBTC's staff and interviewed three subcontractors' staff. Inspectors examined learners' portfolios and files, individual learning plans, paperwork relating to assessments, internal and external verifiers' reports and minutes of meetings. Inspectors observed six assessments and two progress reviews. They also observed and graded one induction, two instruction sessions in key skills and two instruction sessions in retailing and customer service.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering						
Manufacturing						
Business administration		2				2
Retailing & customer service				1		1
Leisure, sport & travel						
Hair & beauty			3			3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Retailing & customer service		3	1			4
Leisure, sport & travel		1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Engineering

### Grade 3

8. WBTC has 16 trainees on engineering programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3. Of these, eight are modern apprentices, one is a national trainee, and seven are following other vocational programmes. Training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is available in engineering production, engineering maintenance, servicing electronic systems, engineering manufacture, technical services and vehicle maintenance. Twelve trainees are employed and four are in work placements. Employing and sponsoring organisations offer a diversity of employment ranging from specialist automotive component manufacture to general engineering. WBTC subcontracts all its off-the-job training in engineering to two colleges. College staff carry out assessment and internal verification. In Newbury, modern apprentices and trainees following other programmes take the NVQ level 2 foundation course one day a week over two years. After this, they work towards an NVQ at level 3 on their employers' premises and attend college one day a week to take an appropriate further education course. In Reading, all trainees spend one day a week in the college's skills-training facility following a one-year course leading to NVQ 2 in foundation engineering. Those who obtain their NVQ at level 2 progress to training on their employers' premises leading to NVQ level 3. Most trainees also then attend college on day release to work towards an additional vocational qualification. The colleges are responsible for teaching and assessing key skills. WBTC refers all potential engineering trainees to the colleges for initial assessment. WBTC staff carry out reviews of trainees' progress and provide trainees with



continuous additional support, where required, throughout training. Retention and achievement rates for work-based trainees during the training years 1997-98 and 1998-99 were low. On average, 43 per cent of trainees left early without qualifications. These rates are improving and all trainees who completed programmes in 1998-99 are now working towards higher level qualifications. Inspectors considered that the strengths stated in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. They agreed with the weakness identified in the report and found one additional strength and one additional weakness. The grade they awarded was lower than that given by WBTC.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees and employers' poor understanding of programmes
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment

9. Good off-the-job training on the level 2 foundation course takes place at two local colleges. Trainees are instructed by well-qualified staff in well-resourced engineering training facilities at both locations. At both centres, staff have well-structured lesson plans. Each learning activity which trainees participate in is carefully recorded. There are comprehensive monitoring systems for trainees' progress. Trainees are provided with good guidance on how to collect evidence and build up their portfolios. Qualified assessors conduct assessments regularly. A range of assessment evidence is generated from observation of trainees and examination of the products trainees make. Records of trainees' progress held by the trainers and assessors clearly indicate the stage the trainees have reached in their programme. Attendance at both centres is good and trainees openly demonstrate a pride in their work and programme.

10. Trainees, and many employers, are unable to define the apprenticeship or traineeship programme. Most believe that the prime requirement for apprentices is the acquisition of the vocational qualification to which the college course leads and they consider the NVQ to be incidental and of secondary importance. Other elements, such as key skills, are not covered until near the end of the programme. Some trainees do not begin to collect evidence for their NVQ at level 3 until the third year of the programme. Currently one trainee is working towards an NVQ at level 3 and two are about to do so. Trainees working towards an NVQ at level 3 are not assessed through observation of their work but staff in the workplace provide witness testimony as to the quality of their work. There are no qualified assessors in the workplaces and WBTC does not have an occupationally competent member of staff to carry out the assessment. Opportunities are missed to assess trainees' vocational competencies and key skills in everyday situations in the workplace. WBTC has acknowledged this weakness and discussion with subcontractors on ways of rectifying it is currently taking place. Assessment plans have been drawn up. The college assessor who carries out progress reviews of

level 3 trainees in the workplace plans to make assessment visits to each trainee. The first visit is scheduled during the college's summer holidays.

## **Manufacturing**

## **Grade 2**

11. WBTC offers training in a range of manufacturing disciplines leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Programmes offered are advanced science and laboratory operations, engineering production and manufacture and handcrafted furniture production. Most trainees are working at two local companies, a handmade furniture manufacturer and an agrochemical manufacturer. There are currently eight modern apprentices and 11 trainees on the programmes. WBTC recruits most trainees through the careers service. Potential trainees are offered an interview and receive induction covering all aspects of their training. During their induction, trainees undergo an initial assessment and science trainees' GCSE results and grades in the general certificate of education at advanced level are taken into account. Trainees attend a local college, on a day release basis, for science programmes. Furniture production trainees attend a training centre in Salisbury for their off-the-job training on a weekly basis and WBTC arranges accommodation for them. Assessment takes place at the college or training centre and in the workplace. The science programme has been offered for the last two years and 14 trainees have joined it since 1998. Of these, four trainees have gained their NVQ at level 3, seven have left the programme early, two have gained an NVQ at level 2 and eight trainees are still in training. Many trainees transfer to modern apprenticeships during their training programmes. In 1998-99, 11 trainees started on work-based training programmes and of those, three gained their NVQ and five transferred to modern apprenticeships. Two trainees left training early with no qualifications and three are still on their original training programme. Inspectors agreed with the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the weaknesses identified by WBTC were of no great significance. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective and innovative programme design
- ◆ particularly good on-the-job training
- ◆ effective coaching sessions in the workplace for science trainees

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities to assess trainees in the workplace

12. Manufacturing trainees are working towards a high level qualification. They receive good on- and off-the-job training. In conjunction with a local college, WBTC staff have designed a training programme specifically to meet the needs of trainees working for an agrochemical company. Trainees working towards an NVQ

in laboratory operations at level 3 can also work towards either a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in science at advanced level, or a higher national certificate (HNC) in applied biology. In conjunction with a local employer and a training centre, WBTC also offers a training programme in handmade furniture manufacturing. The programme is designed to meet trainees' career needs and offers trainees the opportunity of learning a craft skill at a centre of excellence. On-the-job training enables trainees to acquire skills in using modern machinery and in traditional handcrafts in a modern workshop environment. The off-the-job training centre specialises in teaching a variety of traditional crafts to small groups. Trainees benefit from a trainer to trainee ratio of no more than five trainees to one trainer.

13. All manufacturing trainees receive particularly good on-the-job training All trainees receive additional training specific to their individual work role. One of the training centre's trainers visits the employer regularly to train staff in wood machining and to assess trainees' progress in completing woodworking projects set by the centre as part of the training programme. The employer is committed to training. Many of the employers' staff started with the company as trainees. Trainees are encouraged to work in all sections of the company in order to broaden their training experience. Science trainees are able to work with modern and technical equipment and they receive help from highly qualified and experienced staff. The college's course co-ordinator provides regular, half-day coaching sessions in the workplace to help trainees compile evidence for their portfolios. Workplace supervisors provide assessment evidence by confirming that trainees have carried out specific tasks. Regular reports of trainees' progress on both programmes are sent to WBTC.

14. Trainees usually complete work for their NVQ in laboratory operations at level 3 after completing work for their GNVQ or HNC. When trainees are working towards their GNVQ or HNC, they also carry out a wide range of tasks at work. During this period, however, opportunities are missed to assess trainees' NVQ competencies and key skills in the workplace. The majority of workplace assessment is by witness testimony rather than direct observation. Furniture manufacturing trainees receive most of their assessment at the training centre. Trainees rely on their trainer to identify portfolio evidence for them through their work, for example, in specific projects. The trainees do not exercise sufficient initiative in collecting evidence for themselves. Trainees do not start the compilation of their portfolios at the start of their training programme and miss opportunities to collect evidence suitable for assessment purposes.

## Business administration

## Grade 2

15. There are 60 trainees on business administration programmes. Twenty-four are modern apprentices, 23 are national trainees, and 13 trainees are following other work-based training programmes. The table below shows the programmes trainees are following. Additionally, two modern apprentices are following customer service programmes as the first stage of their administration framework. One administration level 2 trainee is also working towards a GNVQ in business at advanced level. The scope of training leading to NVQs in information technology has recently been expanded to meet the needs of trainees and local employers.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 2 and 3	Level 3	Level 4
Using information technology		8	2	2	
Developing information technology programmes		1			
Installing and supporting information technology systems		2			
Administration	3	18	12		
Accountancy technician		3		3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

16. Trainees are recruited through personal recommendations, the careers service, recruitment events in schools, careers exhibitions and local press advertisements. WBTC are piloting initial assessment of trainees' skills and the use of a questionnaire on preferred learning styles. The co-ordinator for information technology training has developed an initial vocational assessment for trainees. The results of this are then taken into account in trainees' individual training plans. Trainees are in a variety of placements, including West Berkshire Council, a car leasing company, computing, electronics and textile companies, building societies and solicitors. Trainees usually receive induction in the workplace on an individual basis, but group sessions also take place. Training in administration and information technology is carried out at WBTC's well-resourced training centre one day a week. Accountancy technician trainees attend a subcontracted college on either one day, or two evenings, a week. One accountancy technician trainee is working towards her qualification through open learning. Administration and information technology trainees are assessed at the training centre or in the workplace. Assessors visit the trainees who attend the centre approximately once every six weeks to carry out assessment by observing their performance. Administration trainees who are working towards an NVQ at level 3 are assessed in the workplace once a month. Unless the subcontractor carries out the assessment, the assessor also carries out the reviews of trainees' progress.

Workplace supervisors generally attend reviews, which are held every three months. Of the 62 trainees who have begun modern apprenticeship programmes in the last three years, 42 per cent have left early with no qualifications, 20 per cent have left early with some qualifications and 38 per cent are still in training. Of the 39 trainees who have begun national traineeships in the last two years, 33 per cent have left with no qualifications, 5 per cent have left early with some qualifications and 62 per cent are still in training. Of the 148 trainees who have begun other training programmes in the last three years, 62 per cent have left early with no qualifications, 10 per cent are still in training and 22 per cent have achieved all the qualifications specified in their training plans. Some of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report were more relevant to generic areas. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured and effective off-the-job training
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ carefully tailored one-to-one training in the workplace
- ◆ wide variety of good portfolio evidence

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Trainees produce a good range of evidence for their portfolios. One trainee's portfolio includes comprehensive research, from catalogues, colleagues and websites, on which type of envelopes would be appropriate to carry company welcome packs. Her recommendation was accepted and the order for this envelope was authorised. One trainee working for a computer software company designs artwork for packaging and produces a range of bitmaps and icons for software.*

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor retention rates
- ◆ no continuous internal verification on administration and information technology programmes

17. Trainees who attend WBTC's training centre receive good off-the-job training in administration and information technology. Training schedules incorporate key skills and clearly show what will be covered in each week's structured session. Time is made available for trainees to build their portfolios and receive individual assistance from trainers. Trainees find the sessions helpful. Trainers ensure that all trainees play a full part in these, contributing ideas and drawing on their experience in the workplace. Accountancy technician trainees who attend a subcontracted college one day or two evenings per week also receive a visit from their tutor in the workplace to help them identify relevant evidence. There is a good rapport between trainers and trainees.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Assessors provide good ongoing clarification of NVQ and programme requirements. On one occasion the assessor met a trainee's needs by transcribing the requirements of a qualification into a more easily understood format.*

18. Trainees enjoy the benefits of a well-resourced training room. The main room has 12 networked personal computers, with a further workstation for the administrator. It is light and spacious, with tables arranged to enable discussions to take place. There are a further three linked personal computers in a ground floor training room accessible to trainees with impaired mobility. Although there is no Internet access in the training rooms, trainees are able to use the computers in the administrative area. Trainers accompany trainees when they do so. There is a library which has a selection of materials for administration training, many of which have been devised by tutors. Up-to-date materials are available, including a training package on webpage design. All relevant WBTC and subcontractors' staff

hold the necessary assessor and internal verifier qualifications. The administration training co-ordinator has completed the five key skills units. There are also freelance assessors to help with training leading to specialist information technology qualifications, including installing and supporting information technology systems.

19. One-to-one training in the workplace is good. It enables trainees who are not able to visit the centre to acquire the skills necessary to achieve their qualifications. For example, training for four administration trainees takes place at Bracknell at an employer's premises so that they do not have to travel to Newbury. Trainees are encouraged to choose options which are relevant to their job role. Assessors ensure they receive advice and guidance to enable them to make the right choice. They explain the requirements of specific tasks and give appropriate instructions. In between scheduled visits, trainees can contact their assessor by telephone. Trainees receive good support from their assessors and their workplace supervisors.

20. Portfolios contain a variety of good evidence. Assessors provide evidence of trainees' acquisition of competencies relevant to the NVQ units, and of their key skills, through observation of trainees' performance. Evidence in portfolios is convincing and includes personal statements about the trainees' competence by workplace supervisors, witness testimonies, trainees' answers to questions, and work products. Trainees explain their role in the evidence they put forward. Accountancy technician trainees include work-based evidence in their portfolios and benefit from the support of workplace supervisors who already have accountancy technician qualifications.

21. Statistics for the last three years show that a low number of trainees achieve all the qualifications for which they are aiming and that retention rates are poor. Retention rates, however, are affected by the fact that business administration trainees leave the programme once they have acquired some skills in order to obtain highly paid jobs. During the past year, key skills training has become an integral part of administration and information technology programmes but hitherto, trainees have received little training in key skills. The statistics do not, however, include trainees who receive assistance from WBTC to achieve qualifications after leaving the programme. Twenty per cent of the trainees on the work-based training programme in 1997-98 achieved the qualification after leaving the programme. Twenty-eight per cent of those on the programme in 1998-99 did the same. Some modern apprentices and national trainees who have left their programmes are still receiving help from WBTC in order that they may achieve their qualifications.

22. Internal verification on the administration and information technology programmes is not continuous but is carried out at the end of the programmes. The internal verifier, however, carries out spot checks during the programme and usually observes assessors twice a year. A new form for continuous internal verification has recently been devised. New members of staff have not yet been observed. Following the intake of new staff, evidence relating to all units in portfolios is subject to internal verification. Reports on trainees' progress are

discussed at team meetings. On the programme for accountancy technician trainees, internal verification is carried out on a continuous basis.

### **Retailing & customer service**

### **Grade 3**

23. WBTC has 49 learners in the occupational area of retailing and customer service. Since the original inspection, WBTC has been accredited to offer training towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in sales. There are 13 advanced modern apprentices and 21 foundation modern apprentices in customer service, and four advanced modern apprentices and two foundation modern apprentices in retailing. Nine learners are following other work-based learning programmes. Of these, one is working towards a level 1 NVQ in distributive operations, one is working towards a level 2 NVQ in retail operations and seven are working towards level 2 NVQs in sales. Most learners are already employed when they begin their training. WBTC's recruitment co-ordinator helps the remainder to find jobs. Learners work for various local employers. These include department stores, software companies, a local building society, an air-conditioning company, a dental practice and a local weekly newspaper. Induction takes place at WBTC with a follow-up in the workplace. Some learners receive off-the-job training from employers and WBTC. WBTC's trainers have appropriate qualifications in providing education for adults. Off-the-job training takes place fortnightly for learners who are at the start of learning programmes in customer service and sales. Learners do not attend off-the-job training for NVQs in retailing. However, some learners in retailing attend off-the-job training towards units of NVQs in customer service. Learners who are working towards key skills awards, attend weekly or fortnightly training in key skills. When assessment is carried out in the workplace, it is done by five of WBTC's staff, who have assessors' qualifications and are also occupationally qualified. Internal verification is carried out by three of WBTC's staff, who are qualified internal verifiers. Progress reviews take place once every three months and are normally carried out by the assessors in the workplace.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ employers and trainees' poor understanding of the programme
- ◆ failure to plan and co-ordinate training effectively
- ◆ trainees' low achievement rates

24. Since the original inspection, WBTC has rectified the first weakness. It has revised learners' inductions and learners now benefit from a well-structured induction, which introduces them effectively to WBTC, NVQs and key skills. Employers' understanding of the learning programmes has also improved. Copies of individual learning plans are now sent to employers and details of the NVQ standards are now issued to workplace supervisors. Employers are invited to take part in progress reviews. The second weakness has also been rectified. WBTC now tests new learners' occupational and key skills and identifies their preferred style of learning. The results are used to inform trainers and assessors of learners'

individual needs. WBTC has introduced new courses and materials for key skills and occupational training. WBTC now uses a subcontractor to assist with key skills training and assessment, as well as providing key skills training and assessment in house. Key skills training is now effective. The third weakness had not been remedied by the time of the reinspection. Rates of retention and achievement have improved, but are still low. Some of the strengths identified in the most recent self-assessment report were found by inspectors to be normal practice. Others, which had been identified as separate strengths, were found to be part of a single strength. Inspectors found that one of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been rectified and was now in fact a strength. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ strong links between assessors, learners and employers

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ low rates of achievement

25. Learners benefit from flexible, enjoyable and effective off-the-job training. WBTC has introduced new off-the-job training courses and new materials to develop learners' key skills and their understanding of theory. This training takes place at WBTC and at employers' premises as required. Two employers have asked WBTC to provide this training in the workplace. Learners can relate their learning to their jobs. Learners and workplace supervisors find that the off-the-job training enhances learners' performance at work. Training is offered at the beginning of the learning programme to learners who have not worked in the vocational area before or who have demonstrated a need for it at their initial assessments. This training is repeated every few months for new learners and for learners who have missed instruction sessions. Learners receive a schedule of training. Aims and objectives are clearly stated at the beginning of each instruction session and dealt with again at the end of the instruction session. Learning resources are good and trainers use various methods to interest learners. The training allows learners to socialise with their peers and gain confidence. On- and off-the-job training are recorded in general terms on learners' individual learning plans.

26. Assessors have developed strong links with employers and learners. Employers make it easy for assessors to visit learners in the workplace to carry out assessments. Assessors strive to meet the individual needs of learners. WBTC's staff provide good support for learners. Employers and WBTC's staff liaise to ensure that assessors can make additional visits to carry out assessments in the workplace if necessary. Learners receive detailed feedback on their progress towards achieving their NVQs. Assessment plans set out short-term targets for learners.



27. Many learners still fail to achieve the targets on their individual learning plans, although achievement rates have improved since the original inspection. At the time of the original inspection, no foundation or advanced modern apprentice had achieved all the targets on their individual learning plan. Twenty-eight advanced and 37 foundation modern apprentices started training between April 1998 and April 2001. Since the original inspection, one advanced modern apprentice and three foundation modern apprentices have achieved the targets on their individual learning plans. Five advanced modern apprentices have now achieved level 2 or level 3 NVQs, and 10 foundation modern apprentices have achieved level 2 NVQs. At the original inspection, no learners had achieved any units of their key skills awards. Since then, five learners have achieved one or more key skills units. A further eight are making good progress towards the new key skills awards. The 46 learners who started other work-based learning programmes between April 1998 and April 2001, have had low achievement rates. Twenty-nine of these learners left their training early without achieving the targets on their individual learning plans. Of the 40 learners who have started training since April 2001, 15 have already left without achieving any qualifications. Some of the information recorded at progress reviews is not used to help learners achieve their qualifications. For example, it was discovered at progress reviews that two learners had attended useful in-house training that could be used to help them complete their NVQs and key skills awards. Some learners, who have left their training early, have been offered the opportunity to finish their NVQ if their employers agree. WBTC is still supporting two learners who have left their training early.

### **Leisure, sport & travel**

### **Grade 3**

28. Three foundation modern apprentices and one advanced modern apprentice are working towards qualifications in sport and recreation. Two of the foundation modern apprentices have achieved level 2 NVQs in operational services and the third is working towards the NVQ. The advanced modern apprentice has recently achieved a level 3 NVQ in sport and recreation supervision. The learners are employed at two local leisure centres and a fitness club. WBTC subcontracts all assessment and internal verification, and training in key skills, to the vocational training arm of a local school. One learner attends off-the-job training in key skills on a day-release basis. Assessors visit learners at least once every two weeks and sometimes more often. The subcontractor has one qualified assessor and one qualified internal verifier who are both occupationally competent. There are additional assessors for specialised optional NVQ units. Every three months, learners have progress reviews with WBTC's training co-ordinator. Learners can achieve additional qualifications, such as qualifications in first aid, lifeguarding and coaching. All learners also receive training from their employers. Since the original inspection, WBTC has not recruited any learners onto learning programmes in this occupational area and plans to cease offering the learning programmes once the current learners have completed their training.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ trainees' poor retention and achievement rates
- ◆ failure to ensure regular assessment for all trainees
- ◆ failure of some trainees to meet framework requirements
- ◆ poor internal verification system

29. WBTC has made some progress towards rectifying the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. After unsuccessful negotiations with the previous subcontractor to rectify the weaknesses identified at the original inspection, WBTC transferred the seven remaining learners to another subcontractor in January 2001. Learners receive frequent, regular and effective assessment from the new subcontractor. Internal verification is now satisfactory. The internal verifier observes assessments in the workplace and samples portfolios, both as they are being put together and when they are completed. The internal verifier gives written feedback to the assessor. However, there is no schedule showing when internal verification will take place. By the reinspection, WBTC had taken steps towards ensuring that learners' training enables them to meet the requirements of their apprenticeship frameworks. Learners are now working towards their key skills awards and their individual learning plans have been amended to show the correct levels of key skills awards. Key skills training and portfolio-building sessions are now good. However, key skills training is not integrated with training towards learners' NVQs. Retention and achievement rates had improved by the time of the reinspection, but they are still low. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the most recent self-assessment report. They considered other strengths to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses which WBTC had not identified and they awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good planning of assessments

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ low rates of achievement
- ◆ poor understanding of apprenticeship requirements among some learners and staff

30. Employers provide good work placements. Learners experience a variety of tasks which equip them with all the competences they need to achieve their NVQs. WBTC and employers provide opportunities for learners to attend coaching and to work towards additional qualifications. Coaching prepares learners to become more involved in the day-to-day running of their organisations, and gives them a sense of

responsibility. Two learners have been promoted to duty managers. One of these learners is also the health and safety officer and training officer for his leisure centre.

31. Assessment is well planned. The new subcontractor has developed a plan for each learner to produce the evidence still required. The assessor makes frequent and regular visits to learners' workplaces at times that suit learners, including at weekends, early mornings and evenings. The visits are well structured and learners understand their purpose. Assessors and learners plan assessments jointly and assessors give learners a written note setting out what they will be assessed on next. At the end of the next visit, they review this written plan and learners receive written feedback on their progress. Assessors make good use of their time with learners and set them short-term targets which are achievable and understandable. The assessors and the training co-ordinator share information about learners' assessment and the training co-ordinator quickly rectifies any problems.

32. Learners' rates of retention and achievement are low. None of the learners on learning programmes in sport and recreation have achieved all the qualifications on their individual learning plans. At the original inspection, no learner had achieved any units towards a key skills award, but, at reinspection, three learners had each achieved three key skills units. Of 11 learners who started a foundation modern apprenticeship in 1999-2000, four left early without achieving any qualifications, four left early having achieved some qualifications and three are still in training. Of nine learners who have started advanced modern apprenticeships since 1998, three have left without achieving any qualifications, five have left with some qualifications and one is still in training. WBTC is in contact with one learner who left his learning programme early because of illness but who wants to continue working towards his advanced modern apprenticeship. Of six learners who started other work-based learning in 1998-99, one gained a level 2 NVQ and the other five left early without achieving any qualifications.

33. Learners and staff at WBTC and its subcontractors do not fully understand the apprenticeship requirements. Learners have not gathered evidence of their awareness of the organisations and industries they work in, although a new project has been developed to help them do so. Individual learning plans record only the required NVQs and key skills awards and do not mention the industrial skills that learners must acquire to achieve their apprenticeships. However, all learners have attended sufficient off-the-job training to meet their apprenticeships' requirements for industrial skills.

### **Hair & beauty**

### **Grade 3**

34. There are 57 trainees following work-based training programmes in hairdressing. Thirty-six trainees are working towards an NVQ in hairdressing at level 2 and 21 towards level 3. There are 21 modern apprentices, 24 national

trainees and 12 trainees on other government-funded youth training programmes. All trainees are employed at 29 hairdressing salons across Berkshire. The training and assessment of practical skills are carried out in the workplace. Twenty-five trainees receive off-the-job training at the provider's centre. They attend on a monthly basis for one day of theory training and assessment, pastoral support and action planning. Theory training is provided in the workplace for 32 trainees who are unable to travel the distance to the training provider. Initial assessment is carried out during induction by occupationally qualified WBTC staff, who also carry out reviews of trainees' progress in the workplace every three months. Trainees have the opportunity to work towards additional qualifications in customer service and health and safety. Procedures for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning and achievement are currently being developed. Internal verification is carried out by appropriately qualified WBTC staff. Of the 71 trainees who started other programmes in 1997-98, 82 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the 46 trainees who started modern apprenticeships in the same year, 46 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the 40 trainees who started other programmes in 1998-99, 58 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the 16 trainees who started modern apprenticeships in that year, 44 per cent left with no qualifications. Of the six trainees who started other programmes in 1999-2000, two have already left with no qualifications. Of the 17 trainees who started modern apprenticeships in that year, 29 per cent have already left with no qualifications. Of the 30 trainees who started national traineeships in the same year, 13 per cent have already left with no qualifications. Inspectors considered three of the five strengths stated in the self-assessment report no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ ready availability of workplace assessors to trainees
- ◆ wide range of good salons/employers
- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to make key skills training fully integral to programmes
- ◆ trainees' poor achievement on some training programmes

35. On-the-job training provided in salons is good. The standard of trainees' hairdressing in the workplace is high. Employers offer work placements where trainees can develop a range of skills. Twenty-three of the salons have appropriately qualified assessors, and another three salons have staff working towards assessor awards. Trainees are placed in a variety of salons suited to their needs and preferences across a wide part of Berkshire. These range from smaller salons in nearby villages to larger ones in town centres. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training is effective. WBTC staff have developed good relationships with employers. They keep in constant touch with them and ensure they receive all relevant information. Employers are invited to attend the annual

hairdressing competition which the consortium holds, and in which all trainees participate. Some trainees have the opportunity to prepare models' hair for fashion shows. Some trainees use photographic evidence from the shows and competition work in their NVQ portfolios. In general, the standard of work in trainees' portfolios is adequate. The portfolios, however, contain little evidence of the routine use of information technology. WBTC provide individual trainees additional workplace training and assessment sessions if they miss training at the centre or require extra support to further their progress.

36. Off-the-job training and the resources to support it are satisfactory. Trainees receive a great deal of support from the training provider's staff and their progress is carefully monitored and recorded. Staff carry out action planning to help the trainees' progress. Trainees negotiate individual targets for themselves with their trainers. WBTC is willing to help trainees gain a qualification after they leave their training programme, if they have failed to obtain one during it. Currently, WBTC is helping 10 trainees in this way. Centre staff make regular checks on assessment activity in the workplace by observing assessment in the salon every three months. Assessors are invited to attend meetings at the centre to discuss ways of ensuring their assessment practice is fair and consistent.

37. Trainees' achievement rates for NVQ level 2, NVQ level 3 and key skills certification is low. Key skills training has only recently been introduced. The integration of key skills training with on- and off-the-job training hairdressing is still at an early stage. No trainee has yet covered all key skills components. Five trainees have recently received certificates for achieving one or two key skills units. WBTC's staff are currently working towards key skills units themselves.

38. In November 1998 the training provider closed its office at Maidenhead, and 15 of the 121 trainees in the 1997-98 cohort transferred to other providers. Of the remaining 106 trainees who started in 1997-98, eight gained a level 2 qualification, seven gained a level 3 qualification and eight achieved all the qualifications specified on their training plan. In 1998-99, six trainees out of the 56 who began training transferred to other providers. Of the 50 trainees remaining, 10 gained NVQ level 2, two gained an NVQ at level 3 and six achieved all the qualifications specified on their training plan. In 1999-2000, out of 53 who began training three trainees gained a level 2 qualification, two gained level 3 qualification and two achieved all the qualifications specified on their training plan.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 3**

39. WBTC has an equal opportunities policy, which is reviewed on an annual basis by the operations director. All staff receive a copy of the policy at induction in their company guide. The policy exceeds the requirement of WBTC's contract with the TEC. A booklet containing information about equal opportunities has recently been

issued to trainees and employers. Employers, trainees and subcontractors can receive the full policy on request. Employers who do not have an equal opportunities policy of their own are not asked to adopt WBTC's policy. Discussion of equal opportunities is a standing item on the agenda of staff meetings. Equal opportunities is an agenda item at the annual general staff meeting. Staff have received training to increase their awareness of equal opportunities issues and more is planned. Data are collected for the purposes of the TEC contract. WBTC staff have recently begun to collect data on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of applicants for training, with the aim of ensuring that all applicants, irrespective of whether they take up work-based training options or not, are treated fairly. WBTC is based in an area where individuals from minority ethnic groups form only 1.7 per cent of the population. There are also two specialist providers of training for people with disabilities in the area. The number of trainees from minority ethnic groups is proportionate to the number of persons from these groups in the local population. Similarly, the number of persons with disabilities is proportionate to the number of disabled persons in the local population. Only the ground floor of the training centre is accessible to trainees with mobility problems. Inspectors considered the two strengths stated in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They found a strength WBTC had not identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ socially inclusive programmes
- ◆ effective process for dealing with complaints

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no specific action to recruit from under-represented groups

40. WBTC aims to provide training for all prospective trainees. WBTC has run a number of diverse programmes, some with as few as one or two trainees on them to ensure that trainees can follow the programme of their choice. This arrangement has been particularly successful in enabling trainees in rural areas. For example, one female trainee was able to pursue pig farming as a career, two are taking modern apprenticeships in machine printing and one is following training in camera operations. WBTC have a clearly written complaints procedure. Few complaints are made. Any complaints are carefully recorded. Managers deal with them promptly and do so in a way that serves the trainees' best interests.

41. WBTC has not launched any specific initiatives, or drawn up any action plans, for the recruitment of trainees from groups under-represented on training programmes. Most trainees have a basic understanding of equal opportunities issues and most can recall their inclusion in the induction programme but there is little further reference to them during the training programme. There is now a space on the trainees' progress review form where the trainer may record a comment on equal opportunities. In practice, however, issues relating to equal opportunities are

not always discussed during trainees' progress reviews.

42. At team meetings for each occupational area, staff review what should be done to help individual trainees and what is being done to support individuals. Staff share good practice at quarterly meetings. Data collected and analysed to establish recruitment trends, for example, WBTC noted that administration programmes were followed mainly by female trainees and that information technology programmes were followed mainly by male trainees. Two women have now joined information technology programmes and two men have joined administration programmes. Data collection meets the TEC's contractual requirements. WBTC does not monitor whether it meets the requirements of its own equal opportunities policy. It does not check whether staff and trainees find the policy effective.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

43. Trainees are referred to WBTC mainly by the careers services. A small number make direct contact as a result of a recommendation from friends. All trainees are interviewed and some have their basic skills assessed. In some areas, subcontractors carry out initial assessment of trainees referred to them. A variety of initial assessment procedures are in use and new tests are being devised and piloted. All trainees receive an induction into the provider's policies and procedures and to their programme and the NVQ process. Each trainee has a designated training co-ordinator who provides support and advice throughout training, both on and off the job. Trainees may be visited in their workplace to avoid the need for them to travel to Newbury. Where required, additional support is provided for trainees. All trainees receive progress reviews at three-monthly intervals in their respective placements or workplaces. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They found three strengths and two weaknesses WBTC had not identified and they awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to gain additional qualifications
- ◆ strong support to meet individual needs
- ◆ well-organised events for celebrating trainees' achievements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of standard initial assessment practice
- ◆ ineffective induction processes in most areas
- ◆ some ineffective practice for reviewing trainees' progress

44. Trainees are provided with good pastoral support, which is arranged flexibly to

meet individual trainees' needs. Trainees with special needs are dealt with sensitively and effectively and they value the service provided. Training co-ordinators will make additional visits to work placements and are available on call to assist and provide additional support. WBTC modify in-house programmes and work with subcontractors to modify their programmes to match the learning styles or needs of individuals.

45. Some trainees benefit from additional modules that are not part of the framework. If it is identified that the modules will help trainees, staff liaise with employers to ensure trainees are given the opportunity for additional training. Trainees make themselves more employable by acquiring additional skills.

46. WBTC is willing to help trainees even after they have officially left their programme. Many trainees receive additional assistance well beyond programme-completion dates to enable them to obtain their qualifications. WBTC celebrates trainees' success by a variety of means. An annual presentation evening has been held since 1993. Every employer and training co-ordinator is asked to nominate trainees for awards in each of 10 categories. The winner is selected by panel on the night. Each nominee receives a certificate and a medal, presented by the chairman, and national celebrities award the prizes. A newsletter is also produced and distributed which features trainees and their achievements.

47. WBTC identified that initial assessment was a weakness in the self-assessment report and has begun to address the issue. Initial assessment is not applied consistently across the range of occupational areas. Many different assessment procedures are in use and some are not effective. In some areas, trainees' occupational aptitude is not tested. Staff in other areas are using tests of their own and these are not necessarily appropriate or effective. For example, the initial assessment arrangements for sport and recreation trainees are insufficiently systematic and the training co-ordinator merely makes an intuitive judgement about the trainees' capabilities. Trainees do not always understand the nature of the industry and some enrol on an inappropriate programme. On retailing and customer service programmes, basic skills and occupational skills tests are not used to ensure that trainees commence training at an appropriate level or that their training needs are identified.

48. All trainees receive induction to their programmes. Although staff carry out some checks on trainees' understanding of content in the induction programme, these are not sufficiently rigorous. Most trainees are unable to recall key elements of their induction and do not have a clear understanding of their programme and important issues such as those relating to equality of opportunity or key skills.

49. During their progress reviews, trainees receive good pastoral support. They are, however, given insufficient advice on their vocational work and insufficient information about their progress towards achieving their qualification. Trainees on manufacturing, engineering, retailing and customer service programmes are not set clear targets during their progress reviews. In some instances, workplace supervisors are not involved in progress reviews. Some WBTC staff who carry out



progress reviews are not occupationally qualified and are not necessarily able to help trainees identify appropriate evidence of their acquisition of competencies for assessment purposes. They are also not always able to identify the extent of trainees' progress towards achieving the award. The progress reviews do not focus sufficiently on trainees' vocational skills and trainees are not given help in drawing up action plans for improving their performance.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

50. West Berkshire Training Consortium is a small, well-established company offering training across a wide range of occupational areas. There are three directors of the company, one of whom is the operations director with responsibility for the strategic management of the organisation. The two other directors are principally concerned with the organisation's charitable status and advise the operations director. Day-to-day management of training is undertaken by three programme managers and each is responsible for specific occupational areas. The company has 18 permanent employees and also employs three freelance assessors. All staff are provided with a copy of the company's annual business plan which covers four areas of business activity: performance against TEC contractual requirements, new business opportunities, internal procedures and staff development. The company was recognised as an Investor in People in August 1999. Training and assessment are carried out by company staff and through 11 subcontractors. WBTC has service-level agreements with all subcontractors and these are reviewed annually. WBTC previously ceased contracting with one subcontractor who did not meet WBTC's standards. Trainees were transferred to another subcontractor. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, considered some to be no more than normal practice and identified other strengths and weaknesses. They awarded the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good management
- ◆ flexible staffing arrangements
- ◆ imaginatively designed appraisal system

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some weaknesses in the management information system
- ◆ poor target setting

51. Communications within the organisation are effective. All staff are asked to suggest amendments and improvements to the draft annual business plan produced by the operations director. The company holds an annual general meeting to ensure all staff understand, and are committed to fulfilling the company's objectives for the year ahead. Training co-ordinators meet formally with their teams on a monthly

basis. These meetings are an effective means of disseminating information within the organisation. Freelance assessors attend every other meeting of the training coordinators in order that they may keep up to date with developments in the organisation and play a full part in the organisation's operation. All teams, including freelance assessors, have a joint quarterly meeting. Administrative staff meet every six weeks. Staff are confident that professional concerns brought to the attention of managers will be treated with sensitivity and dealt with effectively. Managers give priority to staff welfare and ensure that staff who experience personal difficulties are afforded support and practical assistance.

52. Managers encourage staff to get to know each other's job roles to enable staff absences to be covered with the minimum of disruption to trainees. Individual members of training and administrative staff are paired so that each can stand in for the other when necessary. The company has recently experienced difficulties in filling a number of key posts. Staff have helped the company maintain services to trainees and employees by agreeing to changes in their working patterns and responsibilities. Staff at all levels are committed to ensuring that the company provides an effective service to trainees.

53. There is an annual appraisal system. This covers the performance of individual members of staff. It is effective in identifying staff development needs that are consistent with the company's business objectives. The appraisal process was developed by staff at all levels within the company and is regularly reviewed by a staff appraisal committee. The appraisal system is based largely on self-appraisal. The member of staff being appraised can seek the views of other staff in the organisation on his or her performance. So also can the manager conducting the appraisal. Staff and managers are able to draw on a wide and diverse range of views on the person whom they are appraising. During the appraisal process, action points for improving the performance of staff are identified and progress in implementing these is reviewed twice during the year.

54. Managers are not always aware of trainees' progress or of issues affecting the quality of the training the subcontractors provide. For example, in sport and recreation the provider had not identified issues relating to key skills training, assessment and internal verification. WBTC has recognised the deficiencies of the existing management information systems and is taking action to improve the availability and accessibility of management information. The company uses a management information system operated by the TEC. The system cannot fully meet the company's growing need for detailed management information in relation to training programmes and trainees. The system is not always able to analyse the specific data required by managers in an accessible format and on a timely basis. The deficiencies in the company's management information system do not make it easy for managers to monitor programmes and take effective management action.

55. The company identifies a number of objectives within its business plan but sets few clear and measurable targets for improving the quality of services offered to trainees. Managers are aware that trainees' achievement rates on some programmes are low but they have not set staff and subcontractors clear targets for improving

these.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

56. WBTC has a range of quality procedures covering all aspects of training and these are updated regularly. The operations director has strategic responsibility for quality assurance. A programme manager is responsible for the implementation of quality assurance, including self-assessment. The self-assessment report proposed for the inspection was produced in February 2000. Two earlier reports were produced in 1998 and 1999. WBTC has preferred provider status with Thames Valley TEC. All WBTC staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report and in determining grades, but employers and subcontractors were not. WBTC receives visits from external verifiers. The TEC carries out checks of WBTC's compliance with its contracts. There is an established procedure for obtaining feedback from employers and trainees. Training, assessment and internal verification on engineering, manufacturing and leisure, sport and travel and accountancy technician trainee programmes are subcontracted to local colleges. Training, assessment and internal verification for administration, information technology, hairdressing and retailing and customer service programmes are carried out by WBTC. Inspectors agreed with one of the two strengths, and with the one weakness, stated in the self-assessment report. The other strength related to the meeting of awarding body criteria, and inspectors considered that this should be normal practice. They found one weakness the organisation had not identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective internal audit system
- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees and employers

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor quality assurance arrangements for some subcontractors programmes
- ◆ poor internal verification practice on some programmes

57. WBTC has a simple but effective system for auditing the quality of trainees' programmes. Each training co-ordinator is linked to a 'buddy' in the administration team. The buddy carries out monthly audits of the training experienced by 10 of the training co-ordinator's trainees. Over a period of time all trainees' files are monitored. If non-compliance is identified the buddy notifies the training co-ordinator, who then has to take appropriate remedial action. The action is monitored through to its successful conclusion. Another auditor checks the work of the team. The system aims to ensure that trainees receive everything they are entitled to, when they need it. For example, it checks that trainees complete a health and safety project during their induction. The system has successfully identified many issues. For example, one training co-ordinator's reviews of

trainees' progress were not taking place on time and the system identified this. Swift action was taken by the audit team and then by the programme manager to ensure that trainees received progress reviews when they should have done. The first audit is carried out after the trainee has been on programme for three weeks. This audit was initiated because WBTC identified that trainees were most likely to drop out of the programme in the first few weeks. Since carrying out this first audit, the number of trainees who leave the programme in its first few weeks have fallen. The audit system, however, does not cover individual training plans and has failed to identify that these are not updated and that some documents lack relevant signatures.

58. WBTC has an established system for gathering useful feedback from trainees and employers through questionnaires. Following analysis of responses to questionnaires, staff have made improvements to trainees' programmes. WBTC staff have acted on feedback from employers and have taken action to improve the support they give employers. Trainees and employers are asked to respond to questionnaires twice a year. Changes made to trainees' programmes are monitored carefully to make sure they are effective. The process for gathering feedback from trainees and employers is constantly evaluated. The questionnaires are clear and user-friendly. Approximately 50 per cent of all trainees and around 40 per cent of employers respond to the questionnaires. The provider uses innovative methods to encourage trainees to answer the questionnaires. An analysis is made of responses to questionnaires and this is taken into account when drawing up action plans for improvements to training in each occupational area. The implementation of action is monitored through staff meetings and reviews of trainees' progress.

59. WBTC does not ensure that subcontractors' training programmes are subject to quality assurance. Subcontractors do not always make external and internal verifier reports available to WBTC. Although most subcontractors carry out yearly programme reviews, WBTC is not involved in these and does not receive copies of the review reports. When WBTC asked subcontractors for details of their quality assurance arrangements, those who had been inspected by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) provided a copy of the FEFC report, some did not respond and only one attempted to explain the arrangements for carrying out quality assurance of work-based training. Some observation of subcontractors' training has taken place, but only on an occasional basis. WBTC has a procedure for checking the quality of subcontractors' training, involving the completion of standardised forms, but some subcontractors do not allow WBTC staff to carry this out.

60. Internal verification is not carried out with the same degree of thoroughness across programmes. WBTC does not monitor internal verification on subcontracted programmes. For example, internal verification on the sport and recreation programme is subcontracted. The external verifier's report clearly identified problems with assessment and internal verification on this programme but WBTC has taken no action to resolve them. On administration and information technology programmes, internal verification is only carried out when all assessment has been completed. On retailing and customer service programmes, there is inconsistency

in internal verification practice and internal verifiers do not observe assessment on programmes leading to some qualifications. However, internal verification is thorough on engineering, manufacturing, accountancy technicians, and hair and beauty programmes and includes observation of assessment, continuous sampling of portfolios and discussion with trainees. Members of staff new to WBTC are observed carrying out induction, progress reviews and training, but other staff are not. On WBTC's own programmes, there is no observation of the quality of the work of more established team members, by either colleagues or managers.

61. The self-assessment report lacked detail and failed to identify significant weaknesses. Several strengths identified through self-assessment were no more than normal practice. Some of the weaknesses inspectors found had not been identified through WBTC's quality assurance systems. Inspectors agreed with three of the grades in the self-assessment report. In respect of one area, they awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report. All the other grades the inspectors awarded were lower than those given in the self-assessment report. All staff are familiar with the action plan which was produced after self-assessment. The action plan details the action to be taken, states who has responsibility for carrying the action out, and specifies how progress in implementing the plan is to be monitored. At the time of inspection work had begun to rectify some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment.