

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
NOVEMBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
MARCH 2002

Midland Group
Training Services
Limited



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
- ◆ learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- ◆ education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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 Midland Group Training Services Limited was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in a less than satisfactory grade being awarded for quality assurance. This area has been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The section of the original report dealing with quality assurance has been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

Midland Group Training Services Limited provides satisfactory training in engineering. Learners benefit from a good range of training resources. Advanced modern apprentices value their on- and off-the-job training and retention rates are high. Some learners, however, make slow progress. Modern apprentices do not receive any assessment of their key skills until near the end of their training programme. Recruitment data relating to equal opportunities are collected and analysed effectively. There is, however, insufficient monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace. Learners are provided with satisfactory support, including guidance on employment and progression. Learners' additional learning needs, however, are not clearly identified through initial assessment. The training centre is well managed, but insufficient use is made of data on learners' progress in the workplace. The quality assurance arrangements have been greatly improved, including the introduction of an excellent system of evaluation by means of observation.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good engineering foundation training
- ◆ good links with external groups to promote work-based learning opportunities
- ◆ good employment and progression opportunities for learners

- ◆ well-managed off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent evaluations by observation
- ◆ good development for work-based assessors and witnesses

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progression by some learners in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient action to strengthen learners' understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ no standardised process for learners' progress reviews

INTRODUCTION

1. Midland Group Training Services Limited (MGTS) is a registered charity, based in Coventry. MGTS is an engineering group training association with a membership of about 160 companies. The board of directors has 12 members, comprising senior executives from member companies and the chief executive of MGTS. MGTS's premises, close to the centre of Coventry, consist of a two-storey building with a floor area of 3,700 square metres. The technical training centre has 3,000 square metres of floor space for engineering workshops, computing resources, lecture rooms and staff offices.

2. At the time of the original inspection, there were 42 training and support staff, comprising a general manager, three training managers, an office manager, 10 technical instructors, 16 training and development advisers, seven administrative staff, and four caterers and cleaners. At the time of the reinspection, the management structure has been reorganised. There are now 40 members of staff. There is a new chief executive, and a member of staff has been given specific responsibility for the quality assurance of government-funded training programmes.

3. At the time of the original inspection, MGTS had a contract with Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) to provide work-based learning for young people. There were 264 learners on this contract, comprising 53 engineering learners, nine business administration learners and two learners working towards management and professional qualifications. MGTS also had a contract with Herefordshire and Worcestershire CCTE to provide work-based engineering training for 16 learners. There were few learners in the occupational areas of business administration and management and professional, and these areas were not inspected. At the time of the reinspection, MGTS contracts with Coventry and Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Herefordshire and Worcestershire LSC. There are 230 learners in engineering and five learners in business administration.

4. In addition to work-based learning for young people, MGTS provides a wide range of commercial courses for adult employees of local engineering companies. The courses cover management and supervisory skills, health and safety, quality assurance management, technical skills updating and multiskilling.

5. The main geographical area of operation for MGTS is the West Midlands. The unemployment rate in Coventry, at 3.8 per cent in November 2000, was higher than the national average of 3.3 per cent, but close to the average of 3.9 per cent for the West Midlands. By October 2001, the unemployment rate in Coventry had dropped slightly to 3.3 per cent, compared with a rate of 4.6 per cent in the West Midlands and 2.9 per cent in England as a whole. At the time of the 1991 census, the proportions of people from minority ethnic groups in Coventry and the West

Midlands were 11.9 per cent and 14.6 per cent, respectively. The rate for England as a whole was 6.2 per cent.

6. In 2000, in Coventry and the West Midlands, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 40.8 per cent and 44.5 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 2001, the proportions of school leavers in Coventry and the West Midlands achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or above were 42.6 per cent and 45.8 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Number of learners at the time of the original inspection

Number of learners by occupational area	Coventry and Warwickshire CCTE			Herefordshire & Worcestershire CCTE		
	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training
Engineering	201	18	18	16		
Management & professional	2					
Business administration	4	4	1			
Total	207	22	19	16	0	0

Number of learners at the time of the reinspection

Number of learners by occupational area	Coventry and Warwickshire LSC			Herefordshire & Worcestershire LSC		
	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training
Engineering	174	27	8	21		
Business administration		4	1			
Total	174	31	9	21	0	0

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. In October 1999, MGTS established a working party to produce its first self-assessment report, following guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. The working party comprised the manager responsible for training young people and three training and development advisers. The findings in the draft report were discussed at a general staff meeting in December 1999. Further modifications to the report and action plan were made, following a consultation meeting with staff at Coventry and Warwickshire CCE during January 2000. The findings of the report were updated in August 2000. The revised findings were not discussed with learners, employers or workplace supervisors. The report contained an introduction to the training offered by MGTS. It set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the staff involved in the training of young people. The self-assessment report originally identified 19 strengths in the occupational area. Many of these statements were descriptive rather than evaluative. Following the inspection-planning meeting, the number of strengths was reduced to seven. Some of the statements of strengths in the generic areas were unclear.

8. Following the original inspection, self-assessment has become a continuous process. It is firmly based on evidence gained from feedback, observations and data. Learners, employers and staff all contribute to the self-assessment process. A self-assessment report was produced in November 2001, to meet LSC requirements.

9. During the original inspection, four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with MGTS in November 2000. Inspectors interviewed 47 learners, including three business administration learners, and made visits to 16 engineering work placements. They met 25 workplace managers, supervisors and mentors. They interviewed five staff at subcontracted colleges and carried out 17 interviews with MGTS's staff. They looked at 51 learners' files, 31 portfolios of evidence, contracts, external verifiers' reports, policies on health and safety and equal opportunities, minutes of meetings, promotional material, initial assessment materials, induction packs, management procedures and quality assurance evidence. Inspectors observed three reviews of learners' progress in the workplace. They observed and graded six off-the-job training sessions and observed two assessments of learners' performance in the workplace.

10. During the reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of six days with MGTS in March 2002. Inspectors interviewed 16 engineering learners. Inspectors conducted 18 interviews with managers and staff, and visited six employers, including three work-based assessors, and two subcontracted colleges. Inspectors examined the quality assurance policy, procedures, external verifiers' reports, assessment and verification records, data, minutes of meetings, development plans and evaluation records.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering	1	6	1			8
Total	1	6	1	0	0	8

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

11. MGTS has 253 engineering trainees, of whom 217 are advanced modern apprentices. Of the remainder, 18 are foundation modern apprentices and 18 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. All trainees are employed and work in a variety of engineering, manufacturing and food-processing companies throughout the West Midlands. Some of these companies operate in areas of advanced technology, including aerospace and automobiles. Over 70 of the member engineering companies are currently involved in work-based training for young people. Trainees work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at foundation level 2 during their first year either in MGTS's training centre, or in one of two training centres at subcontracted colleges. There are seven first-year trainees on subcontracted foundation programmes and 42 trainees at MGTS's training centre. Ten appropriately qualified instructors carry out practical training and NVQ assessment in MGTS's training centre. Advanced modern apprentices complete the mandatory units for the NVQ at level 2 together with some optional units. Advanced modern apprentices who are due to work towards an NVQ in technical services at level 3, undertake a work-based 'design and make' project after completing the foundation programme. Foundation modern apprentices complete the mandatory units for the NVQ at level 2 and then begin working towards a vocationally specific NVQ at level 2 in the workplace. Second-year advanced modern apprentices start working towards an NVQ at level 3 in the workplace. Twelve qualified assessors and five internal verifiers employed by MGTS carry out assessment and verification during the workplace training stage of the programmes. Some engineering employers have workplace supervisors who hold assessor qualifications. Trainees attend college courses on day release and these lead to vocational educational qualifications such as national or higher national certificates or other non-NVQ courses in engineering. The self-assessment report identified seven strengths. Inspectors considered four of the strengths to be no more than normal practice and two to be more relevant to generic areas. Inspectors agreed with one strength and identified two additional strengths. Nine weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with several of the weaknesses but considered that others were not significant or were more appropriate to generic areas. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good engineering foundation training
- ◆ good on-the-job training
- ◆ high retention rate on advanced modern apprenticeship programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ delayed and weak assessment of key skills for some trainees
- ◆ slow progression by some trainees in the workplace
- ◆ low awareness of appeals process among trainees

12. MGTS provides good training on the level 2 engineering foundation programme. MGTS's training centre is spacious and well maintained and has a wide range of equipment and machine tools. The welding facility is particularly well equipped. The electrical training facility has recently been refurbished. The training centre is sufficiently well equipped to enable a wide range of technically advanced courses to be run there for adult employees of local engineering companies. Trainees at the centre who have completed their engineering foundation units have been encouraged to carry out assignments which lead to the upgrading of facilities. These include sheet metal work for ducting in the welding facility, manufacture of workbenches and wiring in the electrical centre. The training centre has a good range of classrooms and computer training suites, including computer-aided-design facilities. The subcontracted colleges also have good resources for engineering foundation training.

13. During level 2 foundation training sessions, instructors use good learning materials. Trainees are supplied with good handouts and reference documents. Instructors place a high emphasis on the importance of observing health and safety regulations during practical sessions. Trainees are enabled to learn and develop skills at their own pace and receive individual attention when required. Assessors carry out assessment by direct observation of the trainees' performance. They question the trainees skilfully to make sure they understand what they are doing in their tasks. On the foundation programme, the proportion of trainees gaining an NVQ at level 2 has averaged 86 per cent over the past three years.

14. MGTS attempts to replicate workplace conditions in the technical training centre. Trainees have to clock in and out and they work a long day. Many employers visit the training centre regularly to find out how the trainees are progressing. Trainees are allocated a training development advisor at the start of their programme, who remains with them throughout their training in the workplace. Advisors develop an effective working relationship with trainees at an early stage and they keep employers informed of trainees' progress in the training centre.

15. Employers provide good training in the workplace. Many employers have a long standing relationship with MGTS and several employers serve as directors of MGTS. Employers come from a wide spectrum of industry including automotive

components, electronics, aerospace, food manufacture and transportation. A number of employers are operating in areas of advanced technology and offer trainees excellent opportunities to acquire skills in this area. Trainees follow a training plan, which is updated annually. This aims to ensure that trainees develop all the necessary competencies to enable them to acquire their NVQ. Some trainees were working on projects for the development of automotive components. Other trainees were refurbishing automated packaging equipment. Employers are keen to ensure trainees receive the training they need. They move trainees between departments and from one shift to another to give them a breadth of experience. Some engineering employers have workplace supervisors who hold assessors' qualifications and other supervisors are working towards achieving assessors' awards. These supervisors have a good knowledge of NVQ requirements and are able to help MGTS's staff carry out assessments in the workplace.

16. The retention rates for advanced modern apprentices are good. Between 1996 and 1999, 229 trainees have started an advanced modern apprenticeship with MGTS. At the time of the inspection, 10 trainees had left after fulfilling all the objectives in their training plan, 160 trainees were still in training, and the overall retention rate was 74 per cent.

17. Some trainees are in their third, fourth and fifth year of training but have received little assessment of their key skills. Early in 2000, MGTS launched a series of two-week key skills training and assessment sessions in the technical training centre. Trainees are not shown how to gather evidence of their acquisition of key skills through the performance of everyday tasks in the workplace. In some instances, they carry out key skills exercises in a simulated, rather than real, work context. Since 1999, first-year apprentices have been receiving training and assessment in three key skills. These trainees receive further training in these skills when they progress to the workplace.

18. In 1998, 33 trainees started a foundation modern apprenticeship programme with MGTS. Twenty-seven of these trainees have obtained an NVQ at level 2 but only 11 have achieved the requisite key skills certification. Of the 40 trainees who started on programmes of other training for young people in 1997 and 1998, only 15 have achieved all the targets in their individual training plan. Thirteen trainees remain in training, and the other 12 trainees left training before completion of the qualification.

19. Some advanced modern apprentices have experienced delays in being registered for their NVQ at level 3 after completing their NVQ at level 2. In a few cases the delay has been up to two years. Trainees have gathered evidence for their portfolios. Their portfolios have not been assessed, however, and they have made slow progress towards achieving their qualification. Some trainees have been advised to gather evidence over several years but they are not assessed until a late stage in their programme. Only 19 of the 68 trainees who started training over four years ago have completed work for an NVQ at level 3. Some portfolios contain a disproportionate amount of witness testimony and in many cases the statements do

POOR PRACTICE

Witness testimony to trainees' achievement of NVQ competencies forms a significant part of evidence in trainees' portfolios. In many instances, there is no record of acceptable witnesses and no record of the witness's qualifications, experience and status in the workplace.

not comment on the quality of the work done by the trainee. Most portfolios of trainees working towards an NVQ at level 3 are well structured with evidence clearly referenced to the NVQ performance criteria.

20. Although trainees are provided with guidance notes which cover the procedure for making appeals against their NVQ assessment, many have insufficient understanding of how the procedure operates. Trainees are required to make any appeal to the internal verifier but most did not know who this was. When they carry out reviews of trainees' progress, training staff do not check that the trainees understand the appeals procedure.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

21. MGTS has an equal opportunities policy which meets the requirements of the CCTEs and the awarding bodies. The general manager has overall responsibility for the promotion of equal opportunities. The policy was last reviewed and updated in August 2000 as part of the annual review of all policies and procedures. Since January 2000, equal opportunities has been a standing agenda item for the six-weekly 'focus group' meetings of staff involved in the training of young people. There are six trainees from minority ethnic communities, representing 2.3 per cent of all trainees. Thirteen trainees are women and five of these are engineering trainees. The self-assessment report identified three strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors considered one strength to be no more than normal practice, agreed with the other two and found an additional strength. Inspectors agreed with one of the weaknesses and found two more. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good links with community groups to widen participation on programmes
- ◆ systematic analysis of recruitment and selection data
- ◆ good training for staff on equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of workplace promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ failure to raise trainees' awareness of the importance of equal opportunities
- ◆ few women and members of minority ethnic groups taking engineering

22. During late 1999, concern over the low number of trainees from minority ethnic groups led to the development of an overall strategy to widen participation in work-based training programmes. The general manager established links with leaders of two community centres used mainly by people from minority ethnic groups. On two evenings in March 2000, the general manager gave presentations

on work-based learning to members of these community centres. MGTS has been invited to maintain these links by making further presentations to potential trainees and their parents. At such events, MGTS's staff use promotional materials, provided by the engineering awarding body, which are written in four Asian languages.

23. MGTS has effective links with local secondary schools and helps a group of pupils on a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) engineering course. The six pupils, including one girl and two from minority ethnic groups, undertake 10 days of practical work in MGTS's training centre. MGTS provides engineering taster days for school pupils. The most recent event, in June 2000, was attended by seven pupils from a local school from which 10 per cent of trainees come. All but two were girls or from minority ethnic groups. MGTS's staff have good relationships with the careers staff in local schools. Four of the current women trainees have participated, as role models, in local careers events.

24. During 2000, a monthly analysis of data on applicants for training has been made and reported to the 'focus group' meetings. The data relate to the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of applicants interviewed and of applicants accepted. The analysis is now being extended to cover trainees' performance. Findings from the analysis have been taken into account in action plans for improving the promotion of equal opportunities. Over the four months up to September 2000, approximately 11 per cent of applicants were from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of applicants from minority ethnic groups who completed interviews and initial tests successfully was only 3 per cent.

25. In 1999, a training manager provided staff with training on equal opportunities. This staff member has relevant qualifications and experience and acts as a valuable point of reference for all staff on equal opportunities issues. The training involved most of the staff who carry out training. The training was comprehensive and covered current legislation, direct and indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment. In October 2000, the staff training was consolidated during further sessions using a video presenting a series of case studies on equal opportunities issues.

26. All the learning resources, toilet and catering facilities at MGTS's training centre are accessible to people using wheelchairs. At the present time, there are no youth trainees with mobility problems. There are nine trainees who periodically suffer from breathing difficulties and two trainees who are dyslexic. Dyslexic trainees receive one-to-one guidance and are allowed additional time to carry out their work.

27. On recruitment of a trainee, the employers are asked to comply with a service level agreement which requires them to have a written equal opportunities statement. MGTS holds copies of the equal opportunities statements of several engineering employers. Prospective employers who do not have an equal opportunities statement are given guidance on how to produce one by MGTS.

There are, however, no systematic arrangements for monitoring the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace. The form used for recording reviews of trainees' progress has no section relating to equal opportunities. The questionnaire trainees answer about their experience in the workplace does not refer to equal opportunities. In their discussions with supervisors when visiting employers' premises, training and development advisors seldom monitor the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace.

28. Most trainees could not recall the guidance they had been given by MGTS's staff on equal opportunities issues. Trainees are also given guidance by employers and several were aware of their rights and responsibilities and of how the complaints and grievance procedures operated. Apart from the equal opportunities statement there are no displays on notice boards in MGTS's training centre which are aimed at raising the awareness and understanding of trainees.

29. Currently, 2.3 per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups. According to the 1991 census, 11.9 per cent of the population of Coventry was from minority ethnic groups. As a target for 2001, MGTS aims to recruit 5 per cent of its trainees from minority ethnic groups. The five women trainees in engineering are advanced modern apprentices, and account for 2.3 per cent of all trainees. The national average for the intake of women onto engineering advanced modern apprenticeships is 3 per cent. There were no women among the trainees who started MGTS's engineering training programmes in 2000.

Trainee support

Grade 3

30. Those who are interested in a career in engineering are encouraged to apply directly to MGTS. Applicants are directed to MGTS by the local careers service. They receive advice at careers fairs or apply to local companies which then refer them to MGTS. All applicants are given mechanical aptitude, numeracy and verbal reasoning tests. These tests are mainly taken at MGTS's training centre. If trainees live at a distance from MGTS's training centre, they take the tests at a nearer location, such as a local college or at an employer's premises. Successful applicants have a short interview with a member of MGTS's staff a few weeks after the appraisal tests. This interview focuses on personal details and career preferences. Details regarding the individual applicant are then circulated to relevant local employers which have expressed an interest in employing a trainee. They can then interview the applicant. Once a company selects a trainee, training is undertaken at the technical training centre at MGTS. A few companies prefer trainees to spend between two and five weeks with the company before joining MGTS. The first week of training at MGTS is devoted to an induction programme. The induction covers the procedures for evacuating the training centre and gathering points in the event of fire, training centre rules and regulations, equal opportunities and general health and safety matters. Trainees learn about equal opportunities through the use of case studies and a video. Trainees are issued with protective clothing and undergo a half-day health and safety exercise. They gather

evidence through this exercise for their level 2 NVQ portfolios. During the induction period, a training and development advisor is allocated to each trainee. The advisor carries out the trainees progress reviews. On completion of the programme most trainees remain in employment with their sponsoring company. Inspectors considered some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with one of the weaknesses but found others more relevant to other areas. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good employment and progression opportunities for trainees
- ◆ well-structured annual training plans
- ◆ wide range of support services for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of initial assessment to identify trainees' additional support needs
- ◆ lack of a standard procedure for trainees' progress reviews

31. MGTS takes the initial responsibility for the recruitment process. The process works well and trainees are found appropriate employment. All current trainees are employed. Over the past three years, there have been occasions where trainees have been made redundant. MGTS's staff have extensive knowledge of the local employment market in engineering and were able to arrange for nine redundant trainees from five companies to transfer to other companies so that their training could continue. Trainees are encouraged to work towards additional qualifications. Some trainees undertake advanced level craft courses, others work towards higher national qualifications and a few progress to engineering degree courses. Other qualifications towards which trainees can work include those in supervisory management, use of abrasive wheels and electrical wiring regulations. Several trainees who were recruited as foundation modern apprentices have progressed onto advanced modern apprenticeships.

32. There are well-structured and detailed plans for off-the-job training at MGTS's training centre. Trainees carry out set exercises. The structured plans help the training and development advisors to monitor the progress of trainees on the level 2 programme in the centre. Reports on trainees' progress are sent to employers every 12 weeks. In the workplace there is an effective working relationship between the training and development advisors and workplace supervisors. The advisors usually draw up a plan setting out the objectives the trainee has to fulfil in order to achieve the NVQ. This plan is given to the supervisor or employer and in most cases workplace training plans are then drawn up for the trainee. The plans identify work-based tasks and sections within the company where the trainee will be able to carry these out. The plans are designed to help the trainee to develop the requisite NVQ competencies and to further the trainee's career development within the company. The training and development advisors usually visit the trainees in the workplace every month to monitor their

progress in implementing their training plans. Some trainees are temporarily returned to the training centre to receive specific training which their company cannot provide but which they need in order to achieve their NVQ.

33. There are two qualified counsellors on the training staff at MGTS. Both have extensive experience. One of the counsellors works mainly in the training centre and helps to identify problems trainees may have at an early stage of their programme. These are brought to the attention of the relevant instructor. Both counsellors also help other staff to deal with trainees' problems. These problems can relate, for example, to bullying, domestic upheavals involving broken homes, and unplanned pregnancies. Effective links have been established with external organisations such as the probation service, social services and marriage and bereavement counselling agencies.

34. The training centre holds an annual open day to which representatives of local industry and commerce are invited. The occasion is used to celebrate trainees' success and certificates are presented to successful trainees. In addition, parents and guardians of prospective and first-year trainees review the work undertaken by trainees during level 2 NVQ training and all have the opportunity to see the facilities at the training centre.

35. Prospective trainees are given initial tests but these are used as part of a selection process rather than as a means of identifying trainees' additional learning needs. In some instances, trainees with dyslexia have been recruited. These trainees are allowed additional time for written tests and have special access to computers in the training centre. The trainees are not referred to specialist support staff.

36. In March 2000, an initial assessment of key skills was piloted with a group of first-year trainees. The test is computerised and was developed by the CCTE. New trainees' results in the test are recorded. All trainees undergo the same training course in key skills irrespective of the results of the initial tests. Those who have acquired a high level of key skills quickly advance through the course. Other trainees make slow progress. These trainees receive individual attention to enable them to complete the exercises successfully. All entrants to apprenticeship programmes are now assessed in key skills during the first month of their programme.

37. Training and development advisors do not follow a standard procedure when carrying out reviews of trainees' progress. Progress reviews are carried out every three months. In some instances the trainee's supervisor is present during the review and can talk with the advisor and the trainee. Some advisors, however, prefer to talk to the supervisor without the trainee being present. Advisors' records of progress reviews vary in detail. Some specify the targets trainees must achieve. Other advisors merely record what work the trainee has undertaken since the previous progress review and do not include detailed action plans. The documents for recording the progress reviews have boxes for grades denoting the

quality of trainees' work. On some records, no grade is given in the box relating to key skills or the inappropriate comment of 'not applicable' is entered.

38. Some advisors provide trainees with more effective support than others. In a few instances, trainees felt they had received little response from their advisors when they had expressed anxiety about their slow rate of progress towards achieving their NVQ, or had made complaints about their college courses. The trainees had subsequently approached another member of staff at MGTS who dealt with the concerns to the trainees' satisfaction. Several trainees and workplace supervisors stated that the guidance and support provided by different training and development advisors varied from poor to outstanding.

Management of training

Grade 3

39. MGTS's board of directors meets four times each year and sets strategic objectives for the senior management team to implement. The senior management team, comprising the general manager and the three training managers, meets every month. One training manager has responsibility for the technical training centre and the team of 11 instructors. Another training manager has responsibility for the team of 10 engineering training and development advisors. The third training manager has responsibility for the team of six training and development advisors in non-engineering occupational areas. There are six focus groups which meet with a specific agenda. One of the focus groups is concerned with the engineering training of young people in the workplace. Another focus group is concerned with work in the technical training centre. There is a separate focus group for the training of young people working towards non-engineering qualifications. Staff are allocated to specific groups. The focus groups meet every six weeks. General staff meetings are held every quarter. MGTS has been accredited as an Investor in People since 1996. The self-assessment report identified four strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and one weakness. They considered the other strengths and weaknesses to be more relevant to quality assurance. Inspectors found an additional weakness and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective strategic management
- ◆ well-managed off-the-job training
- ◆ effective staff training programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of data on trainees' progress by managers
- ◆ insufficient understanding of apprenticeship frameworks by some supervisors

40. MGTS provides an extensive range of commercial training for companies in

the area. MGTS has developed good resources for trainees on government-funded programmes. For example, the training facilities for welding and electrical plant maintenance are particularly good.

41. MGTS has a clear management structure and this covers both the commercial and the non-commercial activities of the organisation. The roles of staff responsible for government-funded training programmes are clearly defined within this structure. The organisation has several focus groups and one of these covers youth training in engineering. This group is chaired by the general manager and consists of the training and development advisors and the training manager. It undertakes a range of activities relating to business-planning and regularly reviews all aspects of the management of training. This focus group meets every six weeks and clear minutes are taken. The views of the engineering employers on the management board are presented to the focus group by the general manager of MGTS.

42. The first year of the off-the-job training programme in MGTS's training centre is well planned. The workshop manager, in partnership with other training centre staff, devises the detailed plan. The plan is clearly displayed within the training workshops. The plan divides trainees into groups and shows the training location of each group throughout the level 2 NVQ programme. Each section instructor has clearly identified plans of the activities to be undertaken by trainees during the various stages of training. This is complemented by a detailed assessment schedule. The plan aims to ensure that training is structured and that trainees are able to identify clear evidence of their acquisition of the requisite NVQ competencies. There is good communication between the staff involved with the foundation level 2 programme. For example, in recognition of the trainees' proficiency in some practical skills, lecturers at the local subcontracted college have reduced the amount of practical work in off-the-job training.

43. MGTS has a rigorous recruitment, selection, induction and appraisal process for all staff at the centre. There are clear guidelines for those who interview applicants for jobs which aim to ensure the selection process is fair. Induction for new staff is comprehensive and extends over several weeks. Throughout this induction period, initial training is given where necessary. Staff receive an annual appraisal, at which their training needs are identified. These are taken into account in the staff training plan, which reflects the organisation's business objectives. Staff can request training at any time, and can, for example, ask to be sponsored on degree programmes. Management staff are appraised every six months. The training and development advisors receive an appraisal every quarter and this covers the extent to which they have facilitated trainees' progress and achievements. All training staff have received recent training in the teaching and assessment of key skills.

44. A computer-based system for recording trainees' progression has been developed. The information on trainees' progression is supplied by the training and development advisors. Management data relating to trainees' progression are

collected to meet contractual requirements but are not used in decision-making. These data are considered at management meetings. Action is not always taken systematically to rectify weaknesses the data reveal, such as some trainees' slow progress towards achieving a qualification. The focus groups draw up action plans for the improvement of training but managers do not always monitor their implementation with sufficient thoroughness. Lines of accountability are sometimes blurred with some members of the organisation having numerous responsibilities and therefore reporting to different line managers. Training and development advisors are required to visit trainees in the workplace every month and carry out trainees' progress reviews every quarter. Some advisors fail to comply with this requirement fully.

45. Many trainees receive help from mentors in the workplace, who ensure that training plans will enable trainees to develop the requisite NVQ competencies. Some trainees, however, do not benefit from such assistance. There are currently five qualified work-based assessors employed in engineering companies within the group. MGTS is currently helping 14 employees, across nine companies, to obtain assessors' qualifications. MGTS has produced a guidance booklet for workplace mentors and offers training on how to be a mentor. Some of the workplace supervisors have an inadequate understanding of apprenticeship frameworks and the NVQ process. Few supervisors have been involved in teaching and assessing key skills in the workplace. Some supervisors take little part in training in the workplace. They consider it is the responsibility of MGTS's staff to help trainees achieve their NVQ.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

46. MGTS has a comprehensive quality assurance policy and several systems which are used to ensure quality. These include a system of evaluation by observation of instruction sessions and other key parts of learners' training. There are systems for gathering and using feedback from employers and learners. Data on achievement and progress are used to improve quality assurance. MGTS has held the ISO 9001 award since 1992. ISO 9001 is an international quality assurance standard. Procedures are used to define the training and the quality assurance systems, including internal verification. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with two members of staff, one of whom has been given specific responsibility for the quality assurance of government-funded training programmes. Quality assurance is discussed at management meetings and at the six-weekly modern apprenticeship focus group meetings. The quality assurance systems provide evidence for self-assessment. A single development plan is used to manage improvements to the training.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no monitoring of training
- ◆ weak internal verification of work-based assessment

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of subcontractors' quality assurance procedures
- ◆ inadequate arrangements for gathering feedback from employers
- ◆ no formal observation of training

47. Since the original inspection, MGTS has appointed two members of staff to take responsibility for the quality assurance arrangements, of whom one is assigned to the quality assurance of government-funded training programmes. Development plans and the self-assessment process have been used continuously to improve the quality of the training and to remedy all the weaknesses found at the original inspection, both in quality assurance and in the other aspects of the training. Training is now monitored by the evaluation by observation system. Weaknesses in internal verification have been rectified by the introduction of more thorough procedures and by building up expertise in internal verification in a smaller number of staff. Internal verification now takes place throughout the training programme, rather than solely at the end. College subcontractors are now monitored and MGTS has better liaison systems with them. Feedback systems have been introduced for employers.

GOOD PRACTICE

The evaluation system has resulted in improvements to progress reviews. Managers observe progress reviews carried out by training and development advisers. The observations are fully documented and include feedback from employers and learners. The first phase of this process resulted in new progress review paperwork, which now includes learners' progress, learning targets, and a section to indicate learners' awareness of health and safety and equal opportunities issues. MGTS also devised a learner achievement plan to monitor learners' progress using information gathered at progress reviews. This has given learners a stronger focus, and learners now progress more swiftly towards completing their modern apprenticeship framework. MGTS has evaluated its achievement data and has found that more learners have achieved qualifications since improvements were made to the progress reviews.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent evaluations by observation
- ◆ effective development planning
- ◆ good use of feedback from employers and learners
- ◆ good development for work-based assessors and witnesses

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient cross-referencing of evidence at an early stage

48. MGTS has established and introduced an excellent evaluation system using observations by staff and managers. MGTS plans evaluations of every significant activity affecting learners' experience throughout the year. MGTS's quality assurance arrangements now include evaluation by observation of off-the-job training at the training centre, training in the workplace, assessments and progress reviews. The quality assurance manager has scheduled the observations and evaluations throughout the year. Each observed activity is documented. The observed learner receives written feedback from the observer. The observer's feedback includes learners' comments on the activity, based on interviews carried out at the time of the evaluation. Observations are analysed and an evaluation of findings is documented, with actions for improvement clearly described. Subsequent evaluations show that the observations have frequently improved the performance of learners. The evaluation system also includes evaluation of training, based on scheduled visits to employers by MGTS staff. There is a system for the analysis and evaluation of achievement and retention rates, and equal opportunities data. This system is used to set targets for achievement and retention rates, and targets for the recruitment of under-represented groups. MGTS then measures its performance against these targets. Action is taken when targets are

not met. For example, managers found that there was slow progress towards targets set for rates of achievement. Managers introduced a system to monitor learners' achievements and completion of units.

49. Since the time of the original inspection, development planning has been used to manage the improvements to training. Development plans are regularly reviewed and updated. They clearly state the timescales for actions, which are realistic, and the person responsible for carrying out actions. New actions are identified through the evaluation system and self-assessment process, and are then added to the development plans. Completed actions are removed. It is possible to monitor the improvements since the original inspection by examining previous versions of the development plan.

50. MGTS makes good use of feedback from employers and learners. Employers are routinely sent questionnaires and the feedback is collated and analysed. Employers are informed of the results of the analysis and any action resulting from it. As a result of feedback from questionnaires sent to employers, MGTS has organised seminars for employers to keep them informed of changes to the training programme and of proposed future developments. Employers value this involvement and state that they feel more satisfied with the training programme than in the past. MGTS uses a number of methods to get feedback from learners. These include questionnaires after induction, at end of the first year and at the end of the second year. In addition, valuable feedback is obtained from the learner focus group meetings for first-year learners, and through progress reviews. Responses from questionnaires are collated and analysed, and action is taken to rectify any concerns. During the first year of training, learners' views are expressed through the learner focus group meetings, held every six weeks. A record of these meetings is kept and any actions are clearly documented. Response to feedback from learners at progress reviews is also used to improve learners' ability to achieve their qualification. In one company, learners complained about production targets that were not allowing them time to be trained and work towards their NVQs. The training and development officer discussed the issue with the employer, who agreed to allocate a specific morning for the learners to work towards their NVQs.

51. MGTS provides good development opportunities for work-based assessors and witnesses. MGTS works with 72 employers. Eighteen employers have sent their staff, who give witness testimony, on MGTS's expert witness training programme. This training programme provides expert witnesses with a broad understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework and, as a result, witnesses provide learners with more relevant support. Learners who have witness testimonies given by company staff who have previously been on the training programme value the guidance and motivation given to them. Learners are now able to gather more evidence for their NVQs at level 3. Eleven employers have qualified work-based assessors. MGTS's internal verifiers visit assessors on a regular basis and update their knowledge and understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework, key skills and any changes that have been introduced. Internal verification of

workplace assessments is continuous, though there is still insufficient observation of assessors carrying out assessment of learners in the workplace. Where businesses do not have work-based assessors, MGTS's training and development advisers assess evidence from the workplace.

52. MGTS now liaises closely with college subcontractors. The recent service level agreement includes a requirement that subcontractors share achievement data, external verifiers' reports and learners' surveys with MGTS. MGTS has not examined subcontractors' training observation records or self-assessment reports.

53. There is insufficient cross-referencing of evidence at an early stage in learners' NVQs at level 3. This was identified as a weakness in engineering at the original inspection, and there has been insufficient improvement since then. Learners receive good training in the workplace and gain a wide range of experience. They complete a log book and collect evidence which is relevant to their NVQ. Learners are not encouraged by the training and development advisers to start cross-referencing the evidence to the NVQ standards early in their programmes. They do not use the NVQ standards as a learning resource and do not practise the process of matching evidence to the standards. In some instances, learners had been working towards an NVQ at level 3 for 18 months, and not recorded any progress towards their NVQ, despite having collected evidence.

54. Improvements since the original inspection have greatly increased the rate at which learners have completed their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Since January 2001, 90 learners have completed their key skills training and 48 have completed their NVQs at level 3. Key skills training has been completed by first-year learners, with the introduction of new arrangements for off-the-job training in key skills, and also by learners at later stages of their training programmes.