

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
FEBRUARY 2002

Slough Borough Council



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 **learn**direct 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 Slough Borough Council 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).

At the time of the original inspection, Slough Borough Council provided satisfactory training in construction and business administration. It no longer offers training in construction. Slough Borough Council's approach to equality of opportunity is outstanding. The diversity of the local community is reflected among the learners and staff. Learners have an excellent awareness of equal opportunities issues. Support for learners, including pastoral support, is good. Learners with disabilities receive exceptional support. Management of training is good. There are regular and effective discussions between managers, learners and training officers. Communication with the subcontractors that provide off-the-job training is weak, as it was at the time of the original inspection. Quality assurance arrangements are now satisfactory. A number of effective quality assurance initiatives have been introduced since the original inspection, such as closer monitoring of the recruitment, induction and progress review processes that apply to learners. There are plenty of opportunities for learners to give useful feedback. However, the quality assurance system is still not comprehensive. Some aspects of the learning process are monitored informally. Targets for improvement are not routinely set, although achievement rates are rising and retention rates are good. The self-assessment report produced for the reinspection was mostly accurate, but failed to identify some weaknesses in the provision.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Business administration	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	1
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of off-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ excellent implementation of equality of opportunity
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of equal opportunities in learners' recruitment
- ◆ high level of pastoral support
- ◆ excellent internal communication
- ◆ effective initiatives to deal with identified weaknesses

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ inappropriate initial assessment tests
- ◆ lack of a comprehensive quality assurance system

INTRODUCTION

1. Slough Borough Council became a unitary authority in April 1998, taking over responsibility for services previously supplied by Berkshire County Council. Slough Borough Council is the largest employer in Slough, employing over 4,000 people. There has been considerable change within Slough Borough Council over the past four years, including the tendering of local services to external organisations. The work-based learning department was originally created to train young people and adults for a range of construction positions. Slough Borough Council only recruits people from within the boundaries of the borough. The aim of the youth programme is for learners to gain practical work experience and achieve all the requirements of the modern apprenticeship frameworks. At the time of the original inspection, Slough Borough Council provided training towards qualifications in construction, business administration, arts and design, and foundation for work. Training in construction is no longer offered. All the off-the-job training, assessment and internal verification for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 are subcontracted to a local college and a private training company. Learners on foundation for work programmes are trained, assessed and internally verified by Slough Borough Council's employees.

2. At the time of the original inspection, Slough Borough Council held a contract with Thames Valley Enterprise, the local training and enterprise council (TEC), to provide work-based learning for its learners. At that time there were 47 young people and adults in training. Of these, seven were modern apprentices, 18 were national trainees, and 17 were learners on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Five were on basic employability and other work-based learning programmes for adults. Sixteen learners were on construction training programmes, 25 were undertaking business administration training, one was working towards a printing NVQ, and five were foundation for work learners. There are now 31 young people and adults in training. Of these, 21 are foundation modern apprentices, and one is an advanced modern apprentice. Five learners are taking NVQ training for young people. The four adults are on a basic employability or other work-based learning programmes. Twenty-two of the young people are on business administration training programmes, one is working towards a printing NVQ and four are foundation for work learners.

3. Slough Borough Council operates from its administrative base at the town hall in Slough and from its main adult education training centre, the Thomas Gray Centre, also in Slough. The training centre has classrooms and computer workshops. At the time of the original inspection, five of the staff based at the town hall and three of the staff at the Thomas Gray Centre had direct responsibility for TEC-funded learners. Two part-time staff who trained foundation for work learners taught additional courses. These included self-empowerment, keep-fit and yoga. At the time of the reinspection, only the work-based youth co-ordinator was based at the town hall with three staff working at the Thomas Gray centre to

support adults.

4. In 1998, Slough had a population of 101,066. At the time of the original inspection in July 2000, 2.2 per cent of the population were unemployed, compared with the national rate of 3.5 per cent. Of those who were unemployed, 20.3 per cent were aged between 18 and 24. According to Slough Borough Council's statistics, in February 2002, 2 per cent of Slough's population was unemployed, compared with the national rate of 3.5 per cent.

5. Despite the economic boom in Slough, there are pockets of deprivation and high unemployment. The labour market is most buoyant in the service industries, with distribution, hotels and restaurants, banking, finance and insurance and manufacturing being the sectors that employ most of the workforce. The 1991 census showed that 26.7 per cent of the population in Slough were from minority ethnic groups, compared with 6.2 per cent in England as a whole.

6. At the time of the original inspection, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 48.1 per cent in Slough, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. By the time of the reinspection, the proportion in Slough had risen to 52 per cent, while the national rate remained at 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. Slough Borough Council produced its first self-assessment report in 1998. This self-assessment report included the views of the staff at Slough Borough Council. Since then, Slough Borough Council has conducted self-assessment every year. It produced its third self-assessment report in May 2000, in preparation for the original inspection. For the reinspection, the youth and adult team co-ordinators produced a progress plan based on the previous inspection findings. The plan addressed all of the issues raised at the first inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of actions taken in relation to quality assurance. The most recent self-assessment report was written in November 2001 and covers both youth and adult provision. Berkshire's local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) agreed the report in January 2002. The report is thorough but mainly descriptive. The action plan is not sufficiently focused and contains few measurable targets. The self-assessment report went through an internal validation process but this did not include supervisors or subcontractors. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made in the self-assessment report and the proposed actions. However, weaknesses in some aspects of the quality assurance system were not fully recognised.

8. A team of four inspectors, who spent a total of 12 days at Slough Borough Council in September 2000, carried out the original inspection. They visited 13 work placements, and interviewed 27 learners, 14 workplace supervisors and managers and nine members of staff. They observed three progress reviews. Inspectors examined assessment records, learners' portfolios, individual learning plans, internal verification records, learners' and employers' agreements, managers' handbooks, copies of correspondence, job descriptions, minutes of meetings, policies and procedures. Only business administration and construction learners were included in the inspection, as there were too few learners on the media and design and foundation for work training programmes.

9. During February 2002, two inspectors spent a total of six days at Slough Borough Council. They interviewed 18 learners and held 17 interviews with council staff. They visited three workplaces, where they spoke with 17 supervisors. They examined quality assurance documents and procedures, learners' files and portfolios, the reports of audits by the LSC and awarding bodies, policies, procedures, minutes of meetings and records of the achievements of learners. No training sessions were observed.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1					1
Business administration	1		1			2
Total	2	0	1	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

10. Normally, trainees are recruited to the construction programme in September each year. However, Slough Borough Council decided not to recruit any trainees to this programme in 2000. According to normal procedure, potential trainees apply directly to Slough Borough Council or are referred by the local careers service or the Employment Service. Of the 16 trainees on construction programmes, five are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in carpentry and joinery, three are working towards painting and decorating NVQs, three are working towards plumbing NVQs, and five are working towards NVQs in heating and ventilation. All trainees undergo initial assessment and are employed by Slough Borough Council on fixed-term contracts. The modern apprentice and national trainee programmes were introduced in 1999-2000 for Slough Borough Council trainees. Before that, all trainees were on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Seven of the construction trainees are modern apprentices, two are national trainees and seven are on other work-based learning programmes for young people. All trainees attend local colleges of further education for one day a week throughout their training programme. At college, trainees receive theory training and participate in practical workshops. Assessment and internal verification take place at the relevant college, and are undertaken by a suitably qualified college assessor or internal verifier. There are no work-based assessors. For the remainder of the week, trainees work either at Slough Borough Council's depot at Petersfield or on a variety of sites within the Slough Borough Council area. Trainees work mainly on building and refurbishment projects. Seven of the 10 trainees who started other work-based learning programmes for young people in 1997-98 and 1998-99 are still in training. Two of the 10 trainees left the programme early with no qualifications and one has achieved all the targets on their individual training plan. All of the seven trainees who started the modern apprenticeship in 1999-2000 are still in training and three of these have achieved their NVQ at level 2. One of the three trainees who started the national traineeship left early without a qualification. The other two are still in training. The inspectors found the four strengths in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice and agreed with two of the four weaknesses. Additional, significant strengths were identified during inspection, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

All trainees receive comprehensive health and safety training as part of their induction. They receive a health and safety training certificate at the end of their first week. Trainees are motivated by this achievement at such an early stage in their programme.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of work-related learning activities
- ◆ exceptionally flexible training programme
- ◆ good opportunities for additional training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace

◆ no planning of on-the-job training

11. Trainees benefit from a wide range of realistic activities through the off-the-job training at college. These training sessions develop the trainees' working skills to meet industrial standards. For example, full-size heating systems and windows are used in workshops, rather than scaled-down models. Workshops are well appointed and spacious and provide opportunities for trainees to participate in a wide variety of projects under stimulated but realistic working conditions. Trainees are well motivated and value their training. Training sessions are organised into different modules which reflect the different skills trainees need to learn. Trainees are issued with learning packages at the start of each training module. These are of a good standard. The language and terminology are 'user-friendly' and new concepts are clearly explained. All trainers and supervisors have appropriate and relevant vocational experience. They are well qualified in their trade areas. They closely supervise the trainees and encourage them to take responsibility for their work. Assessors use the off-the-job activities to help determine whether trainees are competent and ready for assessment. Key skills are well integrated into the course and recognised both by trainees and by Slough Borough Council's staff. Trainees make good use of a workbook and diary to record activities at work. Trainees are clear about what they have to do to achieve their qualifications and understand the assessment process. They are routinely placed in situations which help them to build their self-confidence.

12. The flexibility within these training modules is good, and allows trainees to proceed at their own pace throughout the entire programme. Trainees benefit from the additional time and instruction which are given where needed. Both Slough Borough Council and the colleges attended are particularly responsive to trainees' individual needs and requests, amending and extending individual programmes where necessary. One of the colleges has recently changed the optional units available to trainees so that they are more appropriate to the refurbishment work that Slough Borough Council's trainees are involved in.

13. Trainees attend additional training programmes provided by Slough Borough Council. These programmes contribute both to their NVQs and to their personal development. This additional training starts off with health and safety training and also includes manufacturers' training courses for specific products. Health and safety issues are regularly reinforced, and due regard is given to all health and safety aspects in both on- and off-the-job training.

14. The colleges send details of the off-the-job training to the training officers at Slough Borough Council. However, this information is not used to plan the trainees' on-the-job training programme. Workplace supervisors are not sufficiently involved or available to discuss the matching of off-the-job training with what happens at work. Trainees do not have a plan for this part of their training programme. The training officers who carry out trainees' progress reviews are not occupationally qualified and rely on supervisors and trainers' expertise.

15. There are no work-based assessors, and all assessments take place off the job.

Consequently, assessment is only ever made in simulations of the workplace, albeit realistic ones. Workplace supervisors rarely meet trainers or assessors and have little or no involvement in the assessment process. Opportunities for work-based assessment are missed and trainees' portfolios rely heavily on projects and assignments worked on at college.

Business administration

Grade 3

16. There are 25 trainees on the business administration training programme. Of these, 21 are working towards administration qualifications, one is undertaking accountancy training and three are undertaking information technology training. Five of the administration trainees and all of the accountancy and information technology trainees are on other work-based training programmes for young people. The remaining 16 administration trainees are national trainees. Trainees are recruited from the local area in September each year. They have an initial assessment, followed by an interview. Information technology trainees are given a separate test to assess their suitability for working in this area. Trainees are given a one-week induction and are then appointed to a work placement in one of the council's departments. All trainees work in various departments of Slough Borough Council, including local libraries and sports centres. The areas which trainees work in include community services, information technology, legal and corporate services and human resources. Most trainees are moved around different departments every six months. Each trainee is allocated a week on reception to ensure that there are opportunities to collect suitable evidence for their qualification. Trainees are initially on work placements, but can progress to permanent employment while they are still on training programmes. Jobs in Slough Borough Council are advertised internally on noticeboards and through the website. Off-the-job training, assessment, verification and certification for the business administration and information technology NVQs are subcontracted to a private training company, while training and assessment for the accountancy NVQ are subcontracted to a local college. Administration and information technology trainees are visited in the workplace by their assessor. Only one of the workplace supervisors is also an assessor. One third of trainees who started other work-based training programmes for young people in 1997-98 and 1998-99 achieved all the targets on their individual training plans and one third left the programme early with no qualifications. Five of these trainees are still in training and three of them have achieved NVQs at level 2. Two trainees started the modern apprenticeship in 1997-98. Of these, neither completed their individual training plan, one achieved an NVQ at level 2 and the other left the programme early with no qualifications. The national traineeship was introduced for Slough Borough Council's trainees in 1999-2000. Of the 11 trainees who started this programme, none have yet achieved all the targets on their individual training plans. Three left with no qualifications and the remainder are still in training. The self-assessment report accurately identified all four strengths in business administration and was self-critical in identifying its weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with one of the weaknesses, which related to poor assessment practice, and found two to be of minimal significance to

trainees. They identified two additional weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good handbooks for supervisors and trainees
- ◆ wide range of off-the-job training
- ◆ thorough process for trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ good teamwork between supervisors and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow achievement rates
- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ late introduction of key skills in the training programmes

17. Trainees and supervisors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They receive a well-structured handbook where all the information is easily accessible. Supervisors attend a training day, during which the information pack is explained and their views are sought. Trainees receive a high level of focused guidance based on the handbook which has been given to them. Trainees receive their information pack at induction. Both handbooks contain useful and comprehensive guidelines about the training programmes. Supervisors use these handbooks as guidance on witness testimonies, progress-review forms, information on health and safety and a list of additional training programmes.

18. The subcontracted private training company offers a wide range of off-the-job training for the administration and information technology components of the programme. This includes courses in key skills, information technology, equal opportunities, time management, business correspondence, word-processing and spreadsheets. Additional training is also provided by Slough Borough Council. This training is promoted through a course calendar. Managers encourage trainees to attend relevant courses which will help their development. For example, one trainee has been given specific training on the use of the Internet and is currently studying to obtain additional qualifications. Evidence from off-the-job training is used effectively towards achievement of the business administration NVQ.

19. The progress review process for this training programme is very good. The first progress review is carried out once trainees have been in their placements for three weeks to check that they are settling in satisfactorily. From then, thorough progress reviews are carried out at least quarterly, and often more frequently. Each progress review involves the training officer, the trainee and their supervisor. Supervisors are an integral part of the review process in that they have to agree any work-based tasks. Progress towards NVQ achievement, health and safety, attendance and future plans are all discussed in reviews. Supervisors and trainees contribute to the discussion and there is effective input from the training officer. The training officer has relevant occupational experience, as well as assessors' and

verifiers' qualifications, and is available on site to give advice and guidance to trainees.

20. All trainees have a job description for their area of work. Supervisors select and organise various work tasks which enable trainees to gain a good range of evidence for their NVQ portfolios. They act as mentors to support the trainees' personal development. Many trainees are also supported by a 'buddy', with whom they can discuss personal or work-related problems. Trainees gain confidence through this support and through being given responsible work roles. Informal communications between the training officer and the assessors from the private training company are good.

21. Achievement on all business administration programmes is slow, and assessors have signed off very few NVQ units. Trainees do not cross-reference the evidence collected for their level 2 NVQs with the requirements of their level 3 qualifications. Trainees have to take responsibility for cross-referencing their own evidence with their qualification aims, and the progress of less motivated trainees is further delayed by this process. Some trainees have spent several months in work roles which provide insufficient opportunities for them to gather the range of evidence required by the NVQ they are working towards.

22. While trainees' portfolios contain a wealth of product evidence from work, there is little effective use of witness testimony and few observations are made in the workplace. Questions used by the assessors to check the knowledge of the trainees are not recorded in the portfolio. Assessment is not planned and trainees are often unclear about how tasks relate to their NVQ.

23. For national trainees, key skills are taught and assessed at the end of their programme. Key skills are not integrated into the NVQ training programme. Furthermore, where trainees have already achieved key skills, this is not recognised. The subcontracted private training company has, however, recently introduced some key skills monitoring records and the training officer is working towards the key skills practitioners' award.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 1

24. Slough Borough Council places equal opportunities at the core of all its activities. The chief executive has overall responsibility for this area and the head of personnel has operational responsibility. There is a mission statement on equal opportunities, which is widely disseminated. This statement is supported by a comprehensive set of policies and procedures relating to equal opportunities, including grievance and disciplinary procedures, and procedures for dismissal and selection for redundancy, with appropriate appeals arrangements. Supervisors have a handbook, which details all the personnel policies related to equal opportunities.

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees receive equal opportunities training during induction. This is given in a lively and interesting way by using quizzes and riddles. Trainees receive a booklet on equal opportunities during this induction. This part of the induction was highly memorable and effective.

All staff and trainees are issued with a booklet about equal opportunities. Equal opportunities policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to keep them in line with the overall strategy of Slough Borough Council and to take account of new developments, such as the *Human Rights Act 1998*. Half of the trainees recruited in the current year are from minority ethnic groups. Four per cent of the trainees who started training programmes have disabilities. Men and women are equally represented on all training programmes. Internal equal opportunities data are collected and analysed and compared with data from the local community. Many of the strengths and all of the weaknesses in the self assessment report were simply descriptive accounts of procedures. Inspectors identified three additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent implementation of equal opportunities policy to meet local needs
- ◆ open approach to tackling equal opportunities
- ◆ highly effective equal opportunities training
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of equal opportunities in trainees' recruitment
- ◆ positive role models among staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

25. Slough Borough Council has taken full responsibility for creating its own equal opportunities agenda, which is mainly driven by the needs of the local community. Equal opportunities at Slough Borough Council is excellent and is not solely driven by the requirements of external bodies. The TEC-funded programmes are part of Slough Borough Council's overall strategy. The youth training programmes are designed and promoted in such a way as to contribute to the creation of a workforce which reflects the diversity of the local community, and the adult programme addresses the needs of adults who experience social exclusion. There is good access to buildings and facilities at all Slough Borough Council's sites for wheelchair users and those with limited mobility.

26. The effectiveness of the equal opportunities strategy is demonstrated by the extent to which it has permeated the culture of the council. Staff at Slough Borough Council show a willingness to tackle tough issues openly and honestly, and demonstrate a deep concern with equality of opportunity. There is also a high level of awareness of equal opportunities among trainees. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is constantly reinforced by supervisors and by information disseminated across the council. Courses on equal opportunities are frequently held for both staff and trainees.

27. Recruitment and selection procedures have been carefully designed to ensure that there are no barriers to prevent potential new entrants from joining training programmes. There is rigorous monitoring of each stage of the recruitment process

to ensure equality of opportunity. Slough Borough Council's recruitment strategy has successfully attracted trainees from minority ethnic groups, enabling the council to tackle under-representation and to counter the effects of past discrimination. The staff profile is now representative of the local community. When trainees come to the end of their programme, a standing order of the council enables them to be treated as internal applicants and they can be matched to the jobs which are available.

28. The handling of complaints and grievances at Slough Borough Council is very good. All trainees' complaints and grievances are handled promptly and in accordance with the agreed procedures, as are disciplinary matters. Trainees are surrounded by positive images of cultural diversity. They interact every day with colleagues who present positive role models and who can help them in ways which are culturally sensitive.

Trainee support

Grade 2

29. Trainee support arrangements at Slough Borough Council operate in two distinct ways. Youth trainees are regarded as employees and can access all the sources of support available to Slough Borough Council's staff, while the five adult trainees are regarded as adult education students and can access support from their tutors and adult education staff. Slough Borough Council recruits trainees through the Employment Service, the school careers service and advertisements. All adult trainees complete a basic skills test in English, as required by the TEC, and have an interview with the project manager. Youth trainees take part in a longer and more structured interview process and may have as many as four initial assessment tests. Adult trainees receive a two-week induction to their programme, while youth trainees have a one-week induction followed by an induction to the workplace. All trainees have individual weekly progress reviews with their supervisor or tutor. Adult trainees receive monthly progress reviews from their tutor, details of which are recorded. Youth trainees have progress reviews with their training officer every twelve weeks. Adult trainees have timetabled sessions for job search. Youth trainees find out about job opportunities available at the council through the personnel department. Three youth training officers and one adult education project manager are involved in implementing trainee support. However, none have a formal qualification in accrediting prior learning and experience. The self-assessment report identified four strengths, three of which were found to be no more than normal practice, although inspectors agreed there was a strength in the support arrangements for trainees with disabilities. Inspectors identified four additional strengths and agreed with the weaknesses identified through self-assessment. They awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent recruitment and selection procedures
- ◆ thorough induction for youth trainees
- ◆ high level of pastoral support
- ◆ plentiful availability of tutors and staff who speak community languages
- ◆ excellent support for trainees with disabilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some inappropriate initial assessment tests
- ◆ insufficient accreditation of prior learning and experience
- ◆ lack of job focus in adult training programme

30. Slough Borough Council has a policy of seeking to attract young people from within the borough for its training programmes. This is consistent with its statement of core values. The training officers work closely with local schools and the careers service to increase awareness of the opportunities available for young people in the area. Advertising in local venues, such as sports centres, and articles in the local press have also contributed to a successful marketing and recruitment strategy. Selection then proceeds in line with a well-designed and detailed process, which is consistent for all applicants. Preset questions are used in interviews to ensure that occupational awareness, skills and abilities, motivation and commitment, appearance, personality and attitude are covered. These are scored to assist interviewers in making objective judgements. Workplace supervisors are closely involved in the process. They contribute by identifying suitable placements, drawing up job specifications and interviewing applicants.

31. Youth trainees benefit from a particularly thorough induction. They receive a strong message that they are embarking on a career with the council, rather than just a training programme. The well-planned general induction includes a motivating session on health and safety and an interesting session on equal opportunities. In addition to the general induction, there is a departmental induction which includes more specific health and safety information and an insight into the work of the department. The colleges and private training company involved in youth programmes provide further induction for the NVQ. Trainees find the various stages of induction both memorable and enjoyable. As many trainees are recent school-leavers, the induction period helps them to find their feet in the world of work.

32. All trainees receive a high level of pastoral support. Adult trainees have daily contact with their tutors, who give substantial amounts of individual attention. Slough Borough Council takes a broad view of trainees' welfare and encourages trainees to take part in yoga classes and 'self-empowerment' workshops. These have proved popular with adult trainees, helping them to overcome personal barriers such as depression and low self-esteem. Youth trainees have good access to support from their training officer, supervisor and other colleagues.

Arrangements are made for former trainees to support current trainees. Mentoring has emerged naturally and is actively encouraged. This has been of particular benefit to trainees who were in danger of dropping out of their programme or of being removed for lateness or poor attendance. Trainees have access to a confidential counselling service from Slough Borough Council's two welfare officers.

33. Staff who have direct experience of the culture of some of the trainees give support in a culturally sensitive manner. For example, arrangements were made for a male Pakistani trainee to be given support and guidance by a male Pakistani colleague from outside of his department, with good results. Staff speak a range of community languages, making such support even more effective.

34. Trainees with disabilities receive exceptional support from Slough Borough Council. They are encouraged to be open about their disabilities, so that suitable arrangements can be made to support them. A deaf trainee, for example, is provided with a signer for all off-the-job training, whether at work or at the subcontractor's premises. Colleagues in the workplace have learned finger spelling and basic signing, to further support this trainee. A visually impaired trainee has special computer equipment, including a scanner to enable him to enlarge printed material. Trainees with disabilities are making good progress in all aspects of their training programmes and are moving successfully into employment.

35. In both occupational areas, initial assessment of trainees is not well-designed. Adult trainees who have been referred to Slough Borough Council by the Employment Service because of their lack of English are given an English test which is designed for native speakers. The test includes inappropriate spelling and punctuation exercises. Many trainees with a lack of English skills are unable to attempt all of these tests and some feel embarrassed by their inability to complete them. Tutors are, therefore, unable to accurately assess the level of trainees' language skills and training programmes are not always tailored to trainees' needs. In youth programmes, there are a number of problems relating to initial assessment. For example, the key skills literacy test is long-winded. One of the construction skills tests includes instructions which new trainees do not easily understand. The test given to information technology trainees includes exercises on systems analysis which are not relevant to the NVQ in using information technology. Most of these tests have been designed internally and have not been standardised. The scores are difficult to interpret and it is unclear how the results are used. Furthermore, staff make no use of the results of initial assessment when they draw up trainees' individual training plans. These plans contain either no arrangements for additional support or inappropriate arrangements for additional support. The plans are not individualised and target dates are usually set two years from starting. However, the training plans of recent recruits are showing signs of more individualisation.

36. There are insufficient procedures for accrediting trainees' prior learning and experience. Some trainees have already achieved key skills qualifications when

they join their programmes. However, this is not recognised and these trainees still have to complete an initial assessment test for key skills. Trainees on the adult programmes are encouraged to bring in details of past qualifications for their curricula vitae, but little use is made of this information either to plan the training or to speed up achievement.

37. In 1999, 67 trainees started on the adult programme but only eight obtained jobs and only two benefited from a work placement during the programme. Staff are aware of this shortcoming and have taken steps to improve job-search activities. A range of reference and teaching materials has been purchased and structured job-search sessions have been timetabled. Job search is not, however, integrated into the whole of the foundation for work programme. The overall training programme itself does not focus on the practicalities of finding a job and does not remove barriers to employment effectively.

Management of training

Grade 2

38. All work-based training programmes are situated within three areas of Slough Borough Council: town services, legal and corporate services, and education. A chief officer has overall responsibility for each department and reports to the chief executive. All construction trainees are within the town services department, and three training officers work with the supervisors and trainees on the programme. Business administration trainees are placed in the legal and corporate services department, with the training and development officer monitoring the training and assessment of the trainees on this programme. Adult trainees are placed within the education department, where they are the responsibility of a trainer and the project manager. Links with supervisors and work placements are maintained through the progress-review system and more regular informal communication. Each trainee has an agreement which lists and explains their work location, allowances, hours of work, conditions of training, leave and the role of the TEC. There are additional guidance notes for trainees which explain the individual training plans, their training programme, grievance and disciplinary procedures and sickness and absence procedures. Slough Borough Council identified five strengths in their self-assessment report, two of which inspectors agreed with. One was found to be no more than normal practice and another was deemed to be more appropriate for trainee support. Of the eight weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, four had been addressed by the time of inspection, two related to quality assurance and two had minimal impact on trainees. Inspectors identified one significant additional strength in the excellent internal communications at Slough Borough Council and two additional weaknesses, and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent internal communication

- ◆ frequent and productive reviews of performance
- ◆ extensive staff development

GOOD PRACTICE

SBC issues a corporate training calendar to all trainees and supervisors. This is used to plan on- and off-the-job training to link with the NVQ. The calendar is updated monthly and contains course dates for the next 11 months. Supervisors encourage trainees to attend these courses which cover subjects as diverse as using particular software applications, customer care, health and safety, budgeting and personal development.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ no service level agreements with colleges

39. Internal communication is excellent and staff are well informed about changes and developments. Regular monthly meetings are held to help link departments and teams. There is good sharing of knowledge and experiences through these meetings and information from the council is also disseminated to trainees through the meetings. Any changes to personnel procedures or support staff are relayed to trainees through their pay slips. Training officers maintain frequent contact with trainees, sometimes seeing them on a daily basis. Trainees value the opportunity to visit their training officer's premises to discuss any problems they may have. Trainees benefit from such problems being resolved effectively and quickly.

40. All trainees have individual discussions with, and receive feedback from, their line managers. These meetings between managers and trainees can be as frequent as every week for new staff, although more established team members generally meet with their managers for discussion and feedback once a month. Ideas are shared in these one-to-one sessions and programmes developed to meet the needs of trainees, the local community and the workforce. Managers use these sessions to review recruitment, retention, progress and achievements. Staff receive coaching and development through discussion of the business and their own professional practice. Problems and issues are identified, discussed and resolved immediately and effectively. Any shortage of resources is discussed and managers act on specific needs quickly. These regular discussions are used as the basis for the annual appraisal system. Some trainees use these one-to-one discussions as evidence towards their NVQs. A diary has recently been issued to all trainees to record the results of these meetings.

41. There is a calendar which gives times and details of internal training courses and many trainees also receive external staff training and development. Staff development has included training in areas such as health and safety, assessment, equal opportunities, interviewing and selection procedures and using computer software. Trainees have greatly benefited from this external training. Job roles are further developed through work shadowing.

42. All trainees are recruited through Slough Borough Council's excellent recruitment and selection procedures which ensure equality of opportunity. They are inducted into their role and receive support from their managers to assist this induction. Annual appraisals determine trainees' development needs and identify training requirements. Training and corporate issues are discussed at monthly team meetings. Data are produced on the numbers starting training, achievements and early leavers, and these are disseminated to trainees and discussed with them.

43. Despite the excellent progress review systems, training officers do not monitor the progress of Slough Borough Council's trainees effectively. There is no management system to show what stage trainees are currently at in their programme. Staff rely on the colleges and the private training company to provide this service and to monitor trainees' progress. Adult trainees' development is not monitored during work experience.

44. The level of service which Slough Borough Council expects from the private training company is set out in a letter. This is appropriate for the current number of trainees. However, there are no service level agreements between Slough Borough Council and the relevant colleges. While the colleges provide information about trainees' progress and attendance, there is very little other communication between these colleges and Slough Borough Council. Links between on- and off-the-job training are poor and workplace supervisors only discover what trainees are studying at college through the trainees themselves. There have also been instances of trainees claiming to have completed their NVQs, when the college has not yet assessed their portfolios. Furthermore, supervisors are not always given sufficient information to be able to plan trainees' work schedules around the off-the-job training.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

45. The work-based youth training unit has a quality assurance policy and a set of related procedures. The procedures and associated documents were updated over a year ago. They include arrangements for the recruitment and selection of learners, and for their progress reviews. There are no targets set for retention or achievement rates. Each of the council's departments is internally audited every four years. The youth training unit was last audited in March 2000. Every month, Berkshire LSC monitors issues related to Slough Borough Council's contract and the quality of its provision. The training and development officer is responsible for all aspects of quality assurance. Destinations of learners are monitored in each programme area and the data are used to measure the success of the training programmes. A number of learners gain jobs with the council. Questionnaires are distributed to learners and the results are analysed. Training, assessment and internal verification are subcontracted to a private training company and a local college. Slough Borough Council has service level agreements with both subcontractors. Learners and workplace supervisors are given handbooks which explain their roles and responsibilities. The youth and adult work-based learning officers meet regularly. Quality assurance arrangements for work-based learning for adults differ from those used for work-based youth training. A progress report action plan was produced for the reinspection. The most recent self-assessment report, written in November 2001, was made available for inspectors at the reinspection.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficient quality assurance arrangements

46. Since the original inspection, most quality assurance documents have been redesigned and updated. Procedures have been rewritten to conform to the council's quality control requirements. There have been a number of new initiatives to improve the quality of learners' training and assessment. An introduction to key skills training and basic skills testing are now included in the learners' induction. Both subcontractors have recently signed service level agreements, drawn up by the council's legal team. Scheduled meetings with the external verifier, subcontractors, assessors and adult programme manager now take place. Assessments in the workplace now take place more frequently. Individual learning plans and the progress review process have been improved. Regular meetings have increased the opportunities for learners to give feedback. The corporate recruitment team carefully monitors applications for the youth work-based programme. A standardised selection process is used to ensure consistency of the recruitment process. Monthly meetings with the representative from Berkshire LSC are used to discuss quality assurance issues. Handbooks for learners and workplace supervisors have been updated.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective initiatives to deal with identified weaknesses
- ◆ good informal systems to gain feedback

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of a comprehensive quality assurance system
- ◆ inadequate setting and monitoring of targets

47. A range of quality assurance initiatives has improved the quality of the learners' experience. Particular attention has been paid to reviewing the processes for recruitment, induction and progress reviews. There has been an increased emphasis on learners' achieving the modern apprenticeship framework. In the past year, four learners have successfully completed all the requirements of the framework, a marked contrast to previous years. Improved support and closer monitoring of progress has led to faster progress towards achieving qualifications. Assessors now visit more frequently than at the time of the original inspection, sometimes twice a week. Assessment practice has improved and is mostly good. This is the case in business administration, where assessment practice was identified as a weakness at the original inspection. The handbook for supervisors has been improved and updated and supervisors have been trained in the new procedures. Most supervisors are developing a good understanding of their role in the training process. They provide good opportunities for learners to develop their vocational and personal skills. The policy of moving learners around the council's own departments ensures that learners receive a valuable range of work experiences. Supervisors provide good individual support for learners. A new

procedure that matches learners' skills to jobs within the council has greatly improved their chances of gaining employment. The council continues to value and support the youth scheme. At any one time, most departments have at least one learner. Learners benefit from a system where they receive coaching and support from a mentor. There are good opportunities for learners to attend additional training courses. The learners with learning difficulties and disabilities receive special consideration and support. The council has recently started working with Berkshire LSC to monitor the quality of provision. The work-based youth officer prepared an action plan with targets and costings and this has secured additional funding. The action plan includes strategies to improve low rates of achievement. The retention rate is very good and few learners leave before the planned end of their programme.

48. Feedback from learners is used effectively to make improvements. The training and development officer has regular group and individual meetings with learners to obtain feedback. Assessors attend focus group meetings and the information gained is used to improve the quality of the learners' experience. A questionnaire provides useful information, although little formal use is made of the findings. The training and development officer makes good use of her work-based qualifications and experience to assist in the assessment process. The youth training officer has a particularly high workload because of the priority given to supporting learners, supervisors and assessors. Sixteen of the 27 learners who are on work-based programmes have officially finished their training and are due to complete all aspects of their individual learning plans. The contract target with Berkshire LSC this year is for 51 learners. A part-time administrative support has recently been appointed to assist the youth training officer.

49. The quality assurance system is not comprehensive and there is an over-reliance on informal systems. The new quality assurance policy and procedures do not focus sufficiently on the learning process. It is not clear, for example, who is responsible for co-ordinating on- and off-the-job training. Quality assurance documents have been updated and instructions rewritten. However, a detailed description of all the processes and actions required to assure quality has not been drawn up. Although the focus of the adult training programme has changed to gaining jobs, progress in developing quality assurance procedures has been very slow. Not all the weaknesses identified at the original inspection have been fully rectified. For example, the late assessment of key skills and slow training of supervisors as assessors have not been dealt with satisfactorily. Some learners still have difficulty in cross-referencing their evidence which can delay them completing their qualification. However, because of Slough Borough Council's increased emphasis on key skills training, some learners have recently achieved their qualification and others are near completion. The adult training programme that now has its focus on learners gaining jobs has been very slow to develop its own quality assurance procedures.

50. There are insufficient clear performance measures and formal monitoring arrangements. There are no clear targets for learners' retention and achievement

rates. The frequency of formal reviews with subcontractors is not specified and Slough Borough Council does not look at subcontractors' own quality assurance procedures or their analysis of their own performance. The monitoring of on- and off-the-job training is not sufficiently planned. External verifiers' reports are not always available or regularly reviewed. The training and development officer observes learners being assessed and meets assessors regularly. However, there are no records or action points arising from these observations. There is no formal monitoring of the workplace supervisors' key role in the training process.