

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
NOVEMBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
FEBRUARY 2002

Chelmsford College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

SUMMARY

The original inspection of Chelmsford College was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for equal opportunities, trainee support and management of training. 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, trainee support and management of training 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).

At the time of the original inspection, Chelmsford College provided training on foundation programmes, from which many learners progressed into employment. Training in construction, engineering and care was satisfactory. At the time of the original inspection, there was insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity, but the college now has appropriate promotional materials, which it uses effectively. Assessors work well with learners to check learners' understanding of equality issues, but the monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices is still inadequate. Support for learners is now satisfactory. The college provides adequate information to learners and encourages them to make good use of the resources and support services at the college. Individual learning plans now set out clearly each learner's training needs. Initial assessment remains inadequate. Management of training is now satisfactory. Good attention is paid to health and safety in the workplace. Most staff have received an appraisal since the original inspection. There is insufficient planning of key skills training and learners are making slow progress towards completing key skills awards. The co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is still inadequate. Quality assurance was satisfactory at the time of the original inspection. There was good use of action-planning, linked to a thorough self-assessment process. Some aspects of work-based learning were not covered by the college's quality assurance procedures.

GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS | GRADE |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Construction | 3 |
| Engineering | 3 |
| Health, care & public services | 3 |
| Foundation for work | 2 |

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

| REINSPECTION | GRADE |
|------------------------|-------|
| Equal opportunities | 3 |
| Trainee support | 3 |
| Management of training | 3 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ wide range of good employers and work placements
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ effective analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ good support services in the college
- ◆ effective management of change
- ◆ good action-planning in most areas

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient assessment in the workplace
- ◆ inconsistency in key skills training
- ◆ slow progress for many learners
- ◆ insufficient initial assessment
- ◆ insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ quality assurance procedures inappropriate for some work-based learning
- ◆ insufficient feedback from learners and employers

INTRODUCTION

1. Chelmsford College is a medium-sized, further education college with approximately 1,500 full-time and 3,500 part-time students. These figures are unchanged since the original inspection. It operates from two sites, about one mile apart. The college first contracted with Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) in 1990, to provide work-based learning in engineering and a preparation for work programme for learners with additional learning needs. At the time of the original inspection, the college held contracts with Essex TEC to provide advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships in construction, engineering, management and professional, business administration, retailing and customer service, hospitality, and care. It also held a contract to provide a training programme leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2 in care and a foundation for work programme leading to prevocational qualifications and NVQs at level 1. Since April 2001, the college has had contracts with the Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). At the reinspection, the NVQs at level 2 were mainly offered in engineering and foundation for work programmes. The college no longer offers training in retailing and customer service. At the time of the original inspection, there were 168 learners. There are now 112 advanced modern apprentices, 31 foundation modern apprentices and 35 young people on other training and foundation for work programmes. The occupational areas of construction, engineering, health, care and public services, and foundation for work were inspected at the original inspection. The other occupational areas were not inspected as there were only 14 learners in total in these areas.

2. At the time of the original inspection, work-based learning was the responsibility of the training unit within the college. Since then, the college has been reorganised and work-based learning now lies within the faculty of the adult, professional and vocational centre and is known as the school of work-based learning. At the original inspection the head of the training unit reported directly to the principal. The head of the school of work-based learning now reports directly to the head of faculty of the adult, professional and vocational centre. The contract manager within the school is responsible for the overall administration of the contract with the local LSC. At the time of the original inspection, the training unit employed two managers, 28 full-time and three part-time staff. There were four administrative staff. The school of work-based learning now employs a head of school, a deputy manager, a contract manager, 23 full-time and eight part-time staff. There are two full-time and one part-time administrative staff and 12 technician staff. Some of the college's other teaching staff are also involved in training. Learners are based on both of the college's sites and can use all the facilities and resources available to students at the college.

3. Chelmsford has been a centre for high-technology manufacturing for many years although the number of people employed in this sector has been declining steadily over the past 20 years. The proportion of the local working population employed in manufacturing is just over half the average for England as a whole.

The reduction in the number of manufacturing jobs has been more than compensated for by an increase in service sector employment and the public sector. Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant increase in employment in the distribution, hotels and restaurants sector. The unemployment rate in Chelmsford has stayed low since the last inspection, standing at approximately 1.6 per cent in September 2001, compared with the averages for Essex and England of 2 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively. In Chelmsford, 22.2 per cent of those unemployed are aged between 18 and 24. This compares with 23.6 per cent in Essex and 26 per cent in England. The proportion of young people participating in full-time education in Essex is similar to that in England as a whole. However, a smaller proportion of young people in Essex are on government-funded training programmes or in part-time education than is the case nationally. Chelmsford has high educational achievement rates, with 62 per cent of school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, compared with the average for Essex of 52 per cent and for England of 47.9 per cent. At the 1991 census, the proportion of Chelmsford's population from minority ethnic groups was 2 per cent. This was slightly higher than the average for Essex but much lower than the average of 6.2 per cent for England.

4. Throughout this report, reference will be made to advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, irrespective of when a learner was first registered. These terms should be taken to include learners originally registered for modern apprenticeships and national traineeships respectively.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. All staff from the training unit were involved in the self-assessment process that led up to the original inspection. The head of the unit wrote the self-assessment report. Staff were asked to comment on the report before it was submitted to the college for approval and added to the college's overall self-assessment report prepared for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The self-assessment report provided an accurate description of the work-based learning programmes. It was self-critical and identified many of the weaknesses subsequently found by the inspectors. Some additional weaknesses were found by inspectors, particularly in the generic aspects of the provision. An updated, detailed action plan was drawn up in November 2001, in preparation for the reinspection. A team of 10 writers drawn from the new management structure was involved in the preparation for the plan. It was reviewed by more than 30 staff from across the college comprising managers, teachers and business support staff. The academic board and the corporation of the college approved the action plan.

6. The original inspection was conducted jointly by a team of inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) and the FEFC. Where appropriate, evidence obtained by the FEFC's inspectors was used by the TSC's inspectors. A team of five inspectors from the TSC spent a total of 20 days at Chelmsford College. The inspectors visited both of the college's sites and 23 work placements. They interviewed 47 learners, 17 employers or workplace supervisors, and 19 of the college's staff. Inspectors examined a range of documents including learners' files and portfolios, records of assessments and internal and external verification, minutes of meetings, contracts, management files and quality assurance procedures. They observed six progress reviews and 14 training sessions.

7. A team of three inspectors from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the reinspection. They spent a total of nine days at Chelmsford College in February 2002. Inspectors interviewed 21 learners, visited six employers' sites and interviewed five employers or workplace supervisors. Inspectors also carried out 25 interviews with the college's teaching, management and support staff. They examined five portfolios and 15 individual learning plans, as well as learners' files and assessment records. As part of the reinspection of management of training, three training sessions were observed. Two were awarded a grade 2 and one was awarded a grade 3.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection:

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Construction | 1 | | 2 | | | 3 |
| Engineering | | 3 | 2 | | | 5 |
| Health, care & public services | | | 2 | | | 2 |
| Foundation for work | 1 | 2 | 1 | | | 4 |
| Total | 2 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 14 |

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. Chelmsford College provides advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships in a variety of construction trades. There are 32 trainees funded by the TEC. The numbers of trainees on each of the programmes are given in the table below. Most of the trainees are employed. The college is a subcontractor to two other training providers. There are 66 modern apprentices in electrical installation funded by a subcontract with one training provider and 52 trainees working towards NVQs in various construction trades funded by a subcontract with the other training provider. All funded by the TEC attend the college for an initial two-week block of off-the-job training at the start of their programmes and subsequently attend off-the-job training for one day each week. Half of the training day is spent in a workshop doing practical training and half in a classroom doing theoretical work. Some trainees attend college for three further blocks of two weeks. The college has separate workshops for each trade. There are 12 full-time and one part-time staff. Five are qualified as assessors and three have internal verifiers' qualifications. All training staff have training qualifications. Trainees are employed by, or on work placements with, appropriate construction companies, including furniture manufacturers, large and small construction firms, specialist door and window makers, fitted kitchen installers and large electrical contractors. The overall retention rate is 64 per cent. No trainee has yet completed the whole of their training plan. The inspectors did not agree with all the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

Number of trainees on each programme

| | Advanced modern apprenticeship | Foundation modern apprenticeship | Total |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Electrical installation | 12 | - | 12 |
| Carpentry and joinery | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| Brickwork | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Painting and decorating | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Total | 25 | 7 | 32 |

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ wide range of supportive employers
- ◆ experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ good monitoring of trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no work-based assessment in most trades
- ◆ poor training resources in some areas
- ◆ late introduction of key skills for most trainees
- ◆ slow achievement

9. Off-the-job training is good. Thorough instruction is provided and clear practical demonstrations are given in appropriate techniques. Training programmes are organised to allow trainees to progress at their own rate. The college maintains clear records of attendance and progress. Feedback to trainees is prompt and comprehensive. On-the-job training is provided by supportive employers who provide the breadth and depth of experience trainees need to complete their training programmes. Trainees are given a wide variety of tasks to complete at work. Employers understand the NVQ system and know what their trainees are doing during their off-the-job training. Communications and liaison between employers and college staff are good. College-based trainers are all occupationally qualified and have appropriate work experience. They also hold training qualifications. Off-the-job training is matched to trainees' workplace experiences. There is good monitoring of trainees' progress. Records are clear, easily accessible and up to date. Trainees know how they are progressing.

10. There is no on-the-job assessment in carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, or bricklaying. In these crafts, all assessments are carried out at the college despite frequent opportunities for workplace assessment. All trainees are issued with logbooks in which to record evidence of their job skills but little reference is made to these records in the planning of training. Trainees are not encouraged to gather evidence from the workplace. There are some poor training

resources. Some training areas are cramped. The temporary building for carpentry and joinery is poorly maintained. Some tools used by trainees are in a poor condition and lead to inaccurate work. Key skills are not introduced until late in the programme for many trainees. Trainees are aware that they need to acquire key skills but do not know exactly what is required. They are missing many opportunities to gather evidence of key skills in the early part of their training programmes. No trainee has achieved all the key skills required by their programme.

Engineering

Grade 3

11. Chelmsford College offers advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships in a variety of engineering disciplines. There are 74 trainees. The numbers of trainees on each programme are given in the table below. All trainees are employed. Most work for precision engineering companies in the Chelmsford area. Trainees initially work towards an engineering foundation NVQ at level 2, attending the college on one day each week. Evidence for their level 3 NVQ comes entirely from the workplace, but advanced modern apprentices continue to attend the college for one day each week to complete the examination-based qualifications which are part of their individual training plans. The college has several mechanical, electrical and electronics workshops. There are seven staff. Five are qualified as assessors and three as internal verifiers. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices is 75 per cent. College-based staff undertake all the assessments and internal verification. The self-assessment report identified some strengths and weaknesses and included an appropriate action plan. The inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses but awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Number of trainees on each programme

| | Advanced modern apprenticeship | Foundation modern apprenticeship | Total |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Engineering production | 23 | 1 | 24 |
| Electronic engineering | 2 | - | 2 |
| Instrumentation engineering | 13 | - | 13 |
| Electrical/electronics technician | 9 | - | 9 |
| Engineering technician | 12 | - | 12 |
| Engineering maintenance | 14 | - | 14 |
| Total | 73 | 1 | 74 |

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ wide range of good work placements

- ◆ good retention rate

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment
- ◆ ineffective progress monitoring
- ◆ late introduction of key skills for many trainees

12. Off-the-job training takes place in a series of work areas in the college. These are well equipped with basic mechanical engineering equipment. The equipment is not modern but is well maintained and provides good facilities for the engineering foundation NVQ. The training unit has designed a training system which covers all aspects of off-the-job training including skills development, portfolio-building, assessment, and introduction to key skills. The package is simple to use and generates sufficient information to allow staff to make accurate judgements on the performance of individual trainees.

13. Advanced modern apprentices are employed in a wide range of companies in the Chelmsford area. The companies vary from high-technology companies in aerospace design and development to small jobbing engineers who provide services to the local community. They include precision engineers who supply parts for airlines, yachts and racing cars, and companies specialising in toolmaking, moulding and the manufacture of high precision surface plates. This range of employers allows the trainees to experience a range of appropriate jobs.

14. The retention rate is good. The rate for advanced modern apprentices is 75 per cent, as is the overall rate for all trainees over the past four years. This good retention rate has been achieved by providing the trainees with effective training, appropriate jobs and active support from the training unit.

15. Opportunities for trainees to gather evidence of competence in the workplace are missed. Trainees record the jobs they have done in their logbooks. This forms part of their portfolio of evidence. There are long time intervals between consecutive entries in these logbooks. There is little assessment in the workplace when trainees are visited by college staff. Many trainees are not able to identify suitable opportunities for recording evidence towards their qualifications. The system for monitoring trainees' progress is ineffective. The college does not know what each trainee has achieved in the workplace and how far they have progressed towards their qualifications. Action-planning is ineffective and trainees are making slow progress towards their qualifications. Employers and workplace supervisors are not aware of their trainees' progress. Some advanced modern apprentices who have been on training programme for some time have not started collecting evidence relating to key skills. They are unaware of the key skills requirements and have missed opportunities to gather appropriate evidence.

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

16. Chelmsford College provides training in care and in early-years care and education. There are 28 trainees, of whom 25 are advanced modern apprentices, two are foundation modern apprentices and one is on another youth training programme working towards an NVQ at level 2. Trainees work towards either the care or the early-years care and education NVQ at levels 2 and 3. A college department known as health and care manages recruitment, induction, training, assessment and verification of these awards. There are four visiting assessors for the care NVQs, and six visiting and five work-based assessors for the early-years care and education NVQs. Seven of these staff hold the internal verifiers' award. All staff are occupationally qualified and experienced. An NVQ consortium manager has been appointed to be responsible for the promotion and management of NVQs in care. This person is also the programme manager for the early-years care and education awards. Training in moving and handling is subcontracted to an outside organisation. All trainees are employed. They work in a variety of workplaces, including day nurseries, residential homes and nursing homes. All trainees are issued with a course handbook. It contains information about the NVQ they are working towards, off-the-job training, work-based assessment and the appeals procedure, and an outline of the roles of those who will support them during their training. Trainees attend off-the-job training at the college one day each week. Of the 47 trainees who started training since 1997, 13 have left early and six have transferred to other programmes. To date, three modern apprenticeships, five NVQs at level 2 and four NVQs at level 3 have been achieved. The self-assessment report identified as strengths several aspects of the training which were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade which was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good learning resources
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ flexible arrangements for off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ over-reliance on written evidence
- ◆ inadequate action-planning

17. Trainees have access to a variety of learning resources in the health and social care base room. This room is equipped mainly for those working towards early-years, care and social care qualifications. The resources include a wide range of relevant, up-to-date journals, videos and textbooks. The college has a variety of teaching aids, including a hospital bed for demonstrating bed making, a skeleton for anatomy lessons, an adult resuscitation manikin and a range of feeding utensils and incontinence aids. Early-years resources include a variety of art and craft

materials. The work placements are good. Trainees have many opportunities to gain valuable and varied experiences by working with a range of clients of various ages who have a variety of needs.

18. Trainees attend off-the-job training one day each week. Timetables for the weekly training sessions are issued at the beginning of each term. This enables trainees to undertake any necessary preparatory work and to choose the sessions which they feel are most appropriate. Tutors are available between 9 am and 8 pm. Trainees can attend at any time during this period and stay for as long as they feel necessary. Many trainees attend to take advantage of the textbooks and journals which are available and to share ideas with other trainees. There is a rolling programme of three one-hour training sessions; one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The evening sessions are mainly related to the early-years awards. Tutors are available to provide individual or group support sessions. The open-door approach and rolling programme of training allow trainees to attend at times which suit their work commitments.

19. Trainees are required to produce large amounts of written evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Most trainees are required to produce this work in their own time and some find the amount burdensome. Insufficient use is made of oral questioning, witness testimony and presentation of work products. Many workplace supervisors recognise these inadequacies and are willing to become more involved in the assessment process but have little knowledge of the NVQ requirements.

20. Most trainees do not undertake any formal action-planning with their assessor for the units they are working towards. Most are confused by the language in the NVQ documents. Trainees are expected to work through the NVQ units and decide what evidence they should produce. As a result of their confusion, trainees produce an unnecessarily large amount of written evidence. This delays their progress. The college has identified this weakness and, at the time of the inspection, all new trainees working towards the early-years care and education awards were receiving guidance on action-planning. However, a requirement to complete an action plan will further increase the amount of written work trainees are required to do.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

21. Chelmsford College provides prevocational training for young people on youth training programmes. Some school leavers are referred to the college by the careers service; other trainees start as a result of having been on other college courses. Trainees are assessed by the careers service before being referred to the programme. All applicants are interviewed by one of the trainers to assess their suitability. Most trainees begin their training in September. Work placements are organised for trainees as soon as they have a clear idea of the occupational area in which they wish to work. Trainees normally spend two days each week in a work

placement and three days at college increasing their confidence and independence and developing other employment skills such as teamworking, communication, using computers, project work and improving literacy and numeracy skills if appropriate. Trainees who are undecided about which occupational area they are interested in have the opportunity to spend up to 10 weeks on other college courses to help them decide. These include catering, electronics, construction, painting and decorating and engineering. Training normally lasts for one year, with trainees attending college for at least 16 hours each week. Over the past four years, 67 per cent of trainees have either gained employment or gone on to undertake further training. Fifty per cent have completed their training programme. The retention rate averages 69 per cent over the past four years. Currently, there are 20 trainees on the programme. Some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective training
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good progression rate into employment and further training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate progress reviews
- ◆ reduced programme during summer period

22. The off-the-job training includes classroom sessions on life skills, information technology, literacy and numeracy. Computer training takes place in an information technology suite equipped with 20 computers. Other teaching sessions take place in a classroom specifically assigned to this group of trainees. The room is well decorated and furnished, and has wall displays which are of interest to the trainees as well as being informative. The room is equipped with a range of good resources produced by trainers. Short course options are available for trainees in a number of occupational areas including engineering, painting and decorating, catering and brickwork. As well as providing some basic occupational skills, these short courses help trainees make informed career choices.

23. Out of the 20 trainees on the programme, nine have a work placement. The appropriate company interviews the trainee before a placement is finally agreed. The placement officer always accompanies the trainee to the interview. Most placements occupy two days each week, but the number of days can be increased or reduced with the agreement of the trainee, the placement supervisor from the college and the workplace supervisor. Relations between the work-placement providers and the college are good and any concerns on either side are dealt with promptly. A wide range of training is available, in supermarkets, day nurseries, public sector offices, car dealerships, garages and care homes. Trainees undertake work tasks which are suited to their capabilities, as well as meeting the needs of the employer. The proportion of trainees gaining employment or moving on to

further training has been consistently high over the past four years, averaging 67 per cent. The proportion of trainees achieving all the targets in their individual training plans over the same period is 50 per cent.

24. Reviews of trainees' progress take place monthly. The action points identified as a result of the progress review are recorded on the trainees' progress-review sheet but do not always specify any learning or training targets, and are not followed up at the next progress review. The written comments recorded are often too vague to be useful. Progress reviews undertaken recently show some improvements. All progress reviews relate to part of the training only. For example, when progress reviews take place in the workplace, no reference is made to the training being done in college. There is a reduced programme of off-the-job training over the summer period. Trainees are offered the option of attending college for one day a week and receive written assignment work. Four of the six trainees on the programme over the previous summer were under the impression that training had stopped. The training unit has recognised the need to improve this aspect of the training.

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

25. Chelmsford College has an equal opportunities policy. There is a complaints and grievance procedure and a disability statement. All policies are available to staff, learners and employers. At induction, all learners are given a handbook that contains copies of the equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedure. The college's director of client services chairs a cross-college equal opportunities advisory committee and has responsibility for equal opportunities. The equal opportunities advisory committee reviews college publicity materials. Data are gathered on gender, ethnicity and disabilities. Managers use this information to help them to plan their training programmes. There is access to all areas of the college for people with mobility difficulties. Assessors visit learners every eight weeks in the workplace to review their progress and to check their understanding of equal opportunities.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ poor monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities issues among trainees

26. Chelmsford College has rectified one of the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. The promotion of equal opportunities now has a high priority across the college. Equal opportunities forms a major part of the college's self-assessment and action-planning process. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda item on management and academic board meetings. Since the original inspection, the equal opportunities committee has reviewed all the college's marketing materials. Marketing materials and advertisements now reflect the college's equal

opportunities policy. Guidelines on how to apply the college's equal opportunities policy have now been issued to all staff. Links with local schools and community groups have been strengthened since the original inspection. Staff have now received training on equal opportunities. The monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices remains poor. Learners' awareness of equal opportunities remains low in some areas. The action plan prepared for reinspection was realistic and identified revised strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ effective analysis of equal opportunities data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities issues among some learners

27. The college successfully promotes equal opportunities. Since the previous inspection, the college's equal opportunities policy has been updated to include current legislation. All staff receive detailed guidance notes on the policy, which outline their responsibilities in ensuring it is implemented across the college and learners' programmes. There are good links with external agencies including those that help people with dyslexia and particular social needs. A comprehensive list of external support agencies is included in the learners' handbook. Since the original inspection, links with local schools have been strengthened. The college is well represented on the local schools' careers advisory group and is a member of a national equal opportunities network which shares good practice on equality of opportunity. Contact has also been made with women from a range of community groups to encourage them to take part in a science and engineering project to challenge the gender stereotyping associated with this occupational area. Marketing materials have been revised to ensure that they reflect the college's policy on equal opportunities. Positive images of learners from under-represented groups are evident on promotional literature and on the college's website. Promotional literature has been produced for learners explaining what equality of opportunity means for them in relation to choosing a course, enrolment, support arrangements, discipline and programme content. Since the original inspection, many staff have received equal opportunities training. Training in equal opportunities for some new staff has been late, due in part to the college's reorganisation in 2001. However, a training schedule clearly shows that this training is imminent. The college has a comprehensive complaints and grievance procedure.

28. Data on learners' gender, ethnicity, disability and age are collected and thoroughly analysed. The results are compared with local data to identify trends in recruitment, retention and achievement. These results are then used to identify ways of improving the promotion of equal opportunities. Data on the postcode addresses of learners are collated and related to gender, ethnicity and disability. This enables the college to concentrate recruitment activity geographically. The

college's management team has received training in retrieving and interpreting data to help them plan and promote their programmes to local community groups, with particular attention given to minority ethnic groups. All course leaders across the college will have that training.

29. There is poor monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices in the workplace. Equal opportunities issues are not routinely discussed with employers. Some staff lack the confidence to discuss issues relating to equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities is discussed with employers before a learner starts with them. Those employers without an equal opportunities policy are required to agree to abide by a standard equal opportunities statement issued by the college. However, the college does not evaluate the effectiveness of this policy or check that employers implement the policy effectively. There is no monitoring of employers who have their own equal opportunities policy. Recently, a policy informing learners of their rights to fair assessment has been introduced. This clearly identifies that employers must ensure learners have fair assessment in the workplace, although it is too early to assess any positive impact of this for learners.

30. Learners in health and social care and in engineering training have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues. In health and social care, assessors regularly check the learners' understanding of equal opportunities at the progress review meetings. Learners' responses are clearly recorded. The progress action plans that the assessor and the learner agree include aspects of equal opportunities. However, learners in construction have little understanding of equal opportunities issues. Learners' understanding of the importance and relevance of equality of opportunity is not checked during progress reviews. Many learners are unable to discuss knowledgeably issues such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. They do not remember discussing equal opportunities as part of their induction. They cannot give examples of how equality of opportunity might affect them and do not understand how the college's policy protects them from unfair treatment in college and at work.

Trainee support

Grade 3

31. Many learners are recruited from the local careers service and local employers. A few transfer from other providers. Staff visit schools, careers events and special careers evenings to tell potential learners about training opportunities. Parents of school leavers are invited to the college to discuss the training on offer and to view the training facilities. College tutors match learners' training needs to suitable employers. Some learners who are in unsatisfactory placements or who become unemployed due to unforeseen circumstances are found alternative employment by the college. Learners can join programmes at any point during the year. An induction programme covers health and safety, equality of opportunity, appeals procedures and details of the training programmes. Learners receive an initial assessment of their basic skills. Their ability in key skills is not assessed.

The college provides additional learning support. A specialist staff member contacts learners who have been absent from programmes for extended periods to offer individual support. Assessors visit learners in the workplace every eight weeks to discuss their progress and work on the learners' individual action plan. The frequency of reviews is increased to monthly visits as learners approach completion of their programmes.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate individual training plans
- ◆ weak initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective induction

32. Since the original inspection, the college has reviewed, evaluated and improved many of its training processes. Two of the weaknesses in the original inspection have been rectified. Individual learning plans now more accurately reflect what individual learners can do to achieve their goals and objectives. Since the original inspection, a clear induction programme has been produced that provides learners with relevant information on the training and their qualification aims. Staff have received training since the original inspection to help them support learners more effectively in the workplace. New assessors, with appropriate qualifications, have now been appointed. In some placements, learners are allocated personal mentors who provide additional support. Initial assessment is still a weakness, with inconsistent practices across work-based learning.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective individual action-planning
- ◆ good individual support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient initial assessment

33. There is effective individual action-planning. Assessors meet with learners every eight weeks to talk about the progress learners are making. These visits become more frequent as learners approach the final part of their training programme. These meetings ensure that outstanding issues are dealt with in readiness for the final assessment of the learners' work. Previous action plans are reviewed and progress is clearly recorded. The assessor and learner agree a new action plan, which identifies actions that need to be taken, and these are referenced clearly against the NVQ units. Assessors provide constructive feedback at progress reviews. They offer useful advice on alternative methods by which the targets and goals that have been set and agreed might be achieved. Learners are encouraged to assess their own performance and identify where they can make improvements in their work. Learners appreciate the clear focus in the action plans.

GOOD PRACTICE

An assessor worked with the managing director of one employer to match the learner's training needs to the company's business needs. They also identified the appropriate knowledge and understanding requirements in the learner's programme. This information was discussed with the learner and an individual training plan was agreed. This structured approach helped the learner to progress.

34. There is good individual support for learners. Throughout their training, learners are encouraged to use the support facilities of the college. The number of staff at the college's learning centres has been increased, and opening times have been extended to suit the shift patterns of learners. Learning workshops are available during the evenings and on Saturday mornings. An outreach worker works with learners who have been absent from off-the-job training for extended periods to establish the reasons for absence and to negotiate a return to learning. This often results in individual training at a time and place to suit the learner. Learners value this support. Some learners are unable to attend off-the-job training regularly in the college. Arrangements have been made for college staff to visit employers' premises and conduct workshops to enable these learners to receive training and work towards their learning goals.

35. Initial assessment is conducted in two separate parts. Firstly, all potential learners attend a comprehensive interview with an assessor. The outcomes of this interview are recorded on an initial assessment guidance form. Information is gathered on the previous academic and vocational achievements of the individual, and on social and health matters. This information is used to develop an individual learning plan when learners are accepted for training. Secondly, during induction to the college and the learning programme, there is a more formal initial assessment. Most learners receive a basic skills scan test. However, the way the test is given, and the interpretation of its outcomes, are inconsistent. Some learners receive timely but superficial feedback on the outcomes of the test, others receive little or no feedback. There are plans to move to the new basic skills scan in the near future. There is no current sharing of best practice in initial assessment. Learners' ability in key skills is not assessed. Some learners make slow progress in achieving their key skills units.

Management of training

Grade 3

36. The college has a mission statement, strategic plan and a set of key strategic aims. The college's strategic plan places work-based learning at the centre of the college's activities. As a result of a college reorganisation in September 2001, responsibility for work-based learning was designated to the faculty of the adult, professional and vocational centre. The head of the school of work-based learning, who was appointed in September 2001, has responsibility for work-based learning for all NVQ programmes and qualifications up to level 3. These include the areas of engineering, construction, health and social care, hospitality and catering, business administration and professional studies and foundation for work programmes. A contract manager monitors the local LSC contracts. The school of work-based learning is responsible for all administration, marketing and recruitment for training programmes, as well as learners' progress reviews and their attendance at off-the-job training. The school has developed a programme of training in consultation with industry. Action plans have been developed to help improve the training programmes. In 1999, the college was accredited with the *Investors in People* award, a national standard for improving an organisation's

performance through its people.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate health and safety monitoring of work placements
- ◆ inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient staff appraisal

37. Since the original inspection, the college has rectified two weaknesses. Health and safety monitoring has improved significantly and is now a strength. There is a well-planned programme of staff training in health and safety. Assessors carry out comprehensive and timely health and safety checks in the workplace. At the time of the original inspection, few staff had received a staff appraisal. Since then, most of the staff have received their staff appraisal. There is still insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Although employers are informed of learners' progress in a few vocational areas, many employers in other areas remain unaware of the content of the learners' training programme. The college has recently appointed staff with responsibility for key skills across the college. However, the school of work-based learning has not identified a strategy for teaching key skills.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management of change
- ◆ productive links with employers and local community groups
- ◆ good health and safety monitoring of work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inconsistency in key skills training

38. Recent changes to the college's organisation structure have been managed successfully. Management and staffing structures are clear. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities. The changes have resulted in a wider range of programmes for those learners who wish to gain qualifications through their employment. The action plans developed by the school of work-based learning are realistic. The college has worked effectively with industry to ensure that the training programmes meet the needs of learners and the industry sectors. Learners are offered training at times that suit them and their work commitments. Since the original inspection, learners are now able to join a training programme at any time of the year and assessors work with each learner to agree a suitable training programme. Staff have received training to make sure they are appropriately qualified to assess learners. A clear recruitment strategy has ensured that suitably qualified and experienced staff are now employed to assess and monitor training. There is good communication and support between staff. Regular staff meetings to review training progress involve all staff in the school. Open debate is welcomed and individuals are encouraged to share their views and ideas.

39. The college has widened its external communication links and improved its relations with employers and local community groups. It works with a local school initiative that helps to develop routes for learners into work-based learning. The college works well with a local employment centre and college staff meet with potential learners every week at the centre. The college has increased its work with local employers since the original inspection. There is an effective engineering advisory group that identifies sector skills shortages and prioritises training needs within the school. The college has opened an 'e-learning' centre in Chelmsford town centre to encourage unemployed people and those in lower-paid jobs to improve their information technology (IT) skills. An engineering project is currently operating to attract women into science and engineering.

40. The college carries out comprehensive health and safety checks of learners' workplaces. A checklist ensures that all workplaces are assessed against the same criteria before a learner starts there. Regular checks are made during process reviews of the learners' knowledge and understanding of health and safety. These checks are properly recorded. Assessors ensure that the learners' understanding is checked against their experience in work and their training at college. If areas of concern are identified, monitoring systems ensure that they are dealt with effectively. Staff have received good health and safety training and there is a planned schedule to keep staff aware of changing legislation.

41. On- and off-the-job training are not sufficiently well co-ordinated. Since the original inspection, new procedures to share information with employers have been introduced. Employers now receive an information pack about the college's involvement in work-based learning. However, employers do not receive information about the individual learner's training programme. They are not made sufficiently aware of the content of the off-the-job training programme. Many employers do not receive a schedule of the learners' training activities when they attend off-the-job training. There are guidelines for assessors to help them support the learners more effectively but few checks are made to ensure that the off-the-job training complements the learners' role in the workplace. Assessors give good feedback to employers at the end of the progress reviews and employers record their comments and sign progress reviews. Some employers discuss the outcomes of the review with the learners, but few employers attend the learners' progress reviews.

GOOD PRACTICE

Learners following training programmes in early years care have formed an effective self-support group. If learners are unable to attend the off-the-job workshops colleagues gather the information and necessary materials to pass to them. Learners find this useful in helping them to maintain their progress when shift patterns at work change unexpectedly.

42. There is inconsistency in key skills training. The college has recently appointed a key skills co-ordinator to work across the college and key skills tutors have been appointed. However, the school of work-based learning has no agreed plan for the training or assessment of key skills. Some learners are unaware of key skills and do not know how they fit in to their whole training programme. Many learners start their key skills training late in their training programme. One learner completed the key skills training in July 2001 but has yet to have a final assessment. This has slowed the learner's progress in achieving the full qualification. Some assessors are not aware that learners do not know how to claim their key skills units. Tutors in health and social care have recently set up workshops to teach key skills, but it is too early to assess the impact of these on

learners' progress.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

43. Chelmsford College has quality assurance arrangements which are intended to cover all its activities including work-based training. The procedures are regularly reviewed and updated. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the director of quality and development. The college regularly audits the implementation of its quality assurance arrangements. This process involves the observation of training. There is a corporation quality committee which meets four times a year to consider quality assurance issues across all the college's activities. Quality assurance is included on the agenda of the managers' meetings within the training unit. Written records of meetings are kept. There is a college-wide internal verification system. Implementation of the system is the responsibility of the internal verification and assessment manager. There are regular meetings of internal verifiers across the college. External verifiers' reports are sent directly to the director of quality and development, who then copies them to all appropriate individuals, including the head of the training unit. The views of trainees and employers on the effectiveness of the college's training programmes are collected regularly. All staff from the training unit contribute to the self-assessment of the work-based training programmes. The self-assessment report gives a clear description of the quality assurance arrangements. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective self-assessment
- ◆ good action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inappropriate quality assurance procedures for some work-based training
- ◆ insufficient feedback from trainees and employers

44. The college has been carrying out self-assessment for several years. The process is effective. Staff gather appropriate evidence and evaluate it well. Most of the judgements in the self-assessment report are sound. Staff have a good appreciation of the standards they should be achieving. The self-assessment report is self-critical where necessary and also identifies most of the key strengths. The report acknowledges that there is a need for more evaluation of the quality of training in the workplace. There is good action-planning leading to continuous improvement. There are a series of action plans aimed at achieving short-term improvements. These focus on a variety of issues including training, assessment and trainee support. Their implementation and impact are frequently evaluated. Issues requiring action are identified from a variety of sources. All staff contribute to the process. The plans are regularly updated. The action plans feed into the self-

assessment process. Actions result in improvements. For example, there have been significant improvements in retention rates. The average retention rate in construction since 1997 is 67 per cent and in engineering it is 77 per cent. The retention rate for trainees who have started since April 1999 is 90 per cent in both areas.

45. The quality assurance system applies to all of the college's activities. Some procedures are difficult to apply to work-based training. Others are applicable only in the college and not in the workplace. For example, the quality assurance procedures relating to assessment make no reference to work-based assessment and do not provide guidance on the type and quality of work-based evidence required. Progress-review procedures make no reference to progress reviews conducted in the workplace or provide guidance on employers' involvement in progress reviews. The collection of trainees and employers' views on the quality of the training programmes is inadequate. The process is the same for trainees as for part-time students and is based on a 10 per cent sample. Given the relatively small number of trainees, the sample size is inappropriate. Similar difficulties are evident in the employer surveys. The college plans to extend its surveys to cover all trainees and employers and to increase employers' involvement in the training programmes through the introduction of employers' meetings.