

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION
REPORT DECEMBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
JANUARY 2002

Dunstable College Training Agency



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 Dunstable College Training Agency was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for construction, business administration, health, care & public services, foundation for work, equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. These sections of the original report dealing with construction, business administration, health, care & public services, foundation for work, equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

Dunstable College Training Agency offered training in eight occupational areas at the time of the original inspection. At reinspection, this number had reduced to six as agriculture and hospitality were no longer offered. Training in construction, care and early years remains poor. Learners in construction benefit from highly supportive employers and good workplace assessment, but their retention and achievement rates are still poor, as are the resources for their training. Retention and achievement rates in care and early years are still poor and the co-ordination of this training is weak. Training in engineering and in retailing and customer service is good, with good assessment both on and off the job. Training in business administration is now satisfactory. Retention rates in this are improving, and work placements are good. Assessment practices in the workplace are poor. Foundation for work programmes have declined from less than satisfactory to very weak. The programmes do not meet the individual needs of learners. Support for learners is satisfactory, but not always recorded properly. Equal opportunities and management of training are now satisfactory. A well-managed restructure of Dunstable College Training Agency has occurred since the original inspection. Quality assurance remains less than satisfactory, although some improvements have been made to the self-assessment process. Monitoring of procedures, particularly relating to training in the workplace, is poor.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	4
Construction	4
Engineering	2
Business administration	4
Retailing & customer service	2
Hospitality	2
Health, care & public services	4
Foundation for work	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	3
Management of training	5
Quality assurance	5

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Construction	4
Business administration	3
Health, care & public services	4
Foundation for work	5

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training in engineering, hospitality, and retailing and customer service
- ◆ effective and frequent support from training officers
- ◆ good development of training at community sites
- ◆ good off-the-job training in engineering

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent review process
- ◆ insufficient data used when considering management decisions
- ◆ weak management of subcontractors
- ◆ little quality assurance of training in the workplace
- ◆ poor Life Skills programme

INTRODUCTION

1. Dunstable College Training Agency (DCTA), the department of the college providing work-based learning, has been running publicly funded training programmes since August 1990. Dunstable College opened as a general further education college in 1961. It is based close to the centre of Dunstable in South Bedfordshire and recruits students for its full- and part-time education and training courses mainly from Luton and the surrounding areas. In 1999-2000, the college had 6,600 students studying for a wide range of full- and part-time courses, from foundation level to higher national diplomas. This had risen to 8,222 in 2000-01. The college's main source of funding is Bedfordshire local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There are 105 teaching staff and 118 support staff employed at the college. There are 16 staff working specifically for DCTA, and college tutors also work with learners in the same classes as full-time students. The college operates in a competitive environment. There are two further education colleges and one sixth-form college in Dunstable and Luton. There is a solid infrastructure of main roads through the county, which has two main centres in the towns of Bedford in the north, and Luton in the south. There is also an international airport in South Bedfordshire, and good rail links.

2. At the time of the original inspection, DCTA had 345 learners. Currently, there are 129 learners. There are now 19 in construction, 48 in engineering, 26 in business administration, 18 in customer service, 15 in health, care and public services and three on foundation for work programmes. DCTA currently offers advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, as well as other work-based learning programmes and the Life Skills element of the Learning Gateway. Learners work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3.

3. Bedfordshire's economy is driven by the manufacturing sector, which provides almost a quarter of all employment in the county. This is almost double the proportion employed in manufacturing for the rest of the Southeast. The county has a population of approximately 543,000. Some areas of the county have high rates of unemployment, poor housing and low levels of educational attainment. According to the 1991 census, people from minority ethnic groups account for 9.9 per cent of the county's population, compared with 6.2 per cent over England as a whole. Unemployment levels have dropped since the original inspection. Around 2 per cent of people of working age in Bedfordshire are unemployed, compared with a national average of 2.9 per cent, in September 2001. In 2000, the percentage of school leavers in Bedfordshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 49 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 2001, the proportion in Bedfordshire remained the same, with the national average decreasing to 47.9 per cent. Data from the local Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise show that, in 2000, 10 per cent of young people aged under 17 in Bedfordshire participated in

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government-funded training, compared with an average in England of 11 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. DCTA produced a self-assessment report in August 2000, before its original inspection by the Training Standards Council (TSC). At this time a self-assessment report was also produced for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), which was reinspecting the college at the same time. The self-assessment report for DCTA was produced by its manager, with help from the head of the college's support unit. No learners or employers were consulted during the self-assessment process. Staff and most subcontractors contributed to the report. However, the three subcontractors which began working with the college in March 2000 produced their own separate reports. Some of the strengths in the DCTA's previous report were descriptive rather than evaluative. After the original inspection, DCTA prepared a post-inspection action plan. DCTA prepared another self-assessment report in August 2001, using the *Common Inspection Framework*. Views of learners, employers and supervisors were used to form judgements. The report clearly evaluates the provision.

5. A team of 11 inspectors spent a total of 43 days at DCTA in December 2000. They interviewed 124 learners, 17 employers and 25 workplace supervisors. Fifty-seven interviews were carried out with staff from the college. Inspectors visited 47 sites where learners were in training, and observed and graded 22 training sessions. In addition, inspectors examined 78 portfolios. Inspectors reviewed learners' files, management information, curriculum and assessment material, internal and external verifiers' records, and policies and procedures.

6. The reinspection was carried out by a team of six inspectors, who spent a total of 24 days at DCTA in January 2002. Inspectors interviewed 44 learners and 12 workplace supervisors, carried out 41 interviews with college staff and interviewed one member of a subcontractor's staff. Inspectors looked at quality assurance procedures and minutes and notes from meetings, as well as learners' and supervisors' evaluations of training programmes.

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Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture	1	1				2
Construction		1				1
Engineering		1	2			3
Business administration	1	2	3			6
Hospitality		1				1
Health, care & public services	2	5				7
Foundation for work		1	1			2
Total	4	12	6	0	0	22

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at reinspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	TOTAL
Construction		1		1				2
Business administration		1	1					2
Foundation for work				2	1			3
Health, social care and public services								0
Total								7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 4

7. DCTA provides training for three specific occupations within the agricultural sector. These are amenity horticulture (sports turf), animal care and equine studies. Of the 13 trainees, there are three advanced modern apprentices, seven foundation modern apprentices and three trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people. There are four trainees on amenity horticulture (sports turf), of whom three are taking NVQs at level 3 and one of whom is taking an NVQ at level 2. These trainees are employed on three local golf courses, where they receive on-the-job training. Off-the-job training is provided on a day-release basis by a local agricultural college which is subcontracted to provide both training and assessment. There are seven trainees on animal care programmes including one taking an NVQ at level 1 and six taking NVQs at level 2. All are employed at local kennels, pet centres and safari parks, where they receive on-the-job training. Off-the-job training is provided at Dunstable College on a day-release basis. Equine training is subcontracted to the training section of a local council. There are two

equine trainees including one taking an NVQ at level 2 and one taking an NVQ at level 1. Equine trainees have work placements at the subcontractor's own stables for on-the-job training and attend a local agricultural college for off-the-job training on a day-release course. The self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical. Inspectors could not find all the identified strengths or weaknesses. The self-assessment report was brief, contained factual inaccuracies and failed to identify several significant weaknesses identified by inspectors. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good workplace learning opportunities
- ◆ good portfolios of evidence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor integration of key skills
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ poorly managed animal care programme
- ◆ no planned on-the-job training
- ◆ poor understanding of training programmes by trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment

8. Trainees are employed or placed with employers who have excellent physical resources, which allow them to gain strong practical skills and industrial experience. Resources include equipment and machinery representative of the latest industrial technology. Trainees often benefit from the variety of opportunities, afforded them by their particular workplaces, which enhance their wider social and personal development skills, such as when they deal with visitors and customers. Trainees' portfolios are well structured and the evidence contained is effectively recorded and referenced to the NVQ standards. Evidence is drawn from a wide range of sources including witness testimony, photographic and pictorial sources, written accounts, assignments, observations and practical assessments.

9. Most trainees are undertaking key skills training and assessment. They have some awareness of the key skills they are undertaking but do not fully understand the rationale for key skills. Trainees receive key skills training which is additional to, and not contextualised within, the occupational training. Many trainees have separate folders for key skills evidence but this is not drawn from or referenced to the occupational evidence. Only a small amount of key skills evidence is linked to occupational areas. Trainees have separate sessions at college for key skills training and this is usually given by a non-occupational tutor. Accreditation of prior learning is not used for trainees entering NVQ training programmes. Some trainees have begun NVQ programmes having achieved other vocational qualifications but have not been able to make use of this previous experience to accelerate them through the NVQ. This has led to repeated work for some trainees.

10. The animal care programme at Dunstable College is poorly planned and managed. There are no schedules or schemes of work for teaching theoretical knowledge or for the tutorial sessions held at the college for trainees. There is no structured learning programme and trainees are not aware of their progress through the NVQ. Some trainees who have been on their programmes for over a year are still waiting for units to be formally assessed and signed off by the assessor. Trainees are assessed in the workplace, but there is no planned schedule for assessment and no recording of individual units or elements completed by trainees. There is no internal verification in animal care, so trainees cannot complete their awards and gain their NVQs. Equine and horticulture trainees who receive off-the-job training at a local agricultural college have a very different experience. This training is well planned, structured and effective in developing trainees' occupational knowledge.

11. In all the programmes there is no planned on-the-job training by the workplace supervisors. This unnecessarily delays trainees' development and restricts their opportunities to fulfil the practical competencies required to complete the NVQ. There is also no link made between the workplace and the off-the-job training. Trainees are not fully aware of the content of their training programmes or of the NVQ requirements and do not understand their training programmes. This lack of understanding means that trainees are not always aware of opportunities to assimilate evidence, and speed up their own progress on their programmes.

12. In the case of subcontracted training in equine studies and amenity horticulture, the assessments are mainly conducted at the local college as the trainees have no work-based assessors. There have been some assessments for the amenity horticulture trainees when the college's assessors have visited them in the workplace, but these visits are infrequent. Many trainees are ready to be assessed by observation but have to wait for opportunities at college for this. This severely restricts the use of genuine work-based evidence and curtails trainees' progress. The distinct lack of planning and recording of observations in animal care does not facilitate the efficient use of work-based assessment.

Construction

Grade 4

13. DCTA provides training and assessment in electrical installation. Since the original inspection, DCTA has ceased to provide training and assessment in carpentry and joinery, and in plumbing. There are 19 electrical installation learners, of whom 12 are advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3, six are foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2, and one is on other work-based learning programmes for young people, also working towards an NVQ at level 2. All learners are men. There are no learners from minority ethnic groups. All learners are employed by small to medium-sized local companies. Learners' on-site experience varies from new build projects in the private housing and commercial sectors, to projects in the domestic repair and

maintenance sector. Fifteen learners attend day-release off-the-job training at Dunstable College. The remaining four learners attend the college one evening a week to prepare for a forthcoming examination. DCTA has two members of staff, one lecturer/training officer and one lecturer, dedicated to the electrical installation programme. The lecturer/training officer visits learners in the workplace to conduct learners' reviews, and to carry out work-based assessments. The lecturer/training officer is occupationally qualified and is working towards the appropriate assessors' qualifications. The lecturer is currently training to become an internal verifier. DCTA is currently advertising for an additional training officer with assessors' qualifications. Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were descriptive. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ slow progress for some trainees
- ◆ no assessment by observation of work-based evidence
- ◆ inadequate resources for practical training
- ◆ poor assessment practice for subcontracted trainees

14. Following the original inspection, DCTA produced an action plan to deal with these weaknesses. A review of subcontracted training and assessment was carried out, and DCTA subsequently discontinued its subcontracting arrangements. A new lecturer/training officer was appointed and given responsibility for work-based assessment. The lecturer/training officer has worked hard to develop and implement a planned and structured approach to work-based assessment. There is still slow progress for learners at DCTA. Resources for practical training at the college remain inadequate.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ involved and supportive employers
- ◆ well-planned on-the-job assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor NVQ and key skills achievement
- ◆ poor internal verification
- ◆ inadequate resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ delayed introduction of key skills training

15. Employers help learners to gain the knowledge and training to become skilled and competent employees. They encourage learners to take part in a wide range of activities to gain valuable experience. For example, one employer suggested that a learner becomes involved with installing lift shafts. This will allow the learner to work with steel wire armoured cabling. Another learner is installing mineral and specialist wiring as part of a church renovation project. Employers respond to learners' needs and help them to gain confidence and become useful team

members. All employers are actively involved in the learners' progress reviews. They regularly set targets for learners. These targets help learners to focus on specific aspects of their work. Targets are reviewed on a monthly basis. Since the original inspection, employers have become increasingly involved in workplace assessment.

16. Workplace assessments are well planned. DCTA and employers work together to identify assessment opportunities and then an assessment plan is agreed with the learner. The assessment date is then formally agreed with the employer. Feedback to learners is prompt and comprehensive. Following assessment, an action plan is agreed with the learner and employer. This is reviewed at the next formal progress review. Learners understand the assessment process.

17. The achievement rate of NVQs and key skills awards is poor. Forty-two per cent of learners who started since 1998-1999 have left the programme without achieving an NVQ or key skills awards. Of the 11 learners who started training between 1998-2000 and are still in training, none have achieved an NVQ or key skills awards. The collection of workplace evidence for portfolios is slow. Most learners have gaps of up to six months in their site diaries. Most NVQ monitoring sheets in portfolios are not kept up to date. Learners find it difficult to judge their own progress.

18. Internal verification is poor. Assessment decisions made by the trainee assessor are not validated correctly. No workplace assessments have been countersigned by a qualified assessor. A sampling plan for level 2 NVQs has been produced, but planned dates for sampling have been missed. Since May 2001, only one source of evidence, an observation, has been internally verified. Internal verification is currently being introduced on one programme. The internal verification of information technology (IT) key skill at level 1 was recently introduced. Some assessment documents are incomplete. The internal verification process failed to identify these weaknesses.

19. The resources for practical training are inadequate. There is no area set aside for this training, and insufficient equipment and materials are available. There is no area to allow learners to train on electrical motors. Since the original inspection, additional resources have been purchased to support training in conduit work, but the training is still given in inadequate accommodation. Additional funds have been set aside. There is no attempt to replicate the working environment. For learners unable to gain a broad range of on-the-job experience for their NVQ, there are insufficient off-the-job resources to fill the gaps.

20. Key skills training is introduced late in the training programme. The timetabling of key skills sessions only started in September 2001. During the summer of 2001, IT key skills sessions were held. Only 62 per cent of learners in training at the time attended the sessions. Of these, only four completed their assignments. No further help has been given to learners who did not complete their work, or who did not attend the sessions. The college's engineering department has developed a key skills learning plan. However, this only covers the application of

number key skill. Learning plans for other mandatory key skills in the electrical installation framework have yet to be introduced. Two weeks before the inspection, learners were given an integrated key skills assignment. The assignment will help to develop application of number and communication key skills. Learners' key skills are not assessed sufficiently in the workplace. Although workplace assessment and witness testimony are now used frequently, work-based assessors do not use the evidence from tasks carried out in the workplace as evidence of key skills achievement. In the past, learners have been registered and then de-registered for key skills awards. This problem has been resolved and all learners are now registered with a recognised awarding body.

Engineering

Grade 2

21. There are 41 advanced modern apprentices, two foundation modern apprentices and two trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people. All the trainees work towards achieving NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in engineering. In addition, trainees work towards other qualifications ranging from craft to degree levels. Nearly all trainees take foundation training at the level for modern apprentices in the college's workshops on a day-release or block-release basis over two years. On completion of their NVQs at level 2, most trainees work towards an NVQ at level 3 in the workplace. Key skills are achieved during this period of on- and off-the-job training. Retention rates are over 80 per cent and the modern apprentices are beginning to achieve their apprenticeships. Most modern apprentices are taking mechanical engineering and are employed in a wide range of small and large companies, many associated with the car or aerospace industries. Occupational staff from the college provide off-the-job training and assessment while DCTA's staff provide the assessment and support for work-based training. The college's occupational staff who provide the training and assessment are fully qualified in mechanical engineering and as assessors and internal verifiers. The self-assessment report highlighted many of the strengths and weaknesses also found by the inspectors, who awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training and assessment
- ◆ well-planned and effective assessment in the workplace
- ◆ effective working relationships between employers and college's staff
- ◆ good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of involvement in assessment by employers
- ◆ ineffective use made of individual training plans

22. Prospective engineering trainees are carefully recruited, tested and matched with suitable employers. This recruitment and matching process is effective and it

provides the employers with appropriate staff. The selection process is followed by off-the-job training at Dunstable College. The training is well planned to cover all aspects of the trainees' chosen NVQs. The training materials are good. They are based on a series of tasks to ensure that the trainees learn all the necessary skills to achieve the NVQ. Although most of the equipment in the workshops is out of date, it can still be used to teach the basic skills required in engineering. New control engineering resources and appropriate computer software has recently been purchased which reflects modern industrial practices. The workshops are well maintained and operated to high health and safety standards. Key skills are being incorporated into the off-the-job training. The trainees are collecting and recording key skills evidence as they build their portfolios for their NVQs at level 2. The staff in the workshops are experienced trainers with good industrial experience. The assessment system used in the workshops is thorough. Each unit is individually assessed and the results recorded. Assessment is supported by an efficient internal verification system. The off-the-job training package effectively provides the trainees with an excellent grounding in engineering skills on which they can build when they are in the workplace.

23. All assessment for the NVQs at level 3 is carried out in the workplace by DCTA's staff. The assessment process is fully explained to the trainee as they start gathering evidence for their portfolios. The concept of unit assessment is explained and the assessor and trainee discuss the various evidence options. They then look at each unit and identify the types of evidence they have available for each unit. The trainee is also given an assessment check sheet appropriate to each unit as a guide to what is expected from them. The assessor is very thorough, and questions trainees about their work after observing them, also looking at any documentary evidence. The assessor records details of all parts of the assessment and the trainees sign the records to indicate their agreement with the conclusion reached. All assessments for each trainee are recorded so that their progress towards completion of units and the NVQ can be easily checked. The assessor has a detailed knowledge of each trainee's work and progress, and there are good working relationships between the assessor and trainees. Assessment in the workplace is effective, comprehensive, well planned and fully recorded.

24. The working relationship between DCTA's staff and employers is also very good. They have worked together over a number of years but have worked more effectively in the last year. DCTA's staff visit employers regularly. This has resulted in a high degree of trust developing between the two parties. The companies now use the expertise of DCTA's staff to help drive forward the progress on their business plans surrounding recruitment. They are involved in helping companies recruit trainees, and DCTA's ability to find appropriate applicants is greatly appreciated by the companies. The companies are very supportive of what the college does and they provide help and equipment to improve the college's training facilities. The teamwork between the companies and DCTA's staff helps in identifying trainees who may be thinking of leaving early and working on ways to encourage them to stay. Of the 69 trainees starting, 14 have left the programme without completing their training, but 10 of these leavers have achieved an NVQ. Only four of the 69 trainees starting in the past three years

have left the programme without any qualifications, which is less than 6 per cent. The advanced modern apprentices in their final year are now beginning to achieve their qualifications. So far, eight have achieved their qualifications and the rest remain in training.

25. The assessment process for NVQs at level 3 is good but there is little involvement by employers except for supplying witness statements. DCTA's staff have not encouraged employers to train their staff as work-based assessors. Employers' staff take an active part in the training of the young people and they are keen for them to succeed, but they rely heavily on DCTA's staff for knowledge about the NVQs.

26. At present, the individual training plans are not used as active working documents. They are completed for each trainee at the start of the programme and copies are circulated to the trainees and their employers. Nothing else is added to the individual training plans. There are a few individual training plans with amendment sheets detailing course changes, but some of these hold incorrect information. If individual training plans are altered, these amendments are not circulated to everyone with a copy of the original. Individual training plans are rarely used when trainees and DCTA's staff discuss trainees' progress or make plans for trainees' work.

Business administration

Grade 3

27. DCTA has 26 learners on business administration programmes. Two of them are advanced modern apprentices and 17 are foundation modern apprentices. Two are following an NVQ programme and five are on accountancy programmes. The learners are recruited throughout the year, in response to advertisements or directly from employers. Potential learners are interviewed and, where appropriate, given basic skills tests. Additional support is given if it is needed. Three of the learners are currently in full-time employment, the others are on training programmes with work experience. A three-day induction programme covers the organisation of the training centre, health and safety issues, equal opportunities, the content of the training programme, an understanding of NVQs and an introduction to portfolio building. The administration learners attend DCTA's training centre for off-the-job training for half a day each week to cover the background knowledge and skills for the NVQ as well as key skills. Accountancy learners attend sessions with students at another college for one day each week. Current work placements provide a variety of opportunities for training and assessment. The training officer carries out progress reviews in the workplace. A member of college staff is responsible for assessments until DCTA's training officer completes assessors' qualifications. Employers are involved in the NVQ process through an employers' forum and their participation in work-based progress reviews. Most learning programmes last for two years.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ low achievement rates by foundation modern apprentices
- ◆ over-dependence on work packs in administration
- ◆ little assessment in the workplace
- ◆ no initial assessment by one training provider

28. DCTA produced a detailed action plan in response to the inspection findings, and a new self-assessment report. Actions have been taken to remedy all the weaknesses. The training provider that provided no initial assessment is no longer used as a subcontractor by DCTA. The work packs now form part of a much wider range of learning materials. Achievement rates have improved, and some assessment is done in the workplace, although some assessment practices are poor. The grade given by inspectors at the reinspection was the same as that given by DCTA.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good variety of work placements
- ◆ good links with employers
- ◆ well-planned and effectively taught off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practice
- ◆ weak co-ordination of accountancy programme
- ◆ lack of integration of key skills

29. Since the original inspection, retention rates have improved in all programmes. During 2000-01, retention rates on the foundation modern apprenticeship improved from 35 per cent to 56 per cent, with 14 of the 25 learners staying in training. On the advanced modern apprenticeship, four out of five who started are still on the training programme. This includes all three who entered at level 3. This compares very favourably with the two previous years when all those who entered at level 3 left early. In 2000-01, only two were recruited on the NVQ training programme. One has already completed the training and the other remains on the programme. On the accountancy programme, three out of four remain on the programme. The previous year all three entrants left early. It is too soon after the original inspection to judge achievement rates, but better retention rates provide more favourable conditions for achievement to improve. During 2000-01, 41 per cent of the 29 foundation modern apprentices gained the full qualification and a further three achieved accreditation for three or more NVQ units.

GOOD PRACTICE

When the tutor is giving one-to-one portfolio support, post-it notes are put on pieces of evidence which could be enhanced. For example, on a log of visitors at reception the post-it suggested that the candidate should also photocopy the visitors' book as further evidence. Action plans are completed for the next session but the post-it notes remind candidates of what they need to do for particular parts of the portfolio.

30. DCTA places learners with a wide range of organisations including two local authorities, a national car manufacturer, a national charity, a local primary school, engineering companies, a national quality assurance company and an estate agency. The larger employers have a planned rotation of work placements in different

sections to provide learners with a breadth of experience and good chances to collect evidence for their NVQ. There is a variety of good on-the-job training covering specific work needs such as the development of computer software skills, product awareness, awareness of new legislation and telephone techniques. Training also covers development of personal skills and topics such as time management, health and safety, personal effectiveness and, in one case, supervisory management training. Other individual development opportunities are also offered to learners, such as a trip to the docks to observe import processes for one person working in that role.

31. Employers work in close partnership with DCTA's staff regarding the training and development of their learners, and support learners with health and family problems. In the larger organisations, training officers closely follow learners' progress. In smaller organisations, managers take an active interest in the learners' development. In one, a senior manager acts as mentor to the learners, in addition to the role taken by the immediate workplace supervisor. Informal on-the-job coaching is provided when appropriate for the learners. DCTA's staff and employers work together to motivate learners and help them resolve matters which might otherwise lead to them falling behind or dropping out of programmes. In most companies, the workplace supervisor is involved in the progress review process and agrees the learners' short-term targets with the training officer. Most employers have copies of the NVQ standards. There is an employers' forum which meets annually to discuss topics such as the time and length of work experience for learners on training programmes. At one meeting of the employers' forum, staff from DCTA gave a presentation on key skills.

32. Off-the-job training for business administration learners is given in pleasant, well-equipped rooms in the college's main building. Attendance at these sessions is excellent. There are usually two tutors for a group of about six learners. This enables one member of staff to provide training in office skills while the other has portfolio-building sessions with each learner in turn. The system is effective and provides learners with learning opportunities and short-term goals for their evidence collection on a weekly basis. The training sessions are well prepared and clearly presented. Both tutors displayed patience and good rapport with the learners.

33. Since the original inspection, assessment through observation in the workplace has been introduced. However, observations are infrequent and are not always appropriate. Several learners were observed at one larger company on a single day. All the observation reports are very similar and they focus mainly on recording the discussions held with the learners about health and safety issues. They do not record events, and in one case a real observation was not recorded. Learners and staff do not understand the purpose of these observations. Some observation reports describe how individual learners are not yet competent. Some learners are given insufficient feedback about their progress in assessment. The internal verification system is weak and has failed to identify these poor assessment practices.

34. The accountancy learners attend another college for their off-the-job training.

From September last year, the college's head of department agreed to meet once a term with DCTA's training officer and to send reports for each college term. There were two meetings in the autumn term. However, issues about key skills which were raised at the first meeting were not referred to during the second meeting. The minutes of both meetings are very brief and do not indicate how DCTA manages the programme. DCTA's staff do not monitor the quality of the off-the-job training sessions at the other college. They receive very brief termly reports on the learners' attendance and diligence. However, these reports give no indication of the learners' progress in their NVQ or key skills work. The termly reports are an improvement on the situation previously when annual reports of attendance were sent to DCTA. In at least one case last year, the report came too late to rectify problems which one learner was encountering.

35. Key skills training is begun late in the training programmes. The few training sessions which have been presented this year have been overloaded with information. Many learners perceive key skills as difficult and unrelated to their work or NVQ. They draw their evidence mainly from assignments, which are unrelated to the workplace. Occupational evidence has not been used as evidence for key skills. There has been no assessment of key skills so far for advanced or foundation modern apprentices in the current intake.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

36. There are 29 trainees in this occupational area. Nine clients are currently attending a three-week fork-truck training work-based learning for adults programme. The first week covers induction and basic information technology skills. The second week involves undertaking fork-truck training leading to a certificate. The third week is spent on job-search activities. Eighteen trainees are working towards an advanced modern apprenticeship in customer service and two trainees are working towards a foundation modern apprenticeship in customer service. The training for most trainees is subcontracted to two training providers. One training provider has 11 trainees, 10 of whom are advanced modern apprentices. The other training provider has the other eight advanced modern apprentices. There is currently one trainee trained directly by DCTA. Both subcontracting arrangements began in April 2000. Both subcontractors undertake all assessments and reviews. Subcontractors ensure that assessments occur in the workplace at least once a month. Reviews are undertaken within the required timescale as set by the CCTE. Both subcontractors internally verify their own work. DCTA's liaison officers undertake assessments and reviews for customer service trainees recruited directly by DCTA. All trainees on this programme are employed. Trainees are placed in medium-sized companies and 11 trainees are working within the hospitality industry. All assessors and internal verifiers are occupationally competent and hold appropriate qualifications. Numbers in this occupational area have been very small but there has been a significant increase in numbers of trainees for the current year owing to the new subcontracting arrangements.

37. Self-assessment reports were written by DCTA and both training providers. However, the three self-assessment reports are presented as separate documents and do not follow the same format. There is no identification of common strengths or weaknesses. The strengths identified by DCTA were found by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths not identified by DCTA. Inspectors agreed with DCTA's weakness of low achievement in retail and found additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by DCTA.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ appropriate selection and matching of job roles and NVQs
- ◆ good understanding of NVQ process by trainees
- ◆ good on-the-job training
- ◆ wide range of assessment techniques used by subcontractor

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little involvement in assessment process by employers
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills

38. Both subcontractors recruit their own trainees. Recruitment is either by employers with employees needing training making contact with DCTA or through trainees making contact themselves. If trainees make contact with DCTA themselves, they are then enrolled on a programme when they have been found suitable employment. Both subcontractors undertake a detailed vocational skills analysis of the job role of each trainee. This analysis confirms whether the job will enable trainees to generate sufficient evidence to complete an NVQ. If gaps are identified, then appropriate arrangements are made to enable the trainee to generate the required evidence. This careful screening ensures that trainees are in appropriate job roles which enable them to collect sufficient evidence against all the components of their framework. All advanced modern apprentices are either in supervisory or managerial positions and have the authority to initiate improvements within customer service. Employers can identify improvements made in workplace practices as a direct result of trainees working towards customer service NVQs at level 3. One employer was able to confirm that the trainee has introduced improvements in the use of recording paperwork. Another employer was able to confirm that the trainees instigated a change to the types of messages left on voicemail. This change resulted in improved communication with customers. Trainees' development through working towards their NVQs is greatly valued by employers and they can identify the benefits arising from the NVQs for both the trainees and organisations.

39. Trainees have a good understanding of the NVQ process. The induction process provides trainees with a good introduction to NVQs, the standards, and the roles and responsibilities of the trainee, assessor and others involved in training, including internal and external verifiers. All trainees are issued with a set of the

NVQ standards during their induction. Both subcontractors clearly inform the trainees of the NVQ assessment process. Trainees have a good understanding of the appeal process. Assessments are well planned. Trainees are set short-term targets which enable them to prepare for subsequent assessments. The planning of assessments, and all assessments undertaken, are well recorded and copies of the plans and records are made available to trainees. Trainees also have a good understanding of agreed long-term achievement targets as recorded in their individual training plans. Portfolios are of a good standard and trainees demonstrate a good knowledge of their portfolios. Trainees are clear about the progress they have made towards achievement. Trainees match the evidence they have collected to each appropriate NVQ element. When they have demonstrated their competence in an element, this is signed off as completed by both the assessor and trainee. For the college's trainee, there was a delay in the start of assessments owing to there being no customer service assessor available. Consequently, the effectiveness of the college's planning and recording of assessment cannot be judged.

40. Since the beginning of the three-week fork-training programme in February 2000, 51 out of 53 trainees beginning have achieved their certificates. Additional qualifications are also made available, including manual handling and basic information technology skills. Of the 53 trainees, 70 per cent have also gained certificates in information technology. Job outcomes are known for all leavers up to the end of August. Of the 37 who have left, 11 have obtained employment. Nine of these 11 job outcomes were related to the distribution industry. Of the four advanced modern apprentices recruited by DCTA, two have completed their individual training plans and one is still working towards this. DCTA has recruited one foundation modern apprentice who has successfully completed the individual training plan. The trainees with subcontractors have not been in training long enough for rates of achievement and retention to become apparent.

41. Both subcontractors have arrangements to ensure that trainees receive appropriate training to support the development of their knowledge and understanding. Trainees' additional training requirements are first identified through the vocational skills analysis undertaken during induction. Subsequent training needs are identified through discussions to plan assessments and through the review process. Training needs, and agreed actions to address them, are recorded on assessment plans. One subcontractor gives trainees a short training programme called 'complaints are a compliment' to explain the need for trainees to accept such involvement in all aspects of their training. The same training provider also has available a range of information technology training programmes and trainees are taught these on a one-to-one basis using laptop computers. Employers have a range of training programmes to support trainees' development as well. One employer uses an external trainer to give a range of customer service courses. Successful completion of each course results in the award of a certificate. Other employers provide training on products and telephone techniques. One trainee has undertaken first aid training.

42. Observation of trainees is the most common assessment technique used by both

subcontractors. Observation is supported by product evidence, personal statements from trainees, photographs and case studies. One subcontractor uses innovative assessment techniques. This begins with the assessor holding a professional discussion with the trainee. The interview is recorded through the use of an audio recorder. Video is also used to record discussions. The assessor references the recording of the interview, giving exact identifiers for where on the tape the trainees' answers to written questions can be heard.

43. Most employers are aware of the NVQ and of the framework that the trainee is working towards. However, employers are not actively involved in the assessment process. Employers rarely provide witness testimonies. Neither of the subcontractors involves employers in the assessment planning. Employers are not given copies of agreed assessment plans or completed assessments. Employers do not have specific knowledge of trainees' progress beyond that which they learn during the review process. Employers' understanding of key skills is varied. Trainees have a better understanding of key skills requirements, and the college and both subcontractors integrate the teaching of key skills within the occupational training programme. However, there is no initial assessment of key skills during the induction or at any stage of the NVQ programme. Although the retention rates for both subcontractors have been satisfactory since the beginning of the subcontracting arrangements in April, the achievement rates have been low.

Hospitality

Grade 2

44. Hospitality training provided by DCTA is subcontracted to one training provider with the exception of one trainee. This subcontractor has an area manager who is supported by two full-time training organisers. There are 36 trainees, 18 of whom are foundation modern apprentices and 18 of whom are advanced modern apprentices. All trainees are employed. Programmes being undertaken by trainees included housekeeping, quick service, food preparation and cooking, food and drink service, craft baking, bar service, reception, on-licensed premises and restaurant supervision. All trainees have been recruited from the hospitality industry or referred by employers to the subcontractor. Establishments where trainees are employed are varied and are assessed by the subcontractor to ensure that there are good opportunities for successful completion of the trainees' training programmes. All training and assessment is carried out in the workplace by the subcontractor's staff. The self-assessment report produced by DCTA placed great reliance on that produced by the subcontractor. The strengths contained in the report were assessed as being no more than normal practice by inspectors, who identified other strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of involvement by employers
- ◆ clear and effective target-setting

- ◆ well-planned assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some missed assessment opportunities
- ◆ incomplete planning of training

45. Training organisers from the subcontractor have good occupational knowledge and experience and effective working relationships with workplace supervisors and trainees. Employers are thoroughly involved in the training programmes and encourage their employees to take part in training. Trainees are fully employed within the industry in a variety of establishments suited to the successful completion of their training programmes. Many are employed before they start their training. An initial assessment is completed by the trainees as well as a key skills assessment to identify learning styles and current levels of key skills abilities. This initial assessment does not fully assess the trainee for any learning support needs and is not reviewed by DCTA. Learning support needs are identified by training organisers during training and they also take responsibility for addressing such needs. Before they start training, trainees have policies and procedures explained to them and they receive a guide to NVQs. Employers also receive a full explanation of the training and sign an employers' agreement provided by the subcontractor which explains their responsibilities in the training process. An individual training programme is decided in consultation with the trainee, training organiser and the employer which takes into consideration both the trainees' job roles and the employers' expectations of them. Optional and additional units within programmes are fully discussed by the trainer, trainee and employer and the selection of these reflects both employment opportunities and the career aspirations of the trainee. Some trainees also have access to in-house training programmes, which further develop their occupational competence and knowledge. This means that trainees have individual programmes which meet their needs and which have optional units best suited to both their needs and their workplaces.

46. Training organisers and employers provide high levels of support to trainees, and training organisers will visit trainees in the workplace at convenient times. This includes visits during both early mornings and late evenings, as well as at weekends. The subcontractor evaluates trainees' satisfaction with their training systematically. The area manager investigates any difficulties identified through this evaluation process. Meetings are held at regular intervals with trainees as part of their reviews. These reviews are held at four-weekly intervals and are often more frequent at the start of training programmes when trainees need increased support. In most cases, employers are involved in these reviews and have a clear understanding of the training trainees need between each review. Those employers which are unable to take part in reviews have a separate meeting with training organisers to discuss this. Tasks for trainees to complete between reviews are clearly stated, effective and re-assessed at the next review. These actions for trainees to complete take into consideration the previous experience they have gained in employment and their individual training plans are updated accordingly.

47. Assessments are well planned by training organisers in consultation with trainees. An assessment plan is produced which details what assessment is needed when, and how the assessment will be carried out. Trainees understand this process. Assessments are carried out at times best suited to the trainees and their employers. After the assessment, trainees receive a comprehensive report from the training organiser on their competence to perform the necessary tasks. This is recorded in their portfolios and entered on the next review sheet. Results of assessments are usually conveyed to employers during the review process and not immediately after they are successfully completed. The subcontractor has a well-developed system for recording progress and a planned internal verification process which includes the observation of assessments. Achievement is not routinely monitored by DCTA. The subcontractor informs DCTA of successful outcomes.

48. Trainees have a good knowledge of the NVQ process and of the manner in which to collect evidence and record it within portfolios. They are required to complete an evidence grid which relates the work they have undertaken to appropriate NVQ units. They answer questions to show their level of theoretical knowledge before they are assessed. Some trainees record their evidence by using a tape recorder. Many trainees have been employed for some considerable time before starting training and many have relevant experience from other employment. Several trainees are in positions of responsibility and have supervisory roles within their organisations. They display good levels of occupational competence. Opportunities are missed to assess trainees when they are completing the theoretical aspects of training, especially when theory is taught as part of their normal working procedures.

49. All training is carried out entirely in the workplace by the subcontractor's training organisers and by workplace supervisors. DCTA's staff undertake occasional visits to the workplace with training organisers to observe training and assessment, but they do not monitor the quality of training. Although trainees and workplace supervisors clearly understand short-term training targets set at reviews, there is no overall planning of training discussed between all the parties at the beginning of the training process. Training meets the short-term targets set between reviews and does not fulfil a previously identified structure.

50. Subcontracting arrangements have been in existence since April 2000. Thirteen foundation modern apprentices were in training in April and a further 18 have since been recruited. Of these, 13 have since left the programme without completing their frameworks and the rest are still in training. There were 12 advanced modern apprentices in training in April and a further 12 have since joined. From this group, six trainees have left the programme without completing their frameworks and the rest are still in training. These rates of retention are similar to those found by other training providers for hospitality.

Health, care & public services

Grade 4

51. DCTA has 15 learners in this occupational area working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in care and in early years care and education. There are four early years learners, of whom two are foundation modern apprentices and two are on other work-based learning programmes for young people. On care programmes, there are five advanced modern apprentices, three foundation modern apprentices, and three on other work-based learning programmes. All learners are employed. There is one man among these learners and he is also the only learner from a minority ethnic group. Learners are usually working in care before their employers approach DCTA to provide training. Employment opportunities for care are in residential care and nursing homes and in a local mental health unit. Early years learners work in nurseries. Learners have a three-day induction with DCTA, at which health and safety and equal opportunities are covered along with an introduction to the college and NVQs. All off-the-job training, including that for key skills, takes place at the college. Assessors from the college carry out all assessment in the workplace. Of 23 learners who began in 1999-2000, four learners have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans and nine have achieved an NVQ at level 2. Of the 37 who began in 2000-01, one has achieved all the targets on the individual learning plan and one has achieved an NVQ at level 2.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ some poor understanding of NVQs by employers
- ◆ incomplete development of training materials for key skills
- ◆ unsupportive structure of off-the-job training
- ◆ delays in assessments
- ◆ poor achievement rates

52. Learners who are working towards key skills find DCTA's training material useful, although most learners interviewed have come to the course having already achieved key skills awards. Most learners are assessed regularly. Assessment often does not start immediately, but this is seen as a chance for learners to gather background knowledge and settle into the course. During this time, the training officer visits once a month and sets workplace and NVQ targets. The other weaknesses have not been resolved, although some progress has been made. The self-assessment report identified the two strengths and two of the weaknesses identified by the inspectors but failed to recognise one weakness. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good links with employers
- ◆ flexible learning opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ weak co-ordination between DCTA and college
- ◆ poor understanding of NVQs and key skills by employers

53. The training officer from DCTA visits learners in their workplaces every month to carry out a progress review. At these reviews, learners and their supervisors agree targets to be met by the next meeting and the paperwork makes it clear who is responsible for meeting the targets. Employers find this a useful opportunity to catch up with learners' progress. Reviews are more focused on NVQ achievement since an occupationally competent training officer was appointed. A new set of guidelines for providers of work placements and training reinforce the role of employers in carrying out induction for learners, planning and designing individual learning programmes, supporting and assessing learners. In addition to discussing progress and the needs of the learner, the assessors support employers.

54. The organisation of off-the-job training is designed to be flexible. Individual tutorials are available to learners who request them. All learners are aware of this and the availability of learning support. Learners make effective use of the college's learning support unit for individual support on a weekly basis. A recently appointed member of DCTA's staff is also available and has helped a learner who had been considering leaving the programme. Off-the-job training is good, and a variety of training methods are employed. The scheme of work identifies which key skills will be covered as well as the NVQ unit. Open-learning packs and college-designed packs provide learners with assignments to do in the workplace and at home. DCTA provides packs for learners to help them record their background knowledge. Most learners feel that they are making good progress. However, not all learners like being in mixed level 2 and 3 groups. Sometimes, learners are just given written questions to answer. There are several care courses offered, at different times of the year and at different venues. Learners can choose which sessions they attend. If a learner misses a session they can catch up later.

55. Achievement rates are poor. In 1999-2000, only four learners achieved all the aims on their individual learning plans and 11 achieved an NVQ at level 2. In 2000-01, one achieved the targets on their individual learning plan and one achieved an NVQ at level 2. Of the 68 learners who started since 1999, 47 left without any qualification. There have been 15 NVQs achieved in the past year. However, of the 37 learners who started in 2000-01, 31 have left without any qualifications.

56. There is insufficient co-ordination between DCTA and the college, and learners make slow progress. Reviews are not used effectively to target NVQ development, learners miss important training sessions, and there is confusion about the key skills requirements. The new training officer is attending regular meetings with the college staff and assessors where learners' progress is

discussed. Paperwork, including assessors' reports and progress review forms, is now routinely shared. The training officer has accompanied assessors on visits and is attending the evening class to gain a fuller understanding of the training being offered. A new system of monitoring learners' progress has been introduced which is shared between the college and DCTA, ensuring progress can be monitored by DCTA.

57. Some employers do not fully understand NVQs or key skills requirements. These employers cannot play a full part in their learners' training. Most learners work with, and are supervised by, senior or experienced staff in the workplace. Not all these staff are occupationally qualified. Learners often miss good chances to use their experience in the workplace towards their NVQ and assessment. Knowledge is often gained from colleagues in an unstructured way. The overall co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is weak. One way this is being dealt with is by the use of new documents which are signed by the learner, supervisor, work-placement provider and training officer. These identify workplace tasks, skills, and knowledge planned as part of the programme. There are also regular progress reviews at which the supervisor must be present. DCTA encourages employers to arrange shifts so learners may attend the college in work time but this rarely happens.

Foundation for work

Grade 5

58. Currently, there are three learners on the Life Skills programme. The Life Skills programme is part of the Learning Gateway and is designed for young people who may have difficulties finding employment or learning because they are not yet ready for work or training. These young people may have social or emotional problems. In 2001-02, 54 learners joined the programme. The local careers service refers young people. The length of the programme is 13 weeks, although some learners may leave sooner if they are ready to progress to employment, further education or training. There are several options to attend as part of the Life Skills programme, including basic skills and personal development that includes job preparation. Learners are also able attend information and communication technology (ICT) sessions. Some learners are found work placements. Learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours each week over a three-day period. Some learners may attend more days if they are in work placement.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ little differentiation in learning materials
- ◆ poor target-setting on some programmes
- ◆ unclear lines of communication between staff
- ◆ poor rates of achievement

59. The report prepared for reinspection has clearly identified some changes DCTA has made to the way the Life Skills programme is managed and operated. The report itself is not sufficiently self-critical. Some of the weaknesses that were

identified as part of the original inspection remain. There are now improvements in the lines of communication between staff but there is no formal policy for communication. There is still poor target-setting on the programme. Learning materials are now of a satisfactory standard.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good resources
- ◆ highly effective induction

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor target-setting
- ◆ inappropriate use of programme
- ◆ failure to meet individual needs of learners

60. There are good resources. DCTA is based on the main college campus and provides good surroundings for learning to take place. There is a well-equipped computer suite with good-quality computers and industry standard packages. Learners are able to use the computers outside the formal taught sessions. A member of staff is available at all times to give advice and guidance to learners. There is a good range of easy-to-understand careers guides, newspapers and textbooks and information about different types of jobs available to learners.

61. Induction is highly effective. Learners had a good recollection of the content of their induction and could talk knowledgeably about the rules and regulations of DCTA, health and safety and equal opportunities. Knowledge of health and safety is demonstrated by completing a safety questionnaire. Learners work in groups on tasks that relate to examples of discrimination in the workplace, such as bullying and harassment. These exercises are highly effective in identifying the level of learners' understanding of equal opportunities. Learners understand the content of their training programme and how they will be taught.

62. There is poor target-setting. This weakness was identified at the original inspection. Individual learning plans show the same or similar targets for each individual. Targets are not clear and are not broken down into small progressive steps. Progress towards the targets set is referred to as 'on-going' or is set for the expected end date of the programme. There are no interim targets. A progress review takes place on a weekly and a monthly basis. Progress reviews are ineffective in identifying learners' achievements. They do not set targets for achievement and do not refer to the individual learning plan. Progress reviews are unstructured and do not look back to previous reviews. Records of some weekly progress reviews are incomplete.

63. The Life Skills programme is being used inappropriately. This problem relates to the local LSC and careers service as well as DCTA. In many cases, initial assessment by the careers service has identified long-term college courses as a long-term solution to individuals' learning needs. Learners can only start these

courses in term time. Learners are referred to Life Skills by the careers service, attend until their course is available and then transfer to their originally identified course. Although a high proportion of learners are achieving the aims on their individual learning plans, this is often because their aims, such as joining a college course, had already been identified before they joined the Life Skills programme.

64. The programme does not meet the individual needs of learners. Options on the Life Skills programme are limited. Activities are classroom based and do not provide a flexible programme for learners. Some of the teaching methods are unsatisfactory. Tutors have made inappropriate comments on learners' progress reviews. Work 'tasters' for learners on some vocational programmes, such as motor vehicle and health and beauty, are available only in term time. Learners on the Life Skills programme are not given a vocational assessment and their prior learning is not taken into account. There is no external accreditation for vocational courses, such as computer literacy and information technology, Wordpower and Numberpower, although learners do receive a college certificate.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

65. DCTA has adopted the college's equal opportunities policy, paperwork and procedures for its staff, learners and subcontractors. This policy was last updated in 1997 and is currently under review. There are separate statements regarding disability and harassment. A short summary of the policy was last updated in 1995. These fulfil the LSC's contractual requirements and the minimum legal obligations. All learners receive a copy of the policy and have equal opportunities training as part of their induction. Equal opportunities are also covered in staff's induction and staff receive training for equal opportunities awareness and related issues from the local LSC if the DCTA's manager thinks it is needed. The college's equal opportunities committee, which includes a DCTA representative, is responsible for reviewing and applying the equal opportunities policy. The self-assessment report did not contain specific strengths and weaknesses relating to equal opportunities. These were included in a section on leadership and management. Two strengths were identified. Inspectors agreed with one of them. No weaknesses were identified. Inspectors gave the same grade as that given as a contributory grade in DCTA's self-assessment report.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities by some staff and trainees
- ◆ no policy for the management of subcontracted trainees' complaints

66. DCTA has made progress in remedying all these weaknesses since the original inspection. Monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace is now satisfactory. Training officers gather copies of employers' equal opportunities policies and

ensure learners read and understand them at induction. The college's policy is also shared with employers. The importance of equal opportunities is also discussed with employers at an initial meeting. This discussion is continued at progress reviews. Equal opportunities is discussed with the learner at each progress review and records are kept. Learners are questioned to make sure they have an understanding of the issues. Staff have now had some training in equal opportunities through a distance learning package and regular discussions at team meetings. An annual team day includes a report on equal opportunities. Learners now have a satisfactory understanding of their own rights and responsibilities in the workplace. They also have a clear understanding of the complaints procedure.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of training opportunities to under-represented groups
- ◆ effective use of data to target recruitment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient staff training

GOOD PRACTICE

The refectory at the college makes special arrangements for those observing the religious festival of Ramadan. The catering staff take advance food orders, which are then served after dusk, when those observing Ramadan are allowed to eat.

67. DCTA promotes training opportunities to under-represented groups in various ways. Recruitment literature has been produced in minority languages appropriate to the area. The specifications of modern apprenticeship frameworks have also been translated. DCTA's staff visit local community centres, schools and sites in areas with higher proportions of minority ethnic groups to promote opportunities for work-based learning. Advertisements are placed in local community publications and some staff have been involved with advertising campaigns on local radio and with local LSC publications to encourage greater awareness of work-based learning. This has been developed since the original inspection as two bids for additional funding have been successful and training centres have been set up in disadvantaged areas. New work includes promotion of training to the local gay community.

68. Data regarding recruitment, retention and achievement rates are collated in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. These are analysed and compared with local population statistics, so that promotional activities are directed at under-represented groups. Results are published in internal reports, and are presented at team meetings. Since the original inspection, this process has become more detailed and data are now available for each programme and area of learning. Yearly trends are also being used. Currently, 41 per cent of learners are women and 10 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. One per cent have a disability. Two per cent of the population in Dunstable are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 23 per cent in nearby Luton.

69. The college's equal opportunities policy and summary statement are currently under review by the newly re-formed equal opportunities committee. There are no details on how this policy will be put into practice or monitored. Few of the new

GOOD PRACTICE

A recent audit on the content of training programmes has identified areas where equal opportunities is promoted in training and assessment. This good practice is being shared so that other areas develop the curriculum to raise learner awareness of equal opportunities

initiatives to monitor equal opportunities, such as an audit of curriculum areas carried out by DCTA's manager, the enhanced collection of data or activities to monitor workplace practice, are documented.

70. There has been insufficient staff training. Although equal opportunities issues are now discussed at progress reviews there are inconsistencies in the way this monitoring is carried out and recorded. Specialist recruitment officers and training officers recruit the learners. They have had little training in recruitment and selection. Interviews are not always recorded. Those that are lack detail. No standard selection criteria are used as part of the selection process.

Trainee support

Grade 3

71. DCTA has a dedicated manager supported by four liaison officers, a youth training co-ordinator, two work-based assessors and administrative staff. One advanced and two foundation modern apprentices undertaking qualifications in business administration are also employed by DCTA. DCTA recruits trainees from the Employment Service, careers services, schools, and by referrals from employers, as well as through individual enquiries. The college does not make any distinction between worked-based trainees and students on either further or higher education programmes. All the college's resources and facilities are made available to them at all times. Trainees are interviewed by liaison officers before they begin training. This is part of the initial assessment process and is used to identify the potential trainees' previous experience and career aspirations to ensure the most appropriate choice of training. Trainees complete a diagnostic assessment which identifies how they are able to manage occupational training learning and their level of key skills. Those trainees who lack either the confidence or the skills to gain employment immediately are moved to the foundation for work programme to improve their literacy and numeracy, and to conduct job-search exercises and activities. Some trainees are placed with other training providers if the training they require is unavailable to them at the college. These trainees are also made aware that they can access support at the college. However, some trainees recruited by subcontractors are not made fully aware that they can use the college's facilities or of any connection with DCTA. Trainees can join training programmes at any time of the year and are placed in suitable employment. For those required to attend the college for off-the-job training, access to programmes is restricted to four occasions during the year. This delayed access to off-the-job training does not prevent them from starting their work placements or having an induction to training. The self-assessment report identified six strengths and failed to recognise any weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with two strengths and identified other strengths and two weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ additional financial support available for trainees

- ◆ good use made of links with external bodies
- ◆ effective and frequent support from liaison officers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent review process
- ◆ no routine recording and monitoring of support

72. Liaison officers arrange interviews at work placements for trainees with potential employers. When the trainee gains employment, a start date for training is arranged and their induction is begun at the same time. A revised induction programme for trainees has recently been introduced for both the workplace and the college. Induction introduces trainees to NVQs and work in a comprehensive manner. They have an induction record to which they add details as their understanding of their work increases. Recording this information also provides evidence towards key skills. Trainees' first reviews are held within the first nine weeks of training and are used to verify the trainees' understanding of the induction process. The induction process has not been established long enough to assess its effectiveness over time.

73. All trainees are issued with a summary of the college's charter, which describes the college's obligations to them and lists literature relevant to part-time students at the college. Trainees are considered to be part-time students. The charter gives names of the support services available to them during training. If trainees are aware of any additional learning support they will need, they are requested to add this to the enrolment form they complete. Alternatively, tutors can refer trainees to support services if they identify additional learning needs. The tutor providing learning support works with trainees on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. These support sessions are arranged at times to suit the trainee. During 1999-2000, 289 students and trainees received additional learning support. Currently, three trainees are doing so.

74. Support provided by the college is good and well organised. A wide variety of support mechanisms and materials are available to trainees in addition to those related to learning. These include tape recorders, cameras and, in the case of one trainee with a hearing impairment, a signer. The college can also obtain support from external organisations with which they have good and well-established links. These include bodies which support those with visual impairments or those with dyslexia, and the Employment Service and careers services. An access fund is also available for those assessed as being in need of financial help. A member of staff from DCTA is based in the local careers service's office for one morning every two weeks. The careers service arranges appointments for this member of staff to see prospective trainees and offer guidance on training opportunities. If DCTA is unable to provide an appropriate training programme, it investigates other training options for the applicant and passes the information on through the careers service. Learning support assistants are also present during teaching sessions to provide support to trainees. The level of support provided by subcontractors is not currently monitored by DCTA to ensure that this is comparable to support provided by

DCTA.

75. There is effective and frequent support for employers and trainees from DCTA's liaison officers. They have reviews in the workplace with trainees at regular intervals and maintain effective communication with employers. This contact is arranged at times to suit both trainees and employers. Liaison officers have good knowledge and understanding of work-based training programmes and make use of links with other organisations. This enables them to provide good advice to trainees on matters other than those related to training.

76. Reviews by both liaison officers and assessors from DCTA and are more frequent than the contractual requirement. However, the quality and effectiveness of the reviews varies across the occupational areas. In care, effective reviews set some good short-term achievable targets, but this is not the same in early years care. In foundation for work, reviews are poor with no recording of short-term targets, and trainees on the eight-week programme for adults of basic employment receive only one review at the end of their training. Reviews for construction trainees are effective. As DCTA does not monitor the support provided by its subcontractors, it does not ensure that trainees with subcontractors have effective progress reviews.

77. Trainees receive a high level of support from liaison officers, tutors and workplace supervisors, but there is no formal and systematic recording of it. As this support is not recorded, there is no information for staff to refer to when a trainee requires it. The only records of support are those kept by Dunstable College's student support services department.

Management of training

Grade 3

78. DCTA was formed in 1990 to offer government-funded training. DCTA is an integral part of Dunstable College. Following the original inspection, an action plan was drawn up. This action plan has been evaluated and positive improvements identified. A development plan and another self-assessment report have succeeded this. There are nine full-time and some part-time staff at DCTA. Staff are managed by one of the college's assistant principals responsible for development. There are appropriate procedures for the recruitment and appointment of staff. Newly appointed staff are able to shadow colleagues before taking up the full job role. Staff responsibilities include recruitment, contact with employers, learners' induction, assessment and review, and contract administration. DCTA subcontracts with two other colleges and several of its own college curriculum departments.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor management of subcontractors
- ◆ insufficient use of data to make management decisions
- ◆ weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

- ◆ poor tracking of trainees' progress

79. DCTA has significantly reduced its subcontracted provision. DCTA recognised that the range of provision was unmanageable. It has greatly reduced the number of programme areas and number of registered learners. DCTA operates in six main programme areas. The two subcontractors are more tightly managed and both have produced self-assessment reports. Service level agreements and contracts are now in place and are monitored at regular meetings. There are still some problems concerning the management of these subcontractors but they are not as significant as at the original inspection. A greater range of data is now collected as a result of improvements to the management information system and use of an automated monitoring system. These systems are quite new. The data they produce are not used effectively to help managers make decisions or to help training officers identify significant trends. More detailed reports are available but they are rarely used. Training officers are responsible for monitoring learners' progress for their own area of the curriculum. Some training officers are able to make more frequent visits and give more individual attention to learners. Recent improvements made to the monitoring paperwork have also helped. Co-ordination of on-and-off the job training remains a weakness.

80. DCTA has changed its management structure considerably since the original inspection. The impact of these changes on the whole organisation is not yet obvious or substantially recorded. The original policies and procedures have been rewritten or adapted to cover the gaps highlighted in the original report. Many of these new procedures are not yet fully in use. The specific detail contained in the post-inspection action plan provided a good basis for making effective progress. The most recent self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of DCTA's current situation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed restructuring
- ◆ effective staff appraisal and professional development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient formal internal communications

81. Following the original inspection, DCTA was comprehensively restructured. This was achieved through careful planning and discussions with all interested parties. Staff respect the manner in which serious issues have been managed and appreciate the consultation process. Staff from the curriculum areas were encouraged to take an active role in the transition and felt that they played a full part in it. Responsibilities were reallocated according to occupational and vocational expertise. The changes were carried out with the learners' needs as the core criteria. The clarification of staff roles, creation of new job descriptions and development of more standardised procedures have contributed to positive staff

attitudes and team cohesion.

82. Staff appraisal is well established and understood. Line managers appraise all staff once a year and agree professional and personal targets with them. A review of these targets is carried out after six months and, if required, the targets are revised to reflect changed circumstances. The process of appraisal is part of the overall plan for staff development. Records confirm that staff attend a range of development activities appropriate to work-based learning. Since the original inspection, two staff have gained training and development qualifications at level 4, three staff are working towards internal verifiers' qualifications and one towards assessors' qualifications. One individual is studying for a certificate in management and another is training to teach key skills. All staff attend health and safety courses and updates to teacher training qualifications.

83. On- and off-the-job training is not effectively co-ordinated. There are few structured or planned training sessions in the workplace. Training in the workplace is left to the employers. In-house training is rarely used to provide evidence for the NVQs. Most learning and assessment still takes place off the job. Background knowledge sessions are not directly linked to the workplace activities. Employers are completely unaware of the content and schedule of off-the-job training. They are not updated regularly about learners' progress, achievements and concerns. Four learners had completed a year's training before the employer became aware that several important units had not been achieved. The role of the training officer in co-ordinating on- and off-the-job training is relatively new and is not yet sufficiently defined.

84. There is an over reliance on informal communication. Issues that arise are discussed but rarely sufficiently recorded. DCTA is not recording instances of good practice or preferred responses to recurring problems. Employers and curriculum staff have many useful discussions about appropriate training, learners' progress and future developments. However, these discussions are rarely recorded, so follow-up action is unlikely. Learners do not know what has been agreed between individuals. Standard agenda items have been introduced to regular meetings but the issues raised are not directly focused on learners' concerns. Action points raised are not always dealt with fully and may have to be raised again.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

85. DCTA use the quality assurance systems, procedures and policies of the college, with additional procedures for work-based learning. The additional procedures include those for the completion of files and paperwork, initial visits to employers, induction, initial assessment, progress reviews, complaints, and assessors' responsibilities. These are recorded in the procedures file and on the college's intranet. They show when each procedure was issued and revised, and its current issue number. The assistant principal responsible for DCTA has overall responsibility for quality assurance of work-based learning programmes. DCTA has an internal audit system that monitors whether staff are following the local

LSC's policies and procedures. When staff are not conforming to procedures, an action plan is prepared. The college also has a cross-college group relating to self-assessment, internal verification and quality control. DCTA is represented on this group. Self-assessment and updates to the quality assurance manual are featured in the college's monthly newsletter, which is circulated to all staff. There is a lesson observation system for all staff, which ensures that all staff are observed on an annual basis. New employer and learner feedback questionnaires are distributed periodically. DCTA is currently on its fourth cycle of self-assessment.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficient target-setting
- ◆ little quality assurance in the work place
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ unsystematic internal verification
- ◆ poor analysis and evaluation of questionnaires
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment

86. Poor target-setting, little quality assurance in the workplace and inadequate internal verification remain as weaknesses. The significant reduction in subcontracted training has overcome the problem of monitoring the subcontractors. The two subcontractors are local colleges who provide training. The managers have introduced some new measures to ensure consistent training. Training questionnaires for learners are now evaluated in a more useful way. Results are measurable and identify areas of concern. However, only one of the four individual questionnaires has been circulated to a small group of learners. Some analysis of this information has taken place, but it is still quite descriptive in content. The self-assessment report produced for the reinspection is more realistic about the strengths and weaknesses of DCTA. A report on the success of the post-inspection action plan has helped the self-assessment process.

87. Progress in this area was delayed while DCTA was being restructured. Until the assistant principal took up responsibility for DCTA in April 2001, no significant problems had been tackled. Very few staff understand the quality assurance procedures in depth. Several new staff have not yet been trained or had enough experience in quality auditing to ensure consistency in training. DCTA relies too heavily on staff outside the agency to carry out quality assurance procedures.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ inclusive self-assessment process
- ◆ effective use of research to improve quality of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsystematic verification

- ◆ weak target-setting
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of quality in the workplace
- ◆ little use of quality assurance procedures

88. The manager of DCTA prepared the previous self-assessment report with no involvement from the rest of the staff. The most recent self-assessment process has been open, honest and critical. Considerable effort has been made to include employers, college curriculum staff, departmental staff and senior managers. Reports and course reviews were used to prepare the final version. The procedure is comprehensive. Staff appreciated being given the chance to make contributions and amendments to the self-assessment report. Learners are aware of the self-assessment process.

89. DCTA has made good efforts to ensure that the improvements it is making are effective. DCTA has worked closely with external organisations to prepare fully for its actions. Exploration of the Internet, other local providers and colleges has been used to establish good practice. In order to raise awareness, some external organisations have been invited to complete presentations on quality issues. DCTA has carried out regular internal audits to establish what progress it has made.

90. The college has its own internal verification policy, and a group that monitors standardisation across the college. However, inconsistencies exist within the programme areas. In some areas there has been very little verification, in other areas it is completed by unqualified verifiers and in other areas it is quite well planned. Some staff do not fully understand the purpose of verification. Verification reports concerning observation of assessors can be descriptions of learners' work or reflect on observation of questioning a learner. Observation of assessors in the workplace in most areas is infrequent and sometimes unplanned. Efforts have been made to prevent verification occurring at the end of the programme, but this still happens. There are no verification reports in learners' portfolios. Learners are aware of an internal verifier's role but are not informed about the judgements made. Commitment to verify at an early stage, and sampling plans, have been requested by DCTA but this does not always happen. In many of the areas, internal verification has not identified significant assessment issues. Some external verifiers have highlighted concerns yet to be dealt with.

91. There is improvement in the collation and accuracy of data since the original inspection. This is very recent. The data are not used sufficiently to set and establish realistic or challenging targets for DCTA's staff. The low recruitment figures are not a daily issue for the training officers. In care, there are 45 per cent fewer starters this year, in administration 52 per cent, and in construction 17 per cent. Training officers are generally aware of the issue but are not able to quantify it or take effective action. Some staff are more aware of achievement and retention rates. Achievement rates are low in most occupational areas. Enough data exist on retention rates and early leavers to warrant more critical examination. This has started to be done by some staff.

92. There is no planning of quality assurance in the workplace. On-the-job training is not observed by DCTA's staff. In construction, some learners receive little training in the workplace and this cannot be resolved as no records are kept by DCTA. Many employers provide substantial in-house training and individual coaching for learners, but this is not monitored. Records of in-house training lack detail. Some employers monitor achievements by learners in the different departments. This information is not put to good use.

93. There are specific quality assurance procedures for DCTA, which fill relevant gaps in the main college quality manual. The procedures are quite new and not fully in use yet. The procedures do not always make it clear how actions should be carried out or how an individual's performance should be monitored. Recruitment of learners is not well managed. A member of staff, who is not always occupationally or vocationally competent, conducts initial interviews for prospective learners. This member of staff then matches the learner to any existing job vacancy. There are no set criteria for this procedure and often interview forms are completed incorrectly. There are no established or set questions to ask at the interview and fair selection cannot be measured. Nearly all learners are started on NVQs at level 2, irrespective of their prior experience or qualifications. The decision-making process is too reliant on subjective judgements. Any response to a subsequent appeal by a learner could not be substantiated. Many learners are on the wrong programme or at the incorrect level. Learners have been moved to other programmes when problems have arisen.