

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT  
MARCH 2001

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION APRIL  
2002

# The Royal National College for the Blind



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

### **Adult Learning Inspectorate**

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

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- ◆ adult and community learning
- ◆ learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- ◆ education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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

### **Grading**

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

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

## SUMMARY

The original inspection of the Royal National College for the Blind was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for business administration 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 business administration 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](http://www.ali.gov.uk)).

**At the original inspection, the Royal National College for the Blind's training in business administration was unsatisfactory. It has improved and is now satisfactory. The college provides good off-the-job training on well-structured training programmes. Retention and achievement rates are good on both administration and information technology programmes. There is, however, inadequate co-ordination of training in the workplace and in college. The Royal National College for the Blind offers good training in hair and beauty. A wide range of opportunities for additional training covers most of the complementary therapies. Training in media and design is outstanding, with excellent links between theory and practical work. The resources are excellent and match commercial standards. Learners work in the college's recording studio with commercial bands which have specifically requested individual learners because of their expertise. Support for learners is outstanding. There is a strong commitment to equal opportunities. There is an effective and thorough induction which ensures that learners are able to take full advantage of the facilities in the college. Management of training is satisfactory, and effective partnerships extend the opportunities available to learners. There is little use of data to guide management decisions. Quality assurance is now satisfactory. Feedback from learners is used effectively to improve the quality of training. The college systematically monitors the quality of teaching and learning by observing lessons. There is insufficient use of target-setting for improvement.**

## GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	4
Hair & beauty	2
Media & design	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	1
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Business administration	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

## KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high achievement and retention rates
- ◆ good off-the job training in business administration
- ◆ excellent training by extremely well-qualified staff in hair and beauty, and media and design
- ◆ comprehensive development and delivery of media and design programmes
- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy and supporting documents
- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ excellent pastoral support
- ◆ comprehensive and effective strategic plan
- ◆ integrated and effective self-assessment
- ◆ good use of feedback from learners

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ incomplete implementation of new management structure
- ◆ weak evaluation of work placements
- ◆ insufficient use of target setting for improvement

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Royal National College for the Blind is a charity and company limited by guarantee. It is a residential college, providing education and occupational training for blind and visually impaired people. Founded in the 1870s in London, it moved to its present site in Hereford in 1978. The college is situated in 25 acres of grounds within easy walking distance of the city, and has good road and rail links. The college offers two main areas of education and training. Training for those under 25 years old, which is funded by 29 local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) and work-based learning for adults which is funded by the Residential Training Unit (RTU) of the government office for the Northeast. The college also holds contracts with Jobcentre Plus, including a national contract for basic employability training for visually impaired people, a contract with the West Midlands Unit of Delivery for assessing clients on work placements, and a contract with the Hereford Unit of Delivery to provide foundation for work training for people with disabilities. Students and learners are recruited from the whole of the United Kingdom. At the time of the original inspection, 69 of the 85 learners following work-based learning programmes were residential at the college. At the time of the reinspection, 66 of the 93 adult learners were residents.

2. The college's mission is to develop the independence and potential of people who are blind or partially sighted. The college aims to provide a learning environment which encourages a positive attitude to the potential of people with a visual impairment, and offers specialist training and learning support. There are four halls of residence, and there are houses both on and off the campus to give learners a wide choice of accommodation. There is a distance learning course for learners in business administration who wish to work from home. There is a wide range of sporting and recreational facilities, and learners are involved in running these. Most learners are referred to the college by disability employment advisers. The college employs 228 staff, including catering, maintenance and residential support staff. Specialist visiting lecturers are also widely used. There is one member of staff to every four or five learners. This ratio is necessary to meet the individual needs of learners. Many of the learners on work-based learning programmes have recently experienced total loss or reduction of vision, and require individual learning programmes which include rehabilitation and personal support.

3. At the time of the original inspection, the college offered training in business administration, media and design, remedial therapy, piano tuning and sport and recreation. Piano tuning and sport and recreation were not inspected as there were insufficient learners on the programmes. Since the original inspection, the college has developed programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in customer service, and advice and guidance. The college, in partnership with Hereford College of Technology, has also developed a music technology programme which is offered jointly by the two colleges. At the time of the original

inspection, there were 85 learners on work-based learning programmes for adults in the following occupational areas:

Occupational area	Number of learners
Business administration	40
Hair & beauty (remedial therapy)	19
Media & design	17
Not inspected	
Manufacturing (piano technology)	6
Leisure, sport and travel	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>

At the time of reinspection, there were 93 learners on work-based learning programmes for adults in the following areas of learning:

Area of learning	Number of learners
Engineering, technology, manufacturing	8
Business administration	16
Information and communications technology	11
Retailing, customer service	11
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	11
Hairdressing & beauty therapy(remedial therapy)	15
Visual & performing arts and media	17
Foundation programmes (work preparation)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>

Learners work towards nationally recognised qualifications including NVQs at levels 2 to 3, or follow other training programmes.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The Royal National College for the Blind produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for an inspection by the Further Education Funding Council in May 1999. In August 2000, another self-assessment was carried out, and this was updated for the March 2001 Training Standards Council (TSC) inspection. TSC inspectors gave the same grades as were in the self-assessment report for training in hair and beauty, and for equal opportunities and management of training. They gave higher grades for trainee support and for training in media and design, and lower grades for training in business administration and quality assurance. Following the TSC inspection, the college developed an action plan to consolidate the strengths and remedy the weaknesses identified by the inspection. This was updated in February 2002 in preparation for reinspection. A new self-assessment report and development plan were produced in December 2001. All staff attended a briefing session on self-assessment and action-planning. Staff teams, the college management team and governors were involved in the preparation of the report. The self-assessment process included the residential aspects of the college, such as catering and maintenance. The impact on learning was used as the basis for judgements. The college assessed and graded its training programmes against the seven key questions in the *Common Inspection Framework*.

5. A team of five inspectors and one specialist in music technology spent a total of 18 days at the college in March 2001. They interviewed 61 learners and 27 staff. They observed and graded 18 learning sessions and observed three assessments and five progress reviews. Inspectors examined learners' individual learning plans, progress review records, files and portfolios. A wide range of other documentation was examined, including contracts, external reports, internal reports, minutes of meetings, staff records, policies and procedures.

6. Reinspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors, who spent a total of 12 days at the Royal National College for the Blind in April 2002. Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including learners' personal files, achievement and progression data, RTU contracts and audit reports, college policies and procedures, quality assurance documents and minutes of meetings. Inspectors observed five learning sessions and visited one work placement. They interviewed 10 learners and held 41 meetings with college staff, including the principal, members of the college management team, teaching staff, internal verifiers, team leaders and programme co-ordinators. They inspected 12 learners' files and 14 work portfolios.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		2	2			4
Hair & beauty	3	2				5
Media & design	6	3				9
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration	0	2	2	1	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 3

7. The college offers training for NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in administration and at level 2 in using information technology (IT) for teleworking. Learners can take administration qualifications either residentially or by distance learning. The IT for teleworking programme is offered through distance learning. The programmes normally last for one year, but can be extended. On the residential courses, there are five learners working towards NVQs in administration at level 2 and one working towards level 3. On the distance learning programmes, 10 learners are following programmes in administration, and 11 in using IT for teleworking, all at level 2. Some of these learners are not working towards a full NVQ but are taking units or parts of units. Learners are recruited nationally. On joining the college, they receive an induction that includes an introduction to the area of learning and an explanation of the qualification. Although distance learners work mainly from home, they attend college for eight residential training blocks during the year, each lasting two or three days. The computer training rooms hold up to 10 learners, but groups are usually smaller. The college carries out initial assessment which identifies the additional aids required by learners. All learners undertake an eight-week work-placement in a business organisation near their home. The college work-placement officer accompanies them on an initial visit to the work placement. Assessors visit learners to carry out work-based assessment. There are 16 staff working in this occupational area, of whom 11 are qualified NVQ assessors. There are two designated internal verifiers. Most staff are very experienced in working with visually impaired learners, and are Braille users.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ over-reliance on assignments for evidence
- ◆ fragmented structure of administration programmes
- ◆ inadequate recording practices in administration



- ◆ poor internal verification processes

8. The college has made good progress in resolving the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. The administration programme has been restructured and this is now a strength. The use of assignments is now satisfactory. Assignments are only used to develop background skills and knowledge and are not used for assessments. Simulations are only used when evidence cannot be collected through learners' everyday work. A standardised recording pack has been introduced for assessors to monitor individual's progress, although there is no overall monitoring system. The new internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. There are regular meetings between verifiers and assessors to standardise assessment and share good practice. There is no overall sampling plan covering units, assessors and candidates, but this is being developed. Assessors are observed regularly. Inspectors awarded the same grade for business administration as that given in the updated action plan.

### ***STRENGTHS***

- ◆ well-designed and structured programmes
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent learning resources
- ◆ good achievement and retention rates

### ***WEAKNESSES***

- ◆ slow progress towards NVQs
- ◆ inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some staff lack recent occupational experience

9. The college has developed well-designed and well-organised administration and IT training programmes. The programmes provide choice and flexibility for learners. They incorporate effective training in the use of specialist equipment designed to support learners with a wide range of visual impairments. Programmes are carefully structured in modules which progressively increase learners' skills and confidence to prepare them for employment. On the residential administration programme, the first block of learning develops generic skills for NVQs in administration, customer service and advice and guidance. Learners can then make an informed choice of which NVQ to follow before they proceed to the next module. Subsequent modules develop the necessary understanding and practical skills for the NVQ. Learners undertake real work tasks in the model office. This gives them experience of the pressures that exist in the workplace before they take up a work placement in one of the college departments. Distance learners acquire the confidence to use computers independently, and develop their skills in a range of business software through a successful mix of work at college and home. The residential training blocks are well-planned and introduce new learning and skills. Learners take work home to practise and submit this electronically to their tutor. Both college-based and distance learners have a period of supported work

experience in their home areas towards the end of the course. Feedback is regularly sought from learners and this has resulted in many improvements to the programmes.

10. Training sessions are of good quality and take place in small, well-managed groups. Learners receive individual coaching, during the sessions. Staff are trained in Braille and are experienced in meeting a wide variety of learners' needs. They take full account of learners' abilities, experience and preferences and plan the learning accordingly. Training sessions include a good mixture of individual and group work. Learners undertake a range of activities to develop their skills, and build their confidence and self-esteem. Learners participate well in group discussions, and tutors make frequent checks to confirm their understanding. There is ample opportunity for learners to practise and reinforce skills. There is good attainment. Learners are well motivated and value the individual support they are given by staff. Session plans and registers are kept meticulously by the tutors, who also carefully record individual learner's needs and progress. Tutors are available daily to give on-line learning support to distance learners. Work submitted is marked and returned promptly with constructive feedback.

11. Learning resources are of an excellent standard. Training facilities are good. They include well-resourced training rooms equipped with networked computers and appropriate software packages, and suitable office equipment. Learners can also use the computers and resources in the college's flexible learning centre, which is open in the evenings and at weekends. There is a good range of special aids and software to assist learners with their visual impairment and meet individual needs. Distance learners are provided with a personal computer and dedicated telephone line at home. Excellent on-line technical support is available, although there are some gaps in the level of support during holiday periods. Tutors have developed a broad range of tape-recorded learning materials with accompanying printed versions. Learners use these to reinforce their on-line work. The model office used by administration learners is well-resourced with computers and up-to-date office equipment. There is CCTV equipment to make business reference books easy to read, and audio equipment and speech software to help learners carry out office tasks. Noticeboard displays are regularly updated. Information is displayed in Braille or large print to make it accessible to learners.

12. Retention and achievement rates are good both on the administration and IT programmes. Over the past three years, there has been an average retention rate of 90 per cent on residential administration programmes. For distance learning programmes, the average retention rate is 84 per cent for administration and 81 per cent for IT for teleworking. Learners do not follow modern apprenticeship programmes. From 1998 to 2000, 77 per cent of learners on the administration programme and 82 per cent of learners on the IT in teleworking programme achieved their NVQ. Many learners achieve additional qualifications in administration, text processing, IT as well as units from other NVQs.

13. Although the achievement rate is good, many learners make slow progress

towards their NVQ. More able learners do not find the work sufficiently challenging, especially in IT. Those on distance learning programmes are not sent additional work when they finish quickly, even if they ask for it. Some learners had been working in industry until their sight deteriorated, but their experience was not credited to save them having to collect unnecessary NVQ evidence. This has been recognised by the college as a weakness. Prior learning and experience is now identified during learners' initial assessment and induction. Many learners have a limited understanding of the NVQ requirements and do not collect evidence from their work placement. This is now being dealt with by the recent introduction of portfolio-building sessions. Some learners are given extra time in which to complete their qualification.

14. There is inadequate planning and co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Work experience for two groups of learners who enrolled in the summer of 2001 was not organised until very late in the programme. This led to difficulty in finding work placements for some of them. A programme of on-the-job training is not agreed until the assessor's first visit to the work placement. This results in delays in collecting evidence of competence for the learners' qualification. Insufficient use is made of witness testimonies. The new work-placement co-ordinator has introduced procedures to ensure that work placements are planned early in the training programme. She works with learners to find the most appropriate placement near to their home. She accompanies learners to their work placement to find out what equipment they will need and arranges for it to be installed by the college. The employer is given a copy of the NVQ standards.

15. Three of the 16 staff lack recent occupational experience or qualifications, although most have assessors' or teaching qualifications. Only one member of staff has health and safety qualifications, but another is currently undergoing training.

### **Hair & beauty (remedial therapy)**

### **Grade 2**

16. The college offers a qualification in remedial therapy through a one-year course, with the opportunity to extend that period, according to learners' needs. The course has been running since 1987. Before starting the course, each trainee is assessed on a two-day residential assessment course. There are 18 learners working towards the qualification and one trainee upgrading skills. There is one full-time member of staff and eight part-time staff. All staff either have, or are working towards, a teaching or training qualification. All staff are working towards a qualification in training people with visual impairments. The training team has a range of qualifications which covers most of the complementary areas. There are regular visiting lecturers. All training and assessment is carried out at the college. An external examiner also visits the college. Learners have a period of work experience after completing the qualification. This usually lasts for two months but it can be extended according to learners' needs. Work experience is usually in the trainee's home area. The main objective of work experience is to

improve employability and to consolidate newly acquired skills. Learners are not assessed at work. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, particularly the strengths relating to achievement and the staffing profile. Two of the weaknesses from the self-assessment report had been rectified by the time of inspection. An additional strength and weakness were identified. The grade awarded by the inspectors is the same as that given by the college.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ inspirational training
- ◆ extremely well-qualified staff
- ◆ good range of additional opportunities for training
- ◆ high achievement and retention rates

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient specialist accommodation
- ◆ no systematic feedback from learners

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Every quarter, a group of former learners is invited back to work with current learners and staff. The former learners act as professional, visually impaired mentors. They bring to current learners experience of working in the occupational areas as a visually impaired person. They also bring complementary training experiences which they share with learners and the training team.*

17. Learners feel stimulated and enjoy their training. Training is individualised and appropriate to learners' needs. There are effective, supportive relationships between learners and staff. There are comprehensive schemes of work and individual learning plans. Individual learners' practical work is recorded. Specialist training resources are used which meet individual needs. Tactile handouts, Braille materials and models are used with learners. Professional journals and other text are available on tape. A variety of strategies is used to teach practical skills to visually impaired and blind learners. Massage is demonstrated using touch, as learners cannot always see demonstrations. There is much effective individual work with learners. Learners are challenged and stretched to a high standard. In anatomy and physiology, learners work above the standards required. They feel this gives them an advantage, both for further study and for job seeking. Learners are well motivated and work well without supervision. Punctuality and attendance rates are good and well managed by the college. Learners' work is of a high standard. Learners display a high standard of client care and professionalism when working with clients. The external examiner gives good feedback on the quality of learners' practical work. The college supplies professional clothing for use in practical sessions. There are sufficient consumable resources and clients for practical sessions.

18. The training team has a good range of qualifications which cover most of the complementary areas. Most of the team are members of professional organisations. Guest trainers are used who bring commercial relevance to the training. Some of these have a high profile within the industry and have published their work. The team is introducing new complementary therapies to the learners. This allows learners to access good-quality, up-to-date training. There is a European exchange of training staff and this brings further expertise to the training team.

19. Learners have the opportunity to access a good variety of additional training. Most of the complementary therapies are taught. These include Indian head massage, acupuncture, baby massage and vertical reflexology. Learners attend exhibitions which keep them up to date with developments in this area. There is the opportunity for learners to experience many types of practical work with clients. In addition to clients who visit the clinics at the college, work is carried out with children, with people with physical disabilities or sports injuries and in hospices. This gives learners the chance to experience the wide range of clients they may work with in the industry. It also allows them to develop their skills with particular client groups, where they may wish to specialise.

20. There are consistently high retention and achievement rates in remedial therapy. In the past three years, 53 of the 55 learners who started programmes have achieved their individual learning plans. Retention rates have been at or above 94 per cent. Ill health is the main reason for learners leaving early. The rates of progression to employment outcomes on leaving the college is low, at 37 per cent, but ongoing monitoring of learners' destinations shows that up to 58 per cent go into employment or self-employment within the occupational area.

21. The accommodation in the remedial therapy unit at the college is too small, especially the reflexology clinics. There is a lack of space when working on clients. These learners often have mobility difficulties, which means that they are particularly affected by lack of space. A small entrance to the unit, where personal belongings are stored, is insufficient for its purpose. There is no reception area or space for consultation with clients. There are no toilets in the unit and learners and clients have to go outside and into another building for toilet facilities. There are written plans for an extension to the unit. This will provide an area for client consultation and reception but will not address the issues of space to work in and toilet facilities.

22. The college does not systematically collect feedback from learners. If learners complain or give their views, this is addressed. Learners feel that the college reacts to their feedback but that this does not always lead to improvements to the course. There is a students' representative but he is not invited to attend staff meetings. Learners are not aware of his role and responsibilities. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report and the college is beginning to rectify it.

## **Media & design**

## **Grade 1**

23. There are 15 learners who are all taking national diploma programmes, leading to full- or part-certification over a two-year period. Thirteen learners are studying music technology. This is the largest group in the area and includes eight first-year and five second-year learners. Two learners are studying performing arts and two learners are working towards an intermediate general vocational qualification (GNVQ) in art and design. Most learners come with little prior technical knowledge for their chosen subject, although many have a natural ability

in music, acting or dance. In the area of music technology, few students come with experience of musical performance. Musical skills are considered fundamental to the successful completion of the course but this is not a prerequisite for entry. By the end of the course, learners are expected to have developed understanding and skills in the practising and theory of music. They should be able to communicate effectively with the musicians they will be working with. Learners taking performing arts are expected to want to work in theatre, dance or a related field, such as performing arts journalism. All learners attend on a full-time basis and are given individual timetables to suit their own chosen paths of study. There are three full-time staff in music technology, supported by four part-time music specialists. In addition, a specialist in literacy communications provides assignment support. In performing arts, there are two full-time staff, supported by visiting specialists. All staff in this area report to the music technology team leader. All the teams work closely together and frequently meet to discuss learners' progress. Learners are all allocated a trainer who oversee the timetabling of their course and regularly review their individual progress. The resources for this area include theatre and workshop space and high-technology equipment. The self-assessment report contained accurate judgements, and inspectors found additional strengths. Full action plans had been developed for the two weaknesses in the self-assessment report. These had been eliminated by the time of inspection. Inspectors awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*A mature trainee had spent 17 years in a hospital-radio position before coming to the college. Weekly individual sessions were arranged with a specialist lecturer working on computerised radio-editing equipment. The trainee quickly gained high-level editing skills, and work experience was arranged at a national television company. The letters of commendation from the company encouraged the trainee to re-enter the field of broadcasting.*

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ high rates of achievement and progression to employment
- ◆ comprehensive development of programmes
- ◆ excellent training with integrated theory and practical work
- ◆ strong encouragement of individual achievement and progression
- ◆ well-qualified staff with good links to industry
- ◆ effective use of good resources
- ◆ wide range of creative talents among staff and learners

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ cancellation of some classes

24. All learners are carefully matched to a programme which suits their personal aspirations. Over the past three years, the rate of achieving targets on individual learning plans has gone up from 73 per cent to 84 per cent. During the same period, the rate leaving early has steadily fallen from 14 per cent to 8 per cent. Most of the small number of learners who have dropped out have done so because of poor health. Over the past three years, 59 per cent of leavers gained a positive outcome. Of these, 24 per cent gained paid employment or self-employment. At least four learners have successfully set themselves up as freelance music engineers. They have gained prestigious work producing for professional artists in commercial recording studios. Others are involved in writing and recording songs for their own commercial rock bands, and are negotiating for contracts with major

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*A mixed group of 18 learners attended night and weekend performance rehearsals to prepare for a performance at a local theatre. The work included 16 improvised dance pieces devised by learners. Many of the accompanying musical pieces have been composed by learners and the sound recordings carried out by learners. The performances are to a high standard and learners' motivation is outstanding.*

record companies. Two former learners have set up their own recording studio in Leeds. They are discussing the option of providing work experience for other learners who attend the college. There is a very high rate, at 35 per cent of learners progressing to university or other higher-education programmes. Where appropriate, staff actively encourage learners to see progression to higher education as a realistic target. All learners have at least one week's relevant work experience. This is normally with a company and arranged through staff contacts in the industry. In many cases, this amount of work experience has been exceeded, with some learners spending four or more weeks on work experience. Learners' work in studios is assessed under workplace conditions. An observed assessment included sound engineering learners working with a fee-paying commercial band from the Herefordshire area.

25. The music-technology course is modular in structure. This flexibility allows the development of a wide range of music and performance-related skills. Up to 24 modules give solid breadth as well as depth of training experience. All learners are guided at entry on this wide choice of available options. This effectively prepares them for the music and performing arts field. Schemes of work are very well organised. They are available to learners through the college's intranet. All staff use the detailed lesson plans which have been developed for each scheme of work. Learners are also prepared well for an appropriate route into information technology occupations. A high level of information-technology and computing skills is developed. At least 50 per cent of the learners follow these additional programmes. Internet skills form an essential element of all study options. Learners carry out research on the Internet to supplement their assignments. A new initiative developed during the past year is a joint music-technology programme with a local college of technology. Recruitment for this is underway, with up to 10 sighted learners from the college attending each class. Learners currently on the course have been involved in discussions on this initiative. They are given weekly briefings about the course's progress. All these learners are keen to work alongside sighted colleagues, who come with more experience in basic technology.

26. Staff adapt their style of training to suit the group of learners they are working with. Groups will normally not exceed a ratio of five learners to one member of staff. In sound-recording sessions this ensures that all learners are able to work on their own allocated equipment, with the trainer close by at all times to provide individual support. All practical sessions begin with the learners together reviewing the learning gained from the previous sessions. This method runs across the whole area of music and performance. All learners become confident in theory. Acquiring skills is established as a natural part of what learners do following effective theoretical sessions. Experimentation is freely allowed without the worry of making mistakes or errors. Trainers make good use of demonstrations of equipment. This allows learners to experiment with equipment and improvisation techniques.

27. Daily encouragement is given to learners regarding completion of assignments. There is a strong commitment to work in all classes, workshops,

studios and performance halls. This maintains a high pace of learning. Staff and learners are highly motivated to succeed. Staff are aware of the individual aspirations of learners. They carry out full subject reviews at regular intervals. The written records are comprehensive and assist learners to plan their work in a logical manner.

28. All full-time staff have teaching qualifications. Most of the part-time staff also have teaching qualifications. Four trainers have degrees, while all staff have specialist music and performance-related qualifications. The team leader has experience as a head of music, advisory teacher, and trainer at a national centre for music technology. The expertise of all staff is well co-ordinated across the area. Staff offer a wide range of specialist input into training and maintain their own professional work in their related fields. At least two of the music-technology staff have worked with prestigious well-known artists in the rock-music field. Learners are aware of these links and proud that their staff are involved in such work. Learners gain confidence in their own aspirations through working with staff who have realistic expectations and experience of the industry.

29. The music-technology area has outstanding physical resources, located in smart accommodation. The combined facilities for the national diploma include six digital recording studios, two hard disc editing suites, two midi audio teaching suites, seven studio-linked recording areas, an acoustic teaching studio, an electrical engineering workshop, and other well-equipped teaching areas. New musical instruments are readily available for use, including grand pianos, full-size drum kits and electronic synthesisers. Learners are given ample opportunity to use these facilities, including during evenings and the weekend. Staff encourage learners in this area to involve other college learners in performance-related activities.

30. There is a high level of creative energy among learners and staff. The programmes have been tailored to the requirements of trainers with visual impairments. Staff are aware of the competitive nature of the industry they are preparing learners for. There is a balanced experience of music and performance which combines technological and musical skills. Where appropriate, learners are assigned to many different work projects. They are encouraged to foster creative links with like-minded learners. Various projects come to fruition, including the setting up of performing bands and staged plays.

31. Timetables are centrally co-ordinated by the team leader. These are effective in allowing learners a flexible approach to attendance at different modules. Each trainee has a printed personal timetable. This is discussed at meetings with the learners to reinforce learners' awareness of where they are on the programme. There have been times when learners have been unsure which module to attend and have opted to go on modules which have been timetabled at the same time. On a few occasions during the past six months, classes have been cancelled. There is a strong culture across all classes of good attendance and punctuality. But as a result of limited technical support for some music functions, staff have occasionally been late to start workshops. When this has happened, learners have been able to carry



on working on practical assignments but this does not assist to promote good punctuality.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 2**

32. The college has an equal opportunities policy which was rewritten in November 1999 and updated in February 2001. The supporting procedures have recently been updated. The college's principal has overall responsibility for equal opportunities. All the relevant policies and procedures include equality of opportunity. There is a complaints and grievance policy. Work-placement agreements require that employers adhere to the college's equal opportunities policy. Learners come from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds and, in the past three years, 5 per cent have been from minority ethnic groups. Twenty-seven per cent of learners are women and 33 per cent of all learners have a disability additional to visual impairment. The grounds and buildings have all been specially adapted to facilitate not only people who are blind or have visual impairment, but also those with sensory or additional mobility needs. The campus is signed throughout in Braille. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths in the self-assessment report. The third strength related to how complaints are dealt with. Inspectors considered the handling of complaints to be satisfactory but identified the recording process as a weakness. One of the two weaknesses in the self-assessment report has been rectified by the time of inspection and the other weakness was not judged to impact on learners' experience. Inspectors identified other weaknesses and gave the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy and supporting documents
- ◆ good understanding and practising of equal opportunities
- ◆ effective protection of learners against discrimination and harassment

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no systematic monitoring of complaints
- ◆ insufficient recording of monitoring of work placements

33. There are comprehensive policies and procedures to support the principle of equality of opportunity in all aspects of college life. A disability statement, students' charter, marketing policy, implementation guidance, data protection guidance, application forms and legal guidelines support the equal opportunities policy. Specific procedures cover staff development, rights, bullying, complaints and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. All are well written and easy to understand. The documents, like all of the college's forms and correspondence, are available in large print or Braille. Taken as a whole, they clearly set out the

college's strong commitment to equality of opportunity in the widest sense. Although the college has the special purpose of serving those with total or partial visual impairment this is not at the expense of any other area of equal opportunities.

34. All staff and learners are well informed about and committed to equal opportunities. In a community in which all the learners and some staff have at least one disability there is a strong commitment to practising equality of opportunity in all aspects of college life. Thirty-five per cent of the members of the governing body are either blind or have some visual impairment and 10 per cent are former students. Six per cent of staff are from minority ethnic groups, 39 per cent are men, 8 per cent have a visual disability, 1 per cent have both visual and sensory impairments, 2 per cent have a physical disability and 2 per cent have a learning disability. These proportions exceed the averages for training funded by the governments' residential training units and are a result of a positive recruitment policy. There has been recent staff training, some of which was also available to learners. Equality of opportunity is covered at induction and learners can recall it. Learners are all aware of and understand the grievance and disciplinary procedures and their rights. The college's marketing policy reflects its commitment to equality of opportunity in literature which features many non-stereotypical situations. The marketing department has links with various associations for people from minority ethnic groups who are blind, and attends national exhibitions to try to attract a broad range of learners. Some data are collected which could be analysed to help plan future initiatives but there is little evidence that the college's management fully uses this information to plan or identify trends. This is partially overcome by the prevailing culture of equality of opportunity in the college, but data collection is a contractual obligation and its potential remains largely untapped.

35. Learners are effectively protected against discrimination and harassment in the college. They are clearly at ease with all the college's staff and feel able to approach any one of them with a grievance, complaint or problem. This is very important because many learners are at a very vulnerable time in their lives, often having to adjust to traumatic changes. Learners have access to a wide and varied support network which ensures they are well protected and that any problems are dealt with promptly. Staff are well aware of the need to help learners to become as self-reliant as possible so they do not become dependent on the help and assistance available at the college.

36. There is no overall monitoring of complaints to give a college-wide overview. Various members of the management team keep their own records in differing formats and deal with these matters. There is no central logging or collation of these records to analyse trends and plan for improvement. Some recording is spasmodic and it is difficult to identify the final outcome. This precludes analysis.

37. A member of the college's staff checks potential work placements and there is some initial checking of the employer's adherence to equality of opportunity, but the work-placement provider's equal opportunity policy is not always checked. There is little reference to monitoring equal opportunities in any of the work-

placement procedures. There is a considerable amount of informal monitoring but it is insufficiently recorded. This is a serious oversight as learners are still the responsibility of the college and have just moved out of a protected environment into a commercial situation.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 1**

38. All learners are visually impaired. Some are totally blind. Many learners are experiencing distress as a result of recent sight loss or impairment and need ongoing support. The support is both pastoral and rehabilitative. The college makes education and training available to a wide range of learners with greatly differing abilities, experiences and needs. Some of the learners have other disabilities in addition to visual impairment. There is also provision for learners with learning difficulties. Learners come from all over the United Kingdom on referral from their disability employment advisor. After referral to the college for a two-day standard initial assessment or a five-day initial assessment for basic employability, learners have both their learning and support needs assessed. The assessment process also covers learners' aspirations, preferences and whether they will benefit from training. The results of the assessments are discussed at the start of training, when all learners have an induction. Each trainee has a personal trainer, a course trainer and a key worker who are responsible for providing comprehensive support. In a few cases, the same staff member has a dual role of personal and course trainer. There are also established links with specialist organisations, community groups and support agencies. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. They did not agree with the weaknesses but identified another weakness. Inspectors awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ effective and thorough induction
- ◆ excellent pastoral support
- ◆ excellent sporting and recreational opportunities
- ◆ good residential facilities
- ◆ good support for progression
- ◆ continuous recording of enabling skills

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of uniform recording system

39. There is a thorough initial assessment with learners attending the college for either two or five days. During this time, they meet all the staff members they will be involved with. The initial assessment covers mobility, visual impairment, residential requirements, training needs and assessment of basic skills. After the

trainee has left, a case conference is called and the trainee advised of the result. The five-day assessment includes a meeting with the trainee and an agreed action plan is sent to the trainee's disability employment advisor. The college refuses to admit only a very few learners, although in some cases the action plan recommends another college which is thought to be more suitable.

40. The induction is effective, thorough and memorable to learners. It includes familiarisation with the site, an assessment of mobility, residential protocols and procedures, an outline of ancillary help available and details of leisure and sports facilities. Learners' course details are fully discussed, along with any additional learning programmes they are to follow. Learners meet their personal trainer, course trainer and key worker, as well as all other staff who will be working with them. Learners are well aware of what the college has to offer in terms of facilities and support.

41. Learners benefit from excellent pastoral support. Each trainee has a personal trainer who has overall responsibility for the trainee and an occupationally focused course trainer. In a few cases this is the same person. Learners are also allocated a key worker with responsibility for non-training related areas. The key worker is usually the person in overall charge of their residential accommodation. Learners have the option of approaching any of the support team with any problem regardless of staff responsibilities. This not only gives learners a choice but also means that support is available all day and well into the night. There are also eight young support workers, who spend a year in college as volunteers. They socialise with the learners, provide escort duties, act as guides and generally help out. There are also good and established links with professional and advisory organisations.

42. Sporting and recreational facilities are excellent. There is a well-equipped student bar, which also provides live entertainment, with learners involved in the day-to-day running. There is a full social programme with a wide variety of events and outings. Events include trips abroad, dining clubs, theatre and concert trips and many more. The college prides itself on the sporting prowess of learners. Sports include acoustic shooting, goalball, judo, blind football, swimming, cricket, and ten-pin bowling. Learners have not only achieved national recognition, but some are representing the country in international events. There is a fully equipped gymnasium with equipment adapted for people who use wheelchairs and also a large multipurpose main hall. The college has the only pitch in the country which is marked out and set up for blind football. There is a flexible learning centre with information technology and a library which includes large print and Braille. Facilities are open in the evening and also at weekends and these include the media studios and remedial therapy unit, where learners can have free treatment. The rich combination of all these social, recreational and sporting facilities means that learners have access to a wide range of activities which restore self-confidence, keep them fit, establish social and living skills and provide enjoyment.

43. There are four halls of residence. Some of the rooms are en suite and the remainder are in the process of being upgraded. There are also houses both on and

off the campus, to give learners a wide choice of accommodation. Each residence has support staff. Learners can have their meals in the refectory or do some self-catering. The college pays careful attention to providing good accommodation as many mature learners are away from home for the first time in many years.

44. There is good support for progression into employment or further and higher education. The employment team is led by a co-ordinator with three other team members. On arrival at the college, all learners are contacted and advised of all the services available. Learners later have an individual meeting to identify their career aims and to identify any additional support needed. Support can be offered with social skills, job search and identifying future educational needs. Many learners already have a clear idea of what they want to do and, providing it is thought to be realistic, they are encouraged to proceed with this. Whether learners are hoping to enter the job market or go on to further or higher education, their progression is carefully facilitated. There is a good range of educational literature and the college has established links with various colleges and universities. For job search, newspapers are bought from the learners' home areas. Ongoing assistance is available, ranging from secretarial support, assistance with research, provision of escorts and the services of a reader. Information is available in both large print and Braille. Work placements are visited before a trainee starts and again during their time on work placement. These visits are clearly recorded. Many work placements take place at the end of the course, with learners not returning to college. This denies learners the opportunity to have in-depth discussion of any problems with college staff. It also prevents the college from making overall assessments of learners' experience. There is a well-resourced job-search room and reference section. Over the past three years, 60 per cent of learners have been placed on work placements in their home area, a further 23 per cent have been placed in Hereford and the remaining 17 per cent placed at the college. All learners on the distance-learning courses have been found work placements in their home area. Analysis of recent leavers shows 35 per cent going into self-employment or employment, 25 per cent going on to further or higher education, 5 per cent doing voluntary work and the remainder searching for jobs.

45. There is continuous recording of enabling skills. Each trainee is assessed on entry for every element of the enabling skills which have been defined as part of their programme. The skills are assessed in three areas: information technology, communication and learning, and living skills and mobility. Progress is monitored using the college's own system, which operates on four levels from no effective skills to confident and independent use.

46. There is a lack of co-ordinated records of trainee support. Different staff members keep their own records and there is inconsistency in the amount of detail recorded. There is no system for recording information centrally. Learners have such a wide choice of people to see that sometimes no single member of staff has the information to take an overall view of a trainee. This problem has been recognised by the college and a 'super-tutor' scheme has been launched. This is proving successful with the FEFC-funded learners but has not as yet been extended

to learners funded by the residential training unit.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

47. The principal has overall responsibility for management of the college. There are two associate principals; one is responsible for finance, business and administration and the other for curriculum and quality. These three appointments have all been made within the past two years. The college's board of 20 governors includes the principal, the president of the students' union and the clerk. Governors include former students, professionals who are distinguished in their careers and other individuals who can contribute their expertise. The college's board meets termly. There are also three working subcommittees, human resources, curriculum and quality, and business and finance. The college is undergoing a period of rapid and intense change of culture and organisation. Phase one, which includes the restructuring of management and staff teams, has nearly been completed. There is a three-year strategic action plan covering 2000 to 2003. This gives priority areas for action, a needs analysis, 14 strategic objectives and an operational plan to implement them. The college's management team, which consists of the principal, the associate principals and the five managers, meets weekly. The five managers each have responsibility for one of five areas; 16 to 19 programmes; adult learners; residential support and independence curriculum; learning support and development; outreach and short courses; and estates, accommodation, health and safety and external services. There is a full staff meeting every three weeks and regular team meetings. Minutes of all meetings are available to the staff. The college achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1996 and was re-accredited in 1999. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified an additional weakness, relating to analysis of data. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive and effective strategic plan
- ◆ effective partnerships

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ incomplete implementation of new management structure
- ◆ inadequate analysis of data

48. There is a very comprehensive strategic plan, which has been developed in conjunction with the staff. In 1999, the college's management team and governors worked on a new strategic plan, which incorporates the standards and targets set in the action plan developed after the FEFC's inspection. This covers: the structure and relevance of the curriculum; teaching, learning and assessment; the development of quality assurance and staff-development systems; the development of external links and the improvement of the college environment. The plan is well

laid out with long-term targets and shorter-term priority areas for action. There is an operational plan for the current year with built-in review dates. The targets in the operational plan are broken down into team targets and individual targets as part of the staff-appraisal system. All staff are aware of the plan and their involvement in it although some have not yet received their individual targets. All targets are written in terms of measurable outcomes and these are monitored to ensure that they are being met. All the targets up to the time of inspection have been met.

49. The development of collaborative partnerships is part of the strategic plan and aims to extend the range of courses and opportunities for learners who have visual impairments. Staff in remedial therapy have been working in collaboration with a European company to produce a European manual for physiotherapist and remedial therapists who have a visual impairment. The college is also a partner in a community vocational training programme to develop a uniform model for European masseur training for visually impaired people. These partnerships ensure that the remedial therapy learners are involved in the latest methods of training and practice. The college is also involved with, and is on several boards of, national organisations. It supports a small number of students at a local sixth-form college and a local college of technology, and in collaboration with four local colleges provides learners with access to a broad range of curriculum options with specialist support. The integration of students from other local colleges with the learners creates a greater understanding of visual impairment and learners have the opportunity to work alongside fully sighted students. For the past two years, students from the leisure and tourism programme at a local college have shared one day a week on the NVQ sport and recreation programme. The shared development of a regional centre of excellence in music technology and sound recording with a local technology college is referred to in the section on media and design. All of these partnerships and others which are still being developed are very successful in extending the curriculum options and opportunities for learners.

50. The new management structure is still being implemented and is therefore not fully operational in all areas. There is uncertainty among some staff about the full implications of their new work roles. Training has not been given to make all staff fully operational in their new work roles. The setting of individual targets from the operational plan is only partially implemented and some staff are not fully aware of their own specific targets. This partial implementation means that not all of the new areas of development are able to progress as efficiently and effectively as possible.

51. The management team and the college's board receive information on learners. Achievements against team targets and the targets which are set by the contracts are linked to this information. But the data are not analysed to identify whether there is any bias in achievement, retention or outcomes. There is little overall analysis of the feedback from learners or of data on complaints. Lack of analysis means that the management team cannot use data to improve performance and its decisions.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

52. The associate principal for curriculum and quality is responsible for quality assurance. She reports to the quality committee of the curriculum and quality assurance board and to the curriculum and quality committee of the governors. This committee monitors progress against targets in the college strategic plan. The college's strategic plan includes the development of an overall quality assurance system. Team leaders and programme co-ordinators are responsible for ensuring that quality assurance arrangements are implemented effectively in their area of responsibility. The quality assurance team has introduced a system for the observation of teaching and learning. There is an annual cycle for quality assurance, which is linked to learners' activity, management processes, self-assessment and staff development. Policies and procedures have been designed, in consultation with staff, to cover most aspects of training. Guidelines on the procedures are in the staff handbook, the college's quality assurance manual and on the college's intranet. The college uses questionnaires and focus groups to gather feedback from learners. There is a college policy on assessment and verification. A team of three co-ordinators is responsible for ensuring that this is implemented.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ incomplete implementation of procedures to assure quality
- ◆ inadequate monitoring and evaluation of training
- ◆ failure to meet contractual requirements for individual learning plans and progress reviews
- ◆ inconsistent sharing of good practice

53. Since the original inspection, good progress has been made in implementing quality assurance procedures. There is, however, no procedure for regular internal audit. Significant progress has been made in monitoring and evaluating training. There are formal arrangements for gathering feedback from learners on their training, and a new lesson observation procedure has been introduced which is well structured and effective. Individual learning plans are satisfactory. There are appropriate written procedures for reviewing learners' progress, and these are routinely monitored. All staff now have opportunities to share good practice. Inspectors awarded the same grade for quality assurance as that given in the college's most recent self-assessment.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough and effective self-assessment
- ◆ effective procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning
- ◆ good use of feedback from learners



### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inadequate internal audit arrangements
- ◆ weak evaluation of work placements
- ◆ insufficient target-setting for improvement

54. The college now has a thorough and effective self-assessment procedure, central to its quality assurance system, which focuses on the experience of learners. The procedure has been carefully planned in consultation with the staff. Self-assessment is now an integral part of the annual cycle of quality assurance. It involves feedback from learners, observation of teaching, analysis of data, and reports from tutors. The action plan arising from self-assessment is monitored regularly and conscientiously. It is reviewed by the college's curriculum and quality assurance board and by the governors. There is now a standardised reporting structure for mid-course reviews. Managers evaluate aspects of each area of learning such as the effectiveness of schemes of work, the quality of learning resources and the timetabling.

55. The college has introduced an effective system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observation. This followed consultation with the staff. There is a planned cycle of observations, linked to self-assessment and mid-programme review and carried out by a trained team. Managers give clear guidance on observation arrangements which encourages staff to reflect on their practice. After observation takes place, staff development needs are identified and action is agreed. The process has enabled teachers to share good practice, improve their performance and expand their range of skills. It has also helped the college management team to identify areas for improvement, such as punctuality and attendance. A programme of staff development has been planned as a result of the most recent set of observations. This will deal with weaknesses in lesson planning, and the lack of differentiation in training sessions.

56. The college makes extensive use of learner feedback to improve performance and identify learners' needs. Learners' views on the quality of their learning programmes and other services are collected regularly at tutorials, progress reviews and focus group discussions, and from surveys. The feedback is analysed and acted upon. Problems are resolved promptly and sensitively. Feedback from groups of learners has led to changes in accommodation, induction and schemes of work. Additional workshops for piano technology and information and communications technology (ICT) have been introduced, and timetables and other information are now translated into a medium accessible to all learners. Focus group discussions are part of the quality assurance cycle and are an important element of self-assessment and programme reviews. Learners discuss the quality of induction, teaching, assessment, careers advice and support for learning. Changes have been made in all areas of learning as a result.

57. The college has policies and procedures for assuring the quality of all major areas of activity. Standards are identified, and there are clear lines of responsibility for monitoring and evaluation. With the exception of health and safety, however,

there is no system of internal audits to check that quality assurance procedures are operating as intended. This leaves a gap in the overall quality assurance arrangements.

58. Work placements are well planned and monitored, and the college has begun to integrate the assessment of NVQs more effectively into the learner's experience. If problems arise in work placements they are identified and action is taken. There are some weaknesses in the evaluation of the work placements, however. Although employers are asked for their views on the learner's performance in the workplace, they are not asked to comment on the overall effectiveness of the work-placement arrangements. The individual evaluations are recorded but they are not collated and analysed. Reviews of the work-placement experience and plans for its improvement are not considered systematically by the college management team.

59. Management information is collected and recorded and used in decision making. Staff are consulted about changes to the management information system to ensure that the needs of managers and other staff are met. Information about learners is readily available to staff and is regularly updated. Data on enrolment, achievement and retention rates are collated, analysed and used by the senior management team in strategic planning. However, measurable targets for improvement are not set.