

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
DECEMBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
JANUARY 2002

North West Kent College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's **learnirect** 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 North West Kent College was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for retailing and customer service, hair and beauty, 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. The sections of the original report dealing with retailing and customer service, hair and beauty, 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).

North West Kent College provides satisfactory training in construction, engineering and business administration. Learners are given adequate help and support. Following the original inspection, the college took effective action to improve training in retailing and customer service and this is now satisfactory. Retention rates on both retailing and customer service and hair and beauty programmes are now satisfactory. Aspects of training in hair and beauty, however, remain unsatisfactory. The individual learning plans for learners on hairdressing programmes do not sufficiently take account of their individual learning needs. Learners make slow progress towards achieving their national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Key skills training and assessment are poor. Learners are now provided with well-written documents to aid their understanding of equal opportunities. Staff receive training on equal opportunities. Monitoring of employers' promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace is still inadequate. Off-the-job training is good but on-the-job training is not planned thoroughly. Since the original inspection, resources for work-based learning have been increased significantly. Well-qualified work-based assessors have been appointed. More assessment is now carried out in the workplace. Staff benefit from a good staff development programme. There is still not enough co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Arrangements for quality assurance are now satisfactory. Systems for monitoring and recording learners' performance and achievements have improved. Employers' views on training are now gathered and analysed. Monitoring of on-the-job training is inadequate.

GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS | GRADE |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Construction | 3 |
| Engineering | 3 |
| Business administration | 3 |
| Retailing & customer service | 4 |
| Hair & beauty | 4 |

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

| REINSPECTION | GRADE |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Retailing & customer service | 3 |
| Hair & beauty | 4 |

| REINSPECTION | GRADE |
|------------------------|-------|
| Equal opportunities | 3 |
| Management of training | 3 |
| Quality assurance | 3 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management commitment to work-based learning
- ◆ good learning activities
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good support for learners
- ◆ good staff training programme

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure of many learners to achieve targets in individual learning plans
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ poor planning of on-the-job learning
- ◆ ineffective target-setting
- ◆ inadequate understanding of key skills among learners and staff

INTRODUCTION

1. North West Kent College is situated on three sites in Dartford, Gravesend, and the National Sea Training Centre in Gravesham. The site at the National Sea Training Centre in Gravesham provides specialist training for the mercantile industry. Gravesham is the local authority area for Gravesend. The college is also provided with rent-free space at a large retail and leisure complex, where training is provided. Most of the 8,500 students at the college are part time and study at the main sites at Gravesend and Dartford. The college employs about 600 staff, with approximately 75 per cent on full-time contracts and 25 per cent working part time. At the time of the original inspection, all teaching was managed through one of four faculties, each of which included up to seven schools. At the time of the reinspection, all work-based learning was co-ordinated by a work-based team of trainers in one of the faculties.

2. The college has an arrangement with the University of Greenwich to provide higher education, and a contract with Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council (LSC), to offer work-based learning for young people and long-term unemployed adults. In addition, the college has contracts with the Employment Service to provide the full-time education and training option, and the training element of the employment option for New Deal clients in the Chatham, Greenwich and Maidstone, Dartford and Mid Kent Units of Delivery. The college offers training in 10 occupational areas. At the original inspection, only five of these were inspected, as the numbers of learners in the five other areas were low. There were 11 staff in the college's training credits unit who were responsible for work-based learning. The head of the training credits unit reported to the director of enterprise, who was also responsible for community liaison, New Deal, and initiatives funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). There are no learners on the work-based learning for adults programme, and no training projects funded by the ESF. At the time of the original inspection, there were 380 young people on programmes funded by the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and 29 New Deal clients aged 18 to 24. There are now 373 work-based learners working towards NVQs in construction, engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, hospitality, hairdressing and health care. One hundred and forty-three young people are advanced modern apprentices, 134 are foundation modern apprentices and 96 are on an NVQ training programme. All learners are employed and the college subcontracts with only one other training provider.

3. The local economy and population are growing. Housing is currently being built to accommodate a predicted rise in the population of 60,000 persons over the next few years. Other important construction projects include the high-speed rail link to the Channel Tunnel, an international railway terminal, a large business and distribution park, and a 400-bed hospital. There is also increasing demand for skilled labour in the retail sector. Employment in this sector has expanded since

the opening of a large retail centre in 1999, where about 8,000 people are now employed. At the time of the original inspection, 825 people in Dartford, and 1,500 in Gravesham were unemployed, representing 1.9 per cent and 4.3 per cent of the workforce, respectively. In the Southeast, outside London, the unemployment rate at that time was 1.8 per cent, lower than the national rate of 3.4 per cent. In September 2001, the unemployment rate was 1.7 per cent in Dartford and 4 per cent in Gravesham, compared with 1.5 per cent in the Southeast, excluding London, and 2.9 per cent in the country as a whole. Some secondary schools in Kent are grammar schools, which select pupils according to their ability in tests in their sixth year of compulsory education. Most learners at the college attended non-selective schools. At the time of the original inspection, the proportion of 16-year-old school pupils in Kent who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 51.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, this proportion had risen to 52.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. According to the 1991 census, 4.1 per cent of Dartford's 85,000 residents were from a minority ethnic group. In Gravesham, this proportion was 8.4 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. In June 2000, staff from all faculties in the college were involved in the compilation of the college's self-assessment report. Judgements from this formed the basis of a separate self-assessment report on work-based learning, which staff produced in September 2000. This self-assessment report did not provide a detailed evaluation of training. Senior staff were consulted throughout the self-assessment process and their views were sought. All staff were involved in the identification of strengths and weaknesses. The views of employers and learners were not sought. The self-assessment report did not take sufficient account of achievement and retention rates. Many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. The report failed to identify some weaknesses, and in many areas inspectors awarded lower grades than those given in the self-assessment report. The college did not produce a new self-assessment report for the reinspection, but produced an updated post-inspection plan. The plan covered all of the issues raised at the original inspection. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the grades in the self-assessment report. The grade inspectors awarded for hairdressing was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

5. During the original inspection in December 2000, a team of nine inspectors spent a total of 36 days at the college, working jointly with inspectors from the former Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). They interviewed 70 learners and 62 members of staff. They visited 43 workplaces, where they spoke with 39 supervisors. They observed and graded 16 training sessions and examined many documents and records, including learners' files and portfolios of evidence, the reports of audits by the TEC and awarding bodies, policies, written procedures, minutes of meetings and records of the achievements of former learners.

6. The reinspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors, who spent a total of 15 days at the college in January 2002. They interviewed 37 learners and held 33 interviews with college staff. They visited 28 workplaces, where they spoke with 21 supervisors. They observed and graded one training session and examined many documents and records, including learners' files and portfolios, the reports of audits by the local LSC and awarding bodies, policies, written procedures, minutes of meetings and records of the achievements of former learners.

TRAINING STANDARDS INSPECTION REPORT: NORTH WEST KENT
 COLLEGE DECEMBER 2000 ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE
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Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Construction | | 4 | 2 | | | 6 |
| Engineering | | 2 | 2 | | | 4 |
| Business administration | | 3 | | | | 3 |
| Retailing & customer service | | | | | | 0 |
| Hair & beauty | | 2 | 1 | | | 3 |
| Total | 0 | 11 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 16 |

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at reinspection

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Retailing & customer service | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Hair & beauty | | | | | | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. There are 145 trainees and eight New Deal clients. Of the trainees, 51 are advanced modern apprentices, 62 are foundation modern apprentices, and 32 are on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in brickwork, formworking, electrical installation, painting and decorating, plumbing, security systems and wood occupations. The number of trainees in each trade by programme is given in the table below. Off-the-job training and training in theory is carried out at the college on a day-release basis. Trainees are recruited through schools, through the local careers service, directly by the college and particularly from local employers. All trainees are employed, most by companies in northwest Kent. These vary from large international companies to small businesses. The key skill of information technology is taught by staff from the information and communications technology department of the college. All other key skills are integrated into the occupational training. Staff from the training credits unit review trainees' welfare and progress in the workplace every 12 weeks. Fourteen construction staff are qualified assessors and one member of staff is working towards this qualification. Six members of staff are also qualified internal verifiers. The average retention rate over the past three years for work-based trainees has been 61 per cent. Over the same period, 48 per cent of trainees have achieved at least one NVQ. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report, and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Construction trainees at December 2000

| | Advanced modern apprentices | Foundation modern apprentices | Other work-based training for young people | New Deal 18 - 24 | Total |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------|-------|
| Plumbing | 13 | 22 | 8 | 3 | 46 |
| Wood occupations | 15 | 19 | 2 | 3 | 39 |
| Electrical installation | 3 | 1 | 22 | 0 | 26 |
| Brickwork | 4 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Painting & decorating | 4 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 14 |
| Security systems | 7 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 12 |
| Formworking | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 51 | 62 | 32 | 8 | 153 |

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well-presented portfolios of evidence
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ particularly thorough internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little assessment in the workplace
- ◆ inadequate resources in some workshops

8. All trainees produce good work-based evidence. Trainees' portfolios are well presented and contain a wide range of detailed evidence to demonstrate their competence. All evidence is gathered from different sources, including observation of activities. The evidence is well recorded. There are well-designed systems for recording and monitoring trainees' achievements. Individual units are assessed, recorded and accredited. Trainees can easily identify their progress and have records which identify the elements and NVQ units they have achieved. This system is cross-referenced to the assessors' records and charts showing which units have been achieved are displayed in workshop areas.

9. Well-qualified, enthusiastic staff teach construction skills in the college. Trainees are appreciative of the high standard of training and support. The progress of trainees is carefully monitored and action plans are regularly updated. Schemes of work and lesson plans are well presented and detailed worksheets for trainees are produced for each training session. In the security systems training room, training sessions are recorded by closed circuit television, adding realism to the sessions. This is a good use of resources. Training in theory is constantly reinforced with reference to current industrial practices. Trainees' experiences in the workplace are integrated into the training activity.

10. Six qualified internal verifiers carry out internal verification. There are detailed, well-written policies and procedures for internal verification within the school of construction. Effective planning documents and a planning matrix clearly set out the dates of internal verification and aspects of the assessment procedure to be verified. The internal verification process thoroughly covers all aspects of the assessment procedure, portfolios, assessments, observation of assessors and tests in theory. Internal verifiers give prompt verbal feedback and clear written feedback to assessors. Regular staff meetings are held and internal verification is an agenda item. Minutes of these meetings show that internal verification is an important issue and that action-planning for continuous improvement is implemented.

11. There is insufficient work-based assessment of trainees. Most assessment is carried out under simulated conditions at college. Trainees gather evidence in the workplace and enter this into their portfolio. This evidence is added to the off-the-job evidence and assessed by a qualified assessor at the college. The evidence is mainly in the form of witness testimony, with very little supporting narrative,

although photographic and written work is included. Assessors rarely observe trainees at work. There are many opportunities for trainees to be assessed in the workplace. Many employers want to be involved in the assessment of trainees on the job. Work placements are of a high standard and the work undertaken is varied. Despite this, trainees repeat at college tasks they have already carried out in the workplace.

12. The construction department relocated to the Gravesend campus in September 2000. Workshops have been built or refurbished to meet the requirements of work-based training. Workshop facilities in plumbing, painting and decorating and brickwork are not fully developed. Trainee plumbers are using their training time to equip the workshop area. This work does not help them progress towards the NVQ at level 3. The workshop facilities in painting and decorating are poor but various project areas on the college campus allow for realistic simulated training opportunities.

Engineering

Grade 3

13. The college provides a wide range of engineering programmes at different levels. These include motor vehicle, refrigeration and air conditioning, information technology systems support, fabrication and welding, mechanical production and marine engineering. Most trainees attend the college's Gravesend site, one day each week, for practical training and training in theory. There are a total of 109 trainees over all the programmes. The number of trainees on advanced modern apprenticeships, foundation modern apprenticeships, the New Deal and other work-based training programmes is shown by occupational subgrouping in the table below. Trainees are employed in a wide range of companies located throughout the Dartford and Gravesham areas, and further afield in Kent and London. Companies range in scope from small specialist motor engineering businesses, servicing the local motor racing industry, to businesses maintaining air conditioning units. Some are national companies with hundreds of employees, while others are small family businesses employing one or two people. Most trainees are recruited by their employers, which then approach the college for a suitable training programme. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

Engineering trainees at December 2000

| | Advanced modern apprentices | Foundation modern apprentices | Other work-based training for young people | New Deal 18 - 24 | Total |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------|-------|
| Motor vehicle | 22 | 12 | 4 | 3 | 41 |
| Refrigeration & air conditioning | 29 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 40 |
| Mechanical production | 2 | 13 | 8 | 0 | 23 |
| Information technology systems support | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Marine engineering | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 53 | 28 | 20 | 8 | 109 |

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good and well-qualified trainers
- ◆ good technical support in college workshops
- ◆ good retention rates for most training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment of occupational competence
- ◆ low awareness of key skills by some trainees

14. Staff are occupationally well qualified and appropriately experienced. Most trainers have teaching qualifications with the majority holding certificates or postgraduate certificates in education. Most are university graduates and have appropriate assessors' qualifications. A sufficient number are qualified as internal verifiers. Those not qualified as assessors are working towards assessors' qualifications. All trainers have relevant industrial experience and put this to good use in the teaching of practical skills and theory. This is apparent across all aspects of engineering training. The enthusiasm and application of trainers is high and the training staff give individual training to those who find work difficult.

15. Practical skills are practised regularly. Trainees are able to practise and demonstrate the various practical skills necessary to achieve their competencies. In off-the-job training, experienced and knowledgeable technicians are allocated to all fabrication and welding, and motor vehicle practical lessons. This reduces trainers' preparation time and minimises disruption to lessons owing to failure of equipment. The high level of technical support also increases trainers' availability to trainees and allows trainers to concentrate on the teaching. The range of off-the-job training facilities is varied and appropriate to the core requirements of the vocational courses.

16. Of 24 trainees starting non-apprenticeship training programmes over the period 1997-2000, only three left before they had completed the programme. Two of these achieved some qualifications before they left. The retention rates of trainees starting in the years 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000 were 89 per cent, 71 per cent and 100 per cent respectively. Eight of these trainees have already achieved all the targets on their individual training plans. The achievement and retention rates for advanced modern apprentices have improved steadily over the past three years. Of the 24 advanced modern apprentices who started in 1997-98, 17 left early, including 12 who achieved NVQs at level 2. The years 1998-99 and 1999-2000 have seen an improvement, with good retention rates of 73 per cent and 77 per cent. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is lower, at 27 per cent and 47 per cent for the years 1998-99 and 1999-2000. In 1999-2000, eight of the 15 foundation modern apprentices who started the programme had left by November 2000, when they had only achieved half of the targets on their individual training plans.

17. There is poor assessment of occupational competence. Evidence is gathered either through off-the-job training or by job sheets and photographs from trainees' workplaces. In many cases a standard college work record sheet is used. The work record sheets are completed at the workplaces and signed by the supervisors. Most assessments are carried out using witness testimony, which at times is poorly recorded and not specifically related to NVQ performance criteria. Some witness testimony is inaccurate or incomplete and there are many examples of statements being accepted on trust. Very few trainees are assessed in the workplace. Trainees are not required to start gathering evidence of their competence until the second year. Opportunities to assess and accredit trainees' competence in the first year are lost. In refrigeration and air conditioning, trainees are not assessed until they are in the final stages of their training. This does not motivate trainees or give them a sense of achievement. Trainees nearing the end of their training cannot be sure if work they did two years previously is sufficient to meet the requirements of the qualification. The college has identified the lack of work-based assessment as a weakness and is recruiting more appropriately qualified staff to address this issue.

18. Trainees do not know what key skills are and how they relate to the modern apprenticeship framework. Many understand key skills to be solely the use of computers. They do not know when they are being assessed on key skills. Trainees do not know which key skills are required to meet the performance criteria of some elements within their programme, and cannot focus on achieving such awards. Within the air conditioning and refrigeration programme there was no strategy for the teaching and assessment of key skills.

Business administration

Grade 3

19. North West Kent College provides training in accounting, administration and information technology at its centres at Gravesend and Dartford, and in key skills

at its training centre in the large retail centre. All other trainees are studying for an NVQ in accounting, at levels 2, 3 or 4. These levels are also known as foundation, intermediate and technician levels. Most trainees start at foundation level and are expected to complete each level within a year. Most trainees are advanced modern apprentices. The number of trainees in each occupational area is given in the table below. Trainees work in a variety of workplaces, including professional accountancy firms and industry. The information technology and administration trainees are employed by the college. These trainees are assessed in the workplace by qualified college staff. Trainees can attend college on a day-release basis or study for two evenings each week. They sit a formal examination at each level and prepare a portfolio of work-based and other evidence for assessment. Eleven members of staff are responsible for training and assessment. One part-time member of staff is the internal verifier. All accountancy staff have appropriate teaching and professional qualifications. Inspectors considered that several of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified several additional weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report, and awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

Business administration trainees at December 2000

| | Advanced modern apprentices | Foundation modern apprentices | Other work-based training for young people | New Deal 18 - 24 | Total |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------|-------|
| Accounts | 33 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 43 |
| Administration | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Information technology | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 36 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 46 |

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good rate of achievement of accounting NVQs at levels 3 and 4
- ◆ improved retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor on-the-job training
- ◆ poor rate of achievement of key skills

20. The college provides good off-the-job training. Courses and lessons are well planned. Lecturers explain complicated accounting terms and concepts clearly. Trainees appear interested in their studies and respond positively in class. Lecturers frequently question trainees to check their understanding. The work carried out by trainees in the classrooms indicates a clear grasp of the subjects being studied. Trainees' written work is well presented and confirms their

understanding of the topics covered.

21. The retention rate and the rate of achievement of accounting NVQs at levels 3 and 4 are now good. In 1999-2000, of the 14 trainees who started on the level 2 NVQ, six have achieved it. Six have taken the examination and are awaiting the results and two are still working towards the qualification. At level 3, nine trainees started, seven have completed the qualification and two are still in training. At level 4, nine started and eight have achieved the NVQ. In previous years, the retention rate was lower, particularly on the level 2 programme. Assessment is rigorous and most lecturers add helpful comments on assessment reports to encourage trainees and to provide clear guidance as to how work can be improved.

22. On-the-job training is poor for some trainees. Some trainees receive little or no relevant training from their employers and have no opportunity to carry out practical tasks which are relevant to their studies at college. Their employers are unaware of the requirements of the NVQ and the need for on-the-job training. Employers are not given any information about their trainees' academic progress, other than at the quarterly progress reviews from non-specialist staff. Some employers do not attend these reviews.

23. Many trainees do not achieve their key skills. Until recently, key skills training was available only during the day. Some trainees found it difficult to attend. In accounting before September 2000, key skills were taught through units devised by the accounting awarding body. Units devised by a different awarding body are now used.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

24. The college offers NVQ training in retailing, customer service, and warehousing and distribution. Twenty-four learners are working towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3. One advanced modern apprentice, eight foundation modern apprentices and three work-based learners are on customer services training programmes. Two advanced modern apprentices and four learners are on retailing training programmes. Six work-based learners are on distribution and warehousing training programmes. Most learners are employed in the shopping outlets of national companies. Learners mostly work at the Bluewater retail complex, located midway between the Dartford and Gravesend centres. The work-based learning staff recruit new learners by directly approaching employers. When a learning programme has been agreed for an employee, a member of the team visits the employee's workplace and carries out both the induction and recruitment processes. New learners are then given a test in the form of an assignment to find out whether they can remember what they have been told during induction. A monitoring officer checks that health and safety regulations are properly observed in the learner's workplace, and draws up individual learning plans. Learners are required to attend the college's learning centre, called the learning shop, which is located near the entrance of the retail complex. Both vocational training and off-

the-job training in key skills are carried out in the learning centre. Training is provided in modules, on one day a week for eight weeks. Six qualified assessor verifiers carry out assessments and internal verification, either in the workplace or the learning centre. The monitoring liaison officers carry out a minimum of four reviews of learners' progress a year. The reviews focus on issues relating to learners' health and safety, welfare and progress. Records of the reviews are kept in learners' personal files. Target dates for the achievement of qualifications are planned and recorded.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ no involvement of workplace supervisors in training
- ◆ slow progress by trainees
- ◆ no integration of key skills

25. After the original inspection, an action plan to improve training was devised. Some of the actions have led to significant improvements. New learners are given an initial interview. They also undergo tests to ascertain their needs for additional learning support and determine which qualifications are most appropriate for them to work towards. Only learners who are considered likely to complete their training programme are recruited. Fewer modern apprentices are now recruited. Following the appointment of a customer liaison manager, communications between the college and employers have improved. Meetings with employers are frequent and are used to build constructive partnerships. Employers, supervisors and learners themselves are involved in planning the assessment schedule. Learners are assessed frequently. Assessors, however, do not give learners enough guidance on how to collect evidence of their acquisition of key skills through work towards the NVQ. None of the learners has achieved key skills qualifications. The number of learners who achieve the objectives set out in their learning plan has increased, but the proportion is still low. Workplace supervisors now play a valuable part in providing on-the-job training for learners.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good vocational training
- ◆ exceptionally well-resourced learning centre
- ◆ good support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective internal and external communications
- ◆ poor understanding of key skills among learners and staff
- ◆ low achievement rates

26. Learners receive good vocational training. A diverse range of effective methods is used for on- and off-the-job training. Training sessions are informal and learners participate in them with enthusiasm. Training helps learners acquire

the competences they need in order to obtain their NVQ and is also relevant to the jobs they carry out in the workplace. Learners choose training sessions most relevant to their individual learning needs. The assessors set research assignments which are designed to increase learners' background knowledge. On-the-job training is good and helps learners to develop the skills they need at work. In some cases, training is specifically adapted to suit individual learners' needs. Learners are given responsibilities at work and acquire and practise a range of skills. They receive helpful guidance on portfolio-building. Portfolios are of a good standard. Most learners are making good progress towards achieving their target qualifications.

27. The college has an excellent training centre, located within a retail complex. The training centre makes good use of natural light, and is modern and comfortably furnished. It is equipped with computer workstations, hardware and software that meet industry standards. Experienced members of staff are available every day of the week to give learners training and support, and carry out assessment. Assessment and internal verification practice are satisfactory.

28. Employers do all they can to help learners at work, and particularly those with additional learning needs. Employers regularly allow learners time off work to attend training sessions. The learning centre manager frequently has meetings with employers. At these meetings, learners' training and assessment plans are discussed in the context of employers' own business plans and staffing needs. Supervisors are familiar with, and have often achieved, the qualifications the learners are working towards. They make every effort to ensure that learners develop those skills which they have to demonstrate to assessors. Supervisors regularly write up witness testimonies of learners' acquisition of competence. Two work-based supervisors are working towards assessor qualifications.

29. Some aspects of internal and external communications are poor. Many learners and some staff do not understand the NVQ assessment process or the roles of assessors and verifiers. Records of learners' progress reviews are usually brief and seldom show that learners have been set targets. Learners and employers are not given a copy of the record of reviews. Individual learning plans are not specific enough. At their induction, learners are not given enough information about what they have to do to gain their qualifications. Learners have a poor understanding of the appeals and complaints procedure, but say they would talk to staff if they had a problem. Staff and learners have a good relationship. At times, learners are given insufficient advance notice of training events, or are not invited to them at all. Learners then receive letters enquiring why they have not attended events. Some learners complain of being given confusing messages when they have asked about training events relevant to their NVQ.

30. Vocational assessors, reviewers and learners have a poor understanding of key skills. Learners have a work-based assessor and a separate key skills assessor. Key skills assessment and NVQ assessment are not integrated. Internal verification of key skills assessment is only carried out when learners are almost at the end of

their training programme. The reports assessors make on key skills assessment are comprehensive and detailed. Assessors help learners identify ways in which they can gather evidence of their acquisition of key skills. Vocational assessors do not have key skills assessor or practitioner qualifications. Key skills training is offered at the training centre, but is not well attended. No learners on the modern apprenticeship programme have yet obtained key skills certification. The college has encountered problems with key skills training and is currently not recruiting learners to modern apprenticeship programmes.

31. The number of learners who achieve qualifications on work-based programmes is low. Over the past two years, no learner has yet achieved all the objectives in his or her individual learning plan. In 1999-2000, 44 per cent of learners on an NVQ programme achieved their qualification. In 1999-2000, the achievement rate on the advanced modern apprenticeship training programme, for the NVQ at level 3, was only 9 per cent. Over the past two years, there has been an increase in the rates of achievement for NVQs on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes, from 28 per cent to 43 per cent. Retention rates are now satisfactory and improving. Over the past two years, the proportion of learners on all training programmes who left early without qualifications has fallen to about 50 per cent.

Hair & beauty

Grade 4

32. There are 17 learners on hairdressing training programmes. Eight are foundation modern apprentices, one is an advanced modern apprentice, and eight are on an NVQ training programme. All learners are employed women and all are working towards an NVQ at level 2 in hairdressing. The college no longer offers a modern apprenticeship programme in hairdressing. The timescale in which learners are expected to achieve an NVQ at level 2 has been reduced from two years to one year. The college has hairdressing salons at the Dartford and Gravesend centres. Work-based learners only attend the Dartford site. Full-time college hairdressing staff are qualified teachers and assessors, and two are qualified internal verifiers. All part-time trainers are qualified assessors. The newly appointed hairdressing liaison officer is qualified as a hairdresser, assessor and internal verifier. Learners are usually in employment in a salon before they start training. Off-the-job training takes place at the college one day a week. The training programme starts at the beginning of the academic year. During the college holidays, the learners work full time in their salons. Learners have a college induction and a workplace induction. Modern apprentices work towards the key skills qualification. The liaison officer carries out learners' progress reviews in the workplace every 13 weeks.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ no assessment in the workplace
- ◆ poor understanding of key skills among employers and trainees

33. Following the original inspection, an action plan was drafted to deal with the weaknesses. It focused on improving learners' achievement and retention rates, and the recruitment process. The college interviews all applicants. In 2001-02, retention rates have improved significantly. An experienced hairdressing work-based assessor was appointed in November 2001. Work-based assessors are responsible for carrying out assessments in the workplace, salon health and safety checks, and learners' quarterly progress reviews. The college has made slow progress in helping learners and employers gain a better understanding of key skills.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good working environment in salons
- ◆ good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently individualised training
- ◆ slow progress of learners towards achievement of NVQs
- ◆ insufficient gathering of evidence in the workplace
- ◆ inadequate key skills training and assessment

34. Both the college salons are spacious, have plenty of natural light, and both are well resourced. They have small areas for background knowledge training and there are classrooms nearby. College staff are appropriately qualified and are familiar with modern techniques and up-to-date equipment. The salons where learners work are modern and well resourced. Learners receive training from senior staff on a regular basis. Learners learn a variety of hairdressing skills. Learners develop skills they need to obtain their NVQ and many have their own regular clients. Many learners participate in hairdressing competitions, manufacturers' seminars and visit hairdressing exhibitions.

35. Retention rates are good. All eight learners on the NVQ programme who started since April 2001, and the one remaining advanced modern apprentice, are still on their programmes. The retention rates for foundation modern apprentices have also improved. The foundation modern apprentice who started in 2001-02 is still on the training programme. The retention rate for those who started in 2000-01 is 75 per cent. Although the 1999-2000 retention rate, at 38 per cent, was very poor, the 1998-1999 rate, at 67 per cent was satisfactory.

36. Learners' training needs are not adequately identified or met. Individual learning plans are not drawn up well. Only one of the individual learning plans drawn up since the original inspection, specified the correct NVQ units for the learner concerned. None of the plans included targets for the completion of NVQ units. A letter sent to employers in December 2001 listed the 10 NVQ units required for the level 2 award, instead of the correct figure of nine. Training plans lack information about learners' past hairdressing experience and prior learning.

There is no specific initial assessment of learners' hairdressing skills. Plans do not specify how learners will be trained and assessed in the workplace. Salon supervisors are not sufficiently involved in ensuring employees' training programmes are appropriate. Contracts with employers do not give details of how employers should help and support work-based learners. Some learners who began their programme in September 2001, were advised that it would be appropriate for them to be on a foundation modern apprenticeship programme. In the event, however, these learners had to follow a NVQ training programme instead. The college encountered difficulties in providing key skills training and did not offer a foundation modern apprenticeship programme. Learners are unable to start an NVQ training programme at any time other than at the start of the college year. The programme of off-the-job training is planned to start from the beginning of the college year. The programme aims to meet the needs of the group as a whole and is not adapted to suit individual learners and enable them to progress at their own pace. All learners have to undergo the tests, and carry out the projects and written assignments specified in the scheme of work, irrespective of their ability and aptitude.

37. Learners' progress towards achieving their NVQs is slow. Non-term time is not used effectively for work-based activities such as training and assessment. Few of the learners who are in their second year have completed more than one of the NVQ units required for the level 2 qualification. Learners who started a one-year programme in September 2001 have yet to be allocated clients on whom they can work during practical training sessions at college. For the first half of the year, learners concentrate on their background knowledge, practise basic hairdressing skills, but do not undergo an adequate number of NVQ assessments. Learners' practical skills are assessed at the end of the training programme. There is insufficient co-ordination of assessment of background knowledge and practical skills. The new, one-year, college training programme is poorly designed. Learners do not have enough time to practise complex skills prior to assessment. The quarterly reviews of learners' progress reviews are not used effectively. Records of progress reviews are not detailed enough. They do not specify what learners need to do to improve their work, or the dates by which tasks must be completed. Learners' progress reviews are usually carried out in the workplace. Logbooks of NVQ assessment are kept at the college and are not brought to the workplace to be referred to during the learners' progress reviews. When targets are set at action-planning meetings NVQ units are identified by the code numbers used by the awarding body and learners and employers often find this confusing. Action plans contain specific tasks for learners to carry out at college when the learners' NVQ logbooks are available. There is little discussion of issues relating to work-based learning at meetings of training staff.

38. Learners do not gather enough evidence of their acquisition of skills in the workplace. Learners and employers do not have a clear understanding of what counts as evidence. Employers are not briefed well about the NVQ process. Learners are not assessed in the workplace often enough. A new assessor has been appointed to carry out assessment in the workplace but there are no assessors in

the salons. Learners are allocated 15 hours of assessment each year. An assessor from the college visits them in the workplace to carry out assessment. Learners are encouraged to plan activities on which they will be assessed. They are not able, however, to take their NVQ assessment logbooks to the salons, and the time allotted for assessment is not always used well. The assessment procedure is also time-consuming. The assessor is required to record the observation and then transfer the assessment results into the learner's NVQ logbook at a later date. The absence of the logbook also makes it difficult for the salon supervisor to monitor the employee's progress. Many learners' portfolios lack a sufficiently wide range of evidence. Very few NVQ portfolios contain photographic evidence of the learners' hairdressing skills and work in salons. Most evidence is gathered during learners' time at the college.

39. Arrangements for key skills training and assessment are inadequate. Modern apprentices do not start key skills training until the second year of their training programme. The college has yet to find someone to teach application of number. Since the beginning of the autumn term 2001, instead of receiving planned key skills tuition, learners are given a free hour each week. The tuition learners receive for both communication and information technology (IT) key skills is satisfactory. Since December 2001, key skills training has been an integral part of vocational training. Key skills information packs were distributed to learners and employers in December 2001. Salon supervisors are informed about the relevance of the packs when the work-based assessor makes a visit. Key skills training for learners on the one-year NVQ ended in December 2001. The learners now spend the time using the Internet and collecting evidence for their portfolios.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

40. The college has an equal opportunities policy and associated procedures. Copies of these are included in the staff handbook, which is available on the college intranet. The policy covers access, marketing, publicity, staff issues, the curriculum, the environment of the college, and administrative arrangements for promoting equal opportunities. The procedure contains more detail and includes management responsibilities, for the implementation of the equal opportunities policy and for monitoring its effectiveness. Terms are defined and the complaints procedure is explained. The college secretary is responsible for reviewing the policy and procedures. The college secretary also chairs an equal opportunities committee, which meets three times each year. An equal opportunities adviser has been appointed. Learners are given a handbook containing an equal opportunities statement, which also summarises commitments given in the college charter. Learners are also given a special version of the equal opportunities policy. At the time of the 1991 census, people from minority ethnic groups made up

approximately 6 per cent of the population of Dartford and Gravesham. Currently, there are 373 work-based learners. There are three learners with a disability and 10 learners from minority ethnic groups. About 2.5 per cent of the learners and New Deal clients are from minority ethnic groups.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ weak monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities among many trainees
- ◆ inadequate equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ no evaluation of equal opportunities data

41. The college has appropriate facilities for people with restricted mobility. Employers' premises vary widely, from large companies equipped to cater for people with disabilities to small family businesses run from home with no special facilities. An action plan was drawn up to rectify weaknesses identified at the original inspection. A full-time staff development manager has been appointed to act as an equal opportunities adviser. The adviser is responsible for providing guidance on equal opportunities to managers, staff and students, and reviewing policy and procedures. A new work-based unit, consisting of monitoring officers and assessors, has been established. These staff have taken part in activities to improve their understanding of equal opportunities. A new equal opportunities policy for students has been developed and issued to all students. A work-based prospectus has been produced which includes a statement on equal opportunities. The college induction programme has been reviewed and equality of opportunity has been given a greater emphasis in it. A questionnaire for employers, with a number of questions relating to equal opportunities, has been designed and distributed. The form used for recording learners' progress reviews has been redesigned and now includes a section on discussion of issues related to equal opportunities.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective promotion of learning to all groups in the community
- ◆ good training for staff on equal opportunities
- ◆ good range of documents to aid learners' understanding of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ poor recruitment from under-represented groups
- ◆ insufficient action to strengthen learners' understanding of equal opportunities

42. The college promotes learning effectively to the communities it serves. The college has appointed a community development co-ordinator. The co-ordinator makes contact with the communities in the area and promotes learning programmes to minority groups. A customer liaison manager carries out a similar role with local employers. Together they provide guidance and support to the equal

opportunities committee. For the past few years, girls from a local high school have attended a one-day engineering course at the college. There are good links with local schools, and vocational 'taster' programmes for pupils. Currently, 200 pupils from seven local schools attend the college. The college provides staff and equipment for a special training centre in an area largely populated by minority ethnic groups and runs IT courses there free of charge. One-to-one teaching is provided for students whose first language is not English. A training centre called the learning shop, has been established in a large retail complex. The centre provides information, training and assessment for learners in retailing and customer service. Unemployed people are offered training through New Deal. Learning programmes are flexibly arranged and are available to employees on a drop-in basis. Marketing materials contain pictures of persons from groups under-represented on training programmes. There is a new brochure for Punjabi speakers in their own language. Through a local partnership funded through the SRB, the college has held two conferences on equal opportunities. College staff meet other local learning providers regularly to discuss equality of opportunity in education and training. The college is part of a strategic partnership set up to deal with the learning needs of persons in the 10 most deprived areas of Dartford and Gravesham. It also helps local community groups obtain funding for learning. The college is currently creating a further seven learning centres in the most deprived wards of Dartford and Gravesham. This initiative is being carried out in partnership with a range of local and national, voluntary and statutory organisations.

43. Staff receive good training related to equal opportunities. In addition to a programme of training for all staff, the new work-based team of trainers has recently attended a highly effective event, intended to increase their understanding of the principles of equal opportunities. At this event, there were sessions on current legislation on equal opportunities, updated college policies and procedures and the responsibilities of staff for monitoring and reporting upon the promotion of equal opportunities. Most of the assessors and monitoring staff are new. This event was evaluated carefully and follow-up sessions to it have been arranged. Staff working with work-based learners now have a much clearer understanding of the importance of equal opportunities than they did at the time of the original inspection.

44. The college has produced a good range of documents to improve learners' understanding of equal opportunities issues. A new version of the college's equal opportunities policy and procedures has been written for the learners. The language in this is simple and clear. Procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment are explained clearly. A statement on the college's commitment to upholding equal opportunities is included in the handbook for learners. A new anti-bullying and harassment policy has been drawn up. Since September 2001, equal opportunities issues are given fuller coverage during the learners' induction programme. Eight weeks after their induction, learners complete an assignment on topics covered during their induction. They are asked to give examples of equal opportunities issues which have arisen in the workplace. The college plans to

broaden the range of equal opportunities materials further.

45. The monitoring of employers' promotion of equal opportunities is weak. Employers are not required to sign an agreement that clearly states their responsibilities for upholding equality of opportunity. Employers sign to the effect that they will meet the college's criteria for promoting equal opportunities. The college does not know which employers have a policy on equal opportunities or whether its implementation is monitored. The college requires employers to complete a checklist on topics required during learners' induction to the workplace. This makes no reference to equal opportunities. When college staff visit employers, they do not always remind them of their responsibility to uphold equality of opportunity for learners. Employers are sent a copy of the college's new equal opportunities policy. Until recently, however, staff from the college have not made a thorough follow-up visit to check employers' understanding of equal opportunities. The college recently sent a questionnaire to employers to ask them if they would like to receive assistance in dealing with issues related to equal opportunities, and many said that they would.

46. The number of learners from under-represented groups is very low. All students who join a training programme are employed and are usually sent to college by their employer. Seventy-seven per cent of all learners are men. In the areas of engineering and construction, there is only one female learner. All learners on the hairdressing training programmes are women. Eighty-eight per cent of business and accounts learners are women. On customer service and retailing programmes, all the female learners work in shops, and the learners who are working towards the NVQ in distribution and warehousing are all men. Currently, there are 10 learners from minority ethnic groups, equivalent to less than 3 per cent of all learners and well below the proportion of persons from these groups who live in the local community. Three learners are registered as having a physical disability. The college has appropriate facilities for people with restricted mobility and much of its accommodation is accessible to them. Many of the larger companies where learners work are able to meet the needs of people with physical disabilities, but other employers, such as small family businesses, are not. Learners identified as being in need of additional learning support are offered it. Twenty-three learners currently receive additional learning support. Equal opportunities data have been collected for many years, but until a month before the reinspection had not been analysed carefully. The recently redesigned questionnaire for learners about the quality of education and training, does not cover the promotion of equal opportunities.

47. Insufficient action is taken to strengthen learners' understanding of equal opportunities issues. Most learners can remember equal opportunities issues being discussed at induction but many are unsure how these might affect them. Many learners cannot remember what they were told about equal opportunities in detail during induction. Work-based monitoring officers or assessors, who now carry out learners' progress reviews, are expected to check learners' understanding of equal opportunities issues. Most learners know that there are complaints and appeals

procedures and that these are set out in the handbook they are given. However, very few know what they should do if they have a complaint, other than speak to a member of staff at the college. The college plans to record all complaints raised formally or informally by learners.

Trainee support

Grade 3

48. Most trainees are recruited by their employers before they join the college. Trainees are screened for literacy and numeracy, using a nationally approved initial assessment test. Trainees' competence in key skills is assessed using computer-based tests. Staff from the training credits unit give summarised results of these initial assessments to tutors, who organise additional basic skills support if needed. The college has a learning support centre. Additional training is usually arranged during the day that the trainees attend other off-the-job training at the college. Trainee painters and decorators attend college for two days each week for off-the-job training. One of these days is dedicated to additional support. Training credits unit staff usually assess trainees' suitability for foundation or advanced apprenticeship programmes when they first meet them at their workplace. Monitoring officers review trainees' progress, usually at 12-weekly intervals, to meet the college's contractual obligations. Monitoring officers induct all trainees to the workplace and explain NVQ procedures, health and safety and equal opportunities to the trainees. Monitoring officers also write the trainees' individual training plans. Personal counselling is available and contact details are provided in the college's student handbook, a copy of which is given to each trainee. Individual training plans are completed for all trainees. The self-assessment report identifies strengths, relating to effective counselling and basic skills support in the college, but fails to recognise the importance of regular, detailed reviewing of progress towards achievement of NVQs. The lack of formal accreditation of prior learning is also identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. Inspectors identified further weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good basic skills support
- ◆ good use of additional support records
- ◆ effective counselling of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no accreditation of prior achievement
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment of some trainees
- ◆ insufficient focus on trainees' learning during progress reviews

49. There is good basic skills training for trainees. This provides effective support for the NVQ training. Tutors try to ensure trainees attend without embarrassment or fear of ridicule from their fellow trainees. For example, basic skills support

sessions are referred to as portfolio-building. The issue is treated with sensitivity. The literacy and numeracy support is occupationally focused and relevant to trainees' work and NVQs. Trainees get individual help with their course work and assignments. The rate of attendance at the support sessions is good. Support tutors inform college tutors if any trainee is absent for two consecutive weeks. There is a formal management structure for the support of trainees. Lines of responsibility and communication are clear.

50. Detailed, up-to-date records are kept of all support for trainees. They are frequently referred to by tutors and are easy to follow. The records are used effectively in conjunction with trainees' action plans. Both are included in individual work folders. Personal counselling is particularly good. It enables trainees to overcome their problems, continue their training and achieve their NVQ. There are qualified counsellors in the college's central support unit. Tutors refer trainees to these staff. Staff in the training credits unit have good interpersonal skills. Many trainees discuss their problems with these staff.

POOR PRACTICE

A trainee's progress was reviewed by a non-specialist. In the section of the review report called 'units to be covered next' the reviewer wrote 'not sure'. The NVQ assessor did not see this. This process gives no guidance or challenge to the trainee.

51. Some initial assessment of trainees' basic and key skills is ineffective. Initial assessment is not always done before trainees start their training programme, and so does not always shape trainees' individual training plans. The decision to place trainees on foundation or advanced modern apprenticeships is rarely based on an assessment of the trainees' potential to meet the requirements of the framework. There is no accreditation of any prior learning. In most occupational areas, there are trainees with skills acquired during previous employment or training, some in family businesses. These skills are not assessed or taken into account when planning their training. Most individual training plans for a particular qualification have the same content for each trainee.

POOR PRACTICE

All trainees are inducted to the workplace, but some trainees, particularly those who do not start at traditional college times, do not receive a college induction.

52. Trainees' progress reviews do not focus on progress towards the NVQ or key skills, nor do they set demanding, achievable targets for the trainees. Records of progress reviews lack detail and often give no indication of what has been achieved to date or what is still to be done. Too often, they simply state that the trainee is progressing towards their qualification.

Management of training

Grade 3

53. The management of work-based learning has been reorganised since the original inspection. The director of the faculty of technology and maritime studies now has responsibility for the management of all work-based learning. A work-based learning unit has been established, led by an operations manager who reports to the director of the faculty. The unit employs three monitoring officers, seven administrative staff and seven full-time equivalent staff who are responsible for carrying out assessments in the workplace. Staff have well-defined job roles and clear lines of reporting and accountability. Monitoring officers visit learners in the workplace to review their progress and welfare. Work-based assessors carry out a

fixed number of assessment visits to each learner. Most learners attend the college one day each week throughout the year for off-the-job training. The college was first accredited with the Investors in People standard in 1998, and has been successfully re-accredited with this award since then.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor co-ordination of management information
- ◆ no planning of on-the-job learning
- ◆ ineffective target-setting by management.
- ◆ insufficient liaison between college staff and employers

54. Good progress has been made in rectifying the first three weaknesses. A work-based learning unit has been established and the monitoring of learners' performance has improved. Work-based assessors have improved communication between the occupational areas and the work-based unit significantly. The work-based learning unit is informed of, and records, assessment of learners' work carried out in the workplace and during off-the-job training. Learners' progress is now monitored more thoroughly. A database for work-based learners has been established. The database contains a range of information, including enrolment details and the results of initial assessment. College staff now maintain closer liaison with employers, and assessors visit learners in the workplace more frequently. The customer liaison manager at the Bluewater retail park is in regular contact with employers and keeps them well informed about training at the college. Since the original inspection, the college has ceased to operate its training credits unit.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective resourcing of work-based learning
- ◆ good staff recruitment process
- ◆ good staff training and development programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor management of key aspects of work-based learning
- ◆ insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

55. In the past year, college managers have provided significant additional resources for work-based learning. Several new posts have been established. These include those for a work-based learning manager and additional assessors. The work-based unit has been set clear targets. The director of faculty responsible for work-based learning ensures that relevant issues are raised and discussed at senior staff meetings. Minutes from these meetings clearly record actions taken and decisions made. Staff who work for the work-based unit are closely involved in future planning. They feel they are well supported by their managers.

56. The staff recruitment system is very thorough. The college has been careful to

appoint staff who have the relevant skills and qualifications. Job descriptions and specifications are well written. All posts are advertised internally, and most are also advertised externally. Posts are advertised in a wide range of publications. Through the information they receive, and the recruitment process as a whole, job applicants are made aware of the career prospects open to them, and of the priority the college gives to staff development. The college seeks to attract learners from groups under-represented in the college and a statement to this effect appears in all job advertisements. Selection procedures are thorough. All new staff take part in a formal induction course which lasts for one-and-a-half days.

57. There is a programme of good staff training and development. During staff appraisals, line managers discuss each individual's training needs, and identify appropriate training courses to meet these. Most staff are well qualified and suitably experienced. Work-based assessors hold, or are working towards, relevant assessor qualifications. Staff are encouraged to attend courses organised by the college. Several recent courses have focused on changes affecting work-based learning have covered for example, equal opportunities, IT applications, key skills training and assessment, and quality assurance procedures specific to work-based learning. The courses are free to staff and most take place in work time. Details of all courses are well publicised on staff notice boards. Alternative dates are offered for the more popular events.

58. Some aspects of work-based learning are poorly managed. There is no service level agreement between the work-based unit and the college's occupational areas. Learners who joined programmes before August 2001, do not fully understand the requirement for them to gain certification in key skills and they have received little key skills training. Learners who joined programmes after August 2001, however, know that they must achieve this certification and staff have helped them to become proficient in key skills. Learners' progress reviews are not always carried out well. There is inadequate monitoring of the frequency with which college staff visit learners in the workplace to carry out their progress reviews. Many learners do not receive progress reviews regularly. In some instances, the number of reviews learners receive does not meet contractual requirements. In its post-inspection plan for improving training programmes, the college recognises that some of the staff who review learners' progress do not fully understand how important a feature of work-based learning programmes this activity is. A staff development event is planned at which staff will be introduced to a new process for recording decisions taken at progress reviews.

59. There is insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. College managers have little information on the training provided by employers. Some employers have well-developed training programmes for their staff. These employers expressed a willingness to share this information with the college, but say they have not been asked to do so. Not all employers are aware of what their employees do at the college one day a week. Increasingly, work-based assessors are facilitating the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Some work towards better co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training by taking part in the

college-based programme themselves. The college is taking action to strengthen the role of work-based assessors.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

60. The college has a quality assurance manual. Learners receive a handbook at the start of their training includes an explanation of quality assurance as it relates to them. The quality assurance manual has been updated recently to cover all areas of work-based learning and it is available on the college intranet. The associate principal has responsibility for quality assurance across the college. A quality assurance manager was appointed in October 2001. The associate principal and the quality assurance manager have joint responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the quality assurance processes relating to work-based learning. The associate principal studies all external verifiers' reports. Recommendations are recorded and action sheets are forwarded to the appropriate occupational heads. The quality assurance system, which includes internal verification procedures, meets the requirements of awarding bodies.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ lack of analysis of data on retention and achievement
- ◆ weak monitoring of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no systematic collection of employers' views
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of subcontractors

61. Since the original inspection, the college's systems for recording and monitoring learners' achievement and retention rates have been improved. The data are analysed and targets for achievement and retention rates in each occupational area are agreed. There are, however, still no separate targets for work-based learners and students on other college programmes in the same vocational area. The college now monitors the effectiveness of off-the-job training that takes place on the college premises. The newly appointed college assessors have specific responsibility for monitoring on-the-job training. Action has been taken to collect the views of employers. For example, questionnaires are regularly sent to employers and their responses to these are analysed. There is now more thorough monitoring of training provided by subcontractors. At present, there is only one subcontractor. The college has a service agreement with the subcontractor. The college has not produced a self-assessment report since the original inspection, although a new one is in draft form.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and detailed quality assurance procedures
- ◆ highly effective contribution of all staff to self-assessment and action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient analysis of work-based learning data
- ◆ no well-established monitoring schedule for on-the-job training

62. The college has a comprehensive range of quality assurance policies and procedures. New procedures for work-based learning were introduced in August 2001. There are clear criteria for evaluating training on work-based learning programmes across all occupational areas in the college. The new procedures for the quality assurance of work-based learning programmes are now an integral part of the college's quality assurance system. Staff received training on the new procedures in December 2001. Some of these procedures have yet to be introduced.

63. Work-based learning staff are fully involved in the quality assurance process. All of the college's quality assurance documents are available to staff in hard copy and on the college's intranet. At the start of their training programme, learners are given a handbook which contains relevant extracts from the quality assurance manual. The self-assessment process is annual and well established. All staff make an effective contribution to it. They monitor the implementation of action plans to improve training and the quality assurance process.

64. Every occupational area in the college sets targets for retention and achievement rates. There is, however, insufficient analysis of the performance of work-based learners. No separate targets are set for the achievement and retention rates of work-based learners. No target is set for the proportion of work-based learners who gain an NVQ. This proportion is currently low. The number of learners in the past three years, who have fulfilled all the objectives in their learning plans is low. No target is set for the proportion of learners who carry out their learning plans in full. There is little analysis of retention rates and of the reasons why some learners leave their programme early.

65. The college does not monitor on-the-job training effectively. Work-based assessors are responsible for carrying out regular monitoring activities. However, most assessors are new in post and have yet to complete a full schedule of visits to workplaces. No other form of monitoring takes place. One well-established assessor does monitor on-the-job training and uses the information to manage learners' training more effectively.