

INSPECTION REPORT

EEF West Midlands Technology Centre

08 July 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

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
- **learndirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training 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.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

The Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) is the representative organisation for engineering in the United Kingdom, covering over 6000 engineering and manufacturing companies. The EEF West Midlands, with over 1,100 member companies, is the largest association of 13 regional associations forming the EEF. In 1998, the employer members made the decision to offer an engineering apprenticeship and an employee training scheme for its members and purchased an engineering training centre. The training centre offers work-based learning for modern apprentices and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) for young people in the training centre in Birmingham and in a range of companies. In addition, the training centre also offers training for adults in engineering on New Deal programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus. The centre is accredited to offer learndirect courses and is part of the Engineering and Marine Training Authority Engineering Hub. It also offers bespoke short courses for its member companies which are funded by the members and do not form part of the inspection.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Work-based learning for young people in engineering is satisfactory, but the leadership and management of the organisation are unsatisfactory. The quality assurance arrangements are also unsatisfactory, but equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good training opportunities
- good learner and employer satisfaction
- well managed initial training in engineering
- careful attention to health and safety at the training centre
- effective measures to widen participation
- good recruitment links with schools and employers

KEY WEAKNESSES

- weak management information system
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements
- inadequate monitoring of performance
- over reliance on witness testimony for work-based assessment
- poor internal verification process
- lack of co-ordination of key skills training and assessment
- little structured learning support
- poor monitoring of equal opportunities during training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer equal opportunities policy for learners
- more detailed recording of meetings
- more target-setting for achievement rates

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at the EEF West Midlands Technology Centre (EEFWMTC) in July 2002. They interviewed 31 learners and carried out 11 interviews with employers and work-based supervisors and 27 interviews with staff. They also visited 12 work placements, visited one subcontracted college and carried out a telephone interview with key staff from another subcontracted college. They examined learners' portfolios of evidence, policies and procedures, awarding body reports, learners' files and internal verifier records. Inspectors studied EEFWMTC's self-assessment report which was produced in May 2002.

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. EEFWMTC is an employer led non-profit making training organisation which was established in December 1998 by the EEFWM. Its primary intention is to offer training for its member companies in the West Midlands. It is situated in Tyseley, Birmingham, and offers work-based learning for modern apprentices in engineering, NVQ training in engineering for unemployed young people and New Deal training for 16-25 year olds as well as for those from the 25+ age group. In addition, the training centre also offers a wide range of commercial courses for its member companies. EEFWMTC is a training and assessment centre for engineering and is accredited as a learndirect centre as part of the EMTA Engineering Hub. EEFWMTC employs 21 full-time staff, which includes a workshop manager, seven technical instructors, 14 associate assessors and can also call on work-based assessors.

3. EEFWMTC has a contract with Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There are 165 learners, comprising 122 advanced modern apprentices, 18 foundation modern apprentices, and 25 learners on NVQ programmes. In addition, there are 27 New Deal clients who have very recently joined. EEFWM recruits learners across the West Midlands and operates its own recruitment campaigns, working closely with local schools and colleges. All apprenticeships involve an initial period of off-the-job training usually eight or nine months followed by two or three years on-the-job training and assessment. The NVQ programmes involve a mixture of on- and off-the-job training and assessment. The modern apprentices and NVQ learners attend a local college where they are taught background knowledge.

4. In the Birmingham and Solihull areas of the West Midlands, manufacturing accounts for 23.5 per cent and 20.1 per cent, respectively, of the employment compared with a regional average of 26.8 per cent. In April 2002, the unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent in Birmingham and 2.3 per cent in Solihull, compared with 3.1 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Birmingham achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 41.2 per cent, and 55.9 per cent in Solihull, compared with a national average 47.9 per cent. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands is 8.2 per cent, 21.5 per cent in Birmingham and 3 per cent in Solihull, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Retention rates for the modern apprenticeship programmes are satisfactory. However, there was a decline in 1998-99 which coincided with the establishment of the technology centre and the inheritance of learners from two training providers who had their training contracts withdrawn. The achievement rates are less clear, with a declining rate in NVQ training and insufficient data for the advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships. The data supplied throughout the inspection could not be verified, and it is therefore difficult to judge the achievement rates. EEFWM is in the process of establishing a new data system, but it is not fully implemented as yet.

6. The overall standard of training is satisfactory. The recruitment of learners is carried out carefully. All applicants are interviewed and given a set of tests to confirm their engineering aptitude and their competence in English and mathematics. Those who are selected are referred to employers who are recruiting. EEFWMTC provides a period of off-the-job training where learners work towards the NVQ at level 2 in performing engineering operations, plus a further two optional modules. The learner is employed at the start of the training programme. The training is tailored to suit individual needs and learners can achieve their qualification within six months, but most achieve in eight to nine months before returning to their employer. All learners attend college on day release. Most learners achieve additional qualifications above the requirements of their apprenticeship.

7. The employers offer good training and many have clearly structured training programmes. Learners receive regular progress reviews and are well supported by the employer and EEFWMTC. The portfolios of evidence for the level 3 NVQ are meticulously constructed. However, there is little assessment by observation and little integration of the NVQ assessment process with company training. Internal verification has until recently, been left until the portfolio is completed and is used to check the quantity of suitable evidence rather than approving the quality of the assessment process. This has recently been recognised by EEFWMTC and a new process is being established. Little written feedback is given to the assessor or the learner, and few improvement targets are set. There has been no observation of the assessment process. Learners receive an initial assessment, however, there is not a structured approach to providing the appropriate support. When support is given, it is often not recorded.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

8. EEFWM is one of 13 regional associations belonging to the Engineering Employers' Federation. The association is a 'not for profit' organisation registered as an employers' association under the Trades Union and Labour Relations Act 1994. The training centre is the responsibility of a director of education and training who reports to the director and chief executive of the association. There is a centre manager responsible for the training, together with a training adviser and a workshop manager. There are seven instructors, one of whom is the lead internal verifier. Fourteen associates are contracted on a part-time basis to carry out the progress reviews and assessment of learners. The training centre also has a sales and accounts manager, an accountant, a recruitment officer and a New Deal liaison officer. EEFWMTC has a quality assurance policy and an equal opportunities policy. The self-assessment report was produced in May 2002 and is the fourth one that the organisation has produced.

STRENGTHS

- good recruitment links with schools and employers
- careful attention to health and safety at the training centre
- well-managed initial training in engineering
- effective measures to widen participation
- good strategies to prevent discrimination during recruitment

WEAKNESSES

- lack of formal agreements with subcontractors
- inadequate monitoring of performance
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and subcontracted off-the-job training
- lack of co-ordination of key skills training and assessment
- weak management information system
- unsystematic development and monitoring of the business plan
- poor monitoring of equal opportunities during training
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed recording of meetings
- clearer equal opportunities policy for learners
- better collection and use of feedback
- better review and updating of development plan

9. There are good links with schools and employers. EEFWM produces an annual

directory of vacancies which contains advertisements from over 80 companies. It maintains close contact with the companies and offers an initial assessment and interviewing service. The directory is updated regularly and is circulated to all schools in the West Midlands area, together with leaflets which promote engineering as a career. Libraries and careers services are also given a copy. EEFWMTC arranges a number of open days and taster events for young people. Over 500 applications are received each year. Applicants can also apply on-line on the EEFWMTC website, which also advertises vacancies. EEFWMTC hosts quarterly meetings with the West Midlands Connexions. An advisory committee has been formed to enable EEFWMTC to gather views from a range of organisations, but the membership has fallen and meetings are infrequent.

10. Staff meetings take place each month where staff are updated on finance and recruitment. Courses are also discussed. Management meetings take place each month and each manager presents a detailed report on their activities. This has only recently been introduced. Financial reporting is a regular item and the reports are clear and well laid out. Close attention is paid to health and safety at the training centre. There are regular audits which involve an external consultant. Outcomes are reported at the management team meetings and action plans are drawn up and monitored.

11. Learners spend their first year at the training centre developing their skills in different areas of engineering. This is well planned and well structured. There is a good range of activities which progressively develops the learners' skills. The training is arranged to suit the individual needs of learners.

12. Formal agreements for training are only in place with one subcontractor. This is a local college which provides off-the-job training for 65 per cent of the current learners. EEFWMTC uses 16 colleges and two private training providers. Where agreements are not in place, there is no requirement for the subcontractor to produce regular reports on the learners' progress or involve EEFWMTC in any discussions.

13. There is inadequate monitoring of the performance of staff and the organisation. Staff have annual appraisals with their manager, but targets and objectives are not always set. There is a staff development plan, but it is not linked to the business plan. Between the annual reviews there is no formal monitoring of performance, although this is being developed for some staff. The company uses 14 associates on a part-time contract for the review and assessment of learners. There is a lack of clarity in the contracts about the responsibilities of the associates and insufficient monitoring of their performance. There are regular meetings with associates as a group but some find it difficult to attend. The monthly management meetings focus primarily on finance and recruitment and there is no discussion of other key performance indicators such as retention and achievement rates, learners' progress and the quality of provision. There is no examination of any trends. The minutes of the meetings are circulated to the attendees and are generally not available to all staff.

14. The co-ordination of on- and subcontracted off-the-job training is inadequate. EEFWMTC are not given schemes of work by subcontractors. Consequently, employers

are not aware of what learners are doing at college and how it could link with the training given by employers. Some employers would like more information. Companies often have a detailed training plan, but assessors do not use it to help learners collect evidence for their NVQ.

15. There is a lack of co-ordination of key skills training and assessment. The responsibility for the co-ordination is not clear and EEFWMTC is not monitoring any training which is subcontracted. Key skills are not mentioned in the current agreement. A recent policy has been devised, but some assessors are not clear about the requirements for key skills, despite a recent staff development event. Some learners do not understand key skills and how they will achieve the qualification. Some learners who are close to achieving the NVQ, have no evidence for the key skills.

16. An external consultant was employed by EEFWMTC, to develop a management information system specifically for their needs. However, the system is not yet complete and some of the learners' records have not been transferred. It is not yet capable of producing reports which would enable the management to monitor performance. To date, there has been little staff training in its use and few staff are capable of using the database to produce their own reports.

17. The business plan does not have specific targets for retention and achievement rates and progression. The staff have not been involved in its production and some staff have expressed concern about their lack of involvement in decision-making. The plan was devised by the director and the training centre manager and has been circulated to staff for comment. The plan is discussed at the management meetings, but there is little systematic review of progress and none of the actions are identified for individuals. Overall, the minutes of meetings do not reflect the level of discussion or specify actions to be taken, responsibility for them and the dates by which they are to be achieved.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

18. EEFWMTC has taken effective action to widen participation in its training programmes and this strength was identified in the self-assessment report. The organisation is actively involved in several projects which aim to introduce young people to engineering. These include working with women who are interested in science and technology, and a mentoring project for young people in year nine at school. This project seeks to match young engineering employees with school pupils to help them make realistic decisions about careers in the engineering and manufacturing sector. EEFWM runs a technology tree project which aims to bring together engineering companies and local primary schools, with the aim of allowing school pupils to experience work placements and work shadowing. EEFWMTC has identified the poor participation of women in engineering training and has offered taster days for local girls' schools. A wide range of marketing methods are used to ensure that EEFWM reaches all members of the local community. These include an annual directory of engineering vacancies, bus advertising and EEFWMTC's own website. All advertising material includes non-stereotypical images such as women engineers. In October 2001, EEFWMTC appointed a New Deal liaison officer to improve participation in its New Deal programme. EEFWMTC has taken effective action to ensure that local job centre staff have a good awareness and understanding of the engineering training programmes available at EEFWMTC. Thirty-five New Deal advisers have visited EEFWMTC to see the facilities available for training. Since October 2000, referrals of New Deal clients have doubled and although previously only one in eight clients referred actually started training, this figure is now one in three. Much of the increase is accredited to referrals from inner-city job centres who have a high proportion of clients from minority ethnic groups. All instructors have received training in equal opportunities.

19. EEFWMTC has developed a good strategy to tackle discrimination by employers during recruitment. The organisation collects data on the ethnicity and gender of all applicants. The data are then analysed and compared with the data for those learners who successfully gain employment and start training. EEFWMTC has recognised that although it is successful in attracting applications from minority ethnic groups, less than half of them gain employment and start training. As a result of this, EEFWMTC have run 'fair recruitment' workshops for employers and plan to publicise case studies of good practice. Realistic targets have been set to increase the recruitment of women and young people from minority ethnic groups in 2002-03. Currently the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is 11 per cent, and 4 per cent of learners are women. The equal opportunities policy was updated in 2002 and now includes a section on recruitment.

20. There is poor monitoring of equality of opportunity during training, but this was not identified in the self-assessment report. Equal opportunities does not form part of the learners' progress reviews. Learners are not routinely asked if they have any problems with fair treatment, bullying or harassment. The review paperwork does not have a section to record or confirm that equal opportunities has been discussed. Learners are given a copy of EEFWMTC's equal opportunity policy at induction, but there is no further reinforcement of the subject. There are no checks of learner's understanding and their

awareness of equal opportunities is poor. The updated agreement between EEFWMTC and its employers does not require any commitment to equal opportunities. There is no monitoring of employer's equal opportunities policies. There are regular management and staff meetings, but equal opportunities is not a regular agenda item at any of these meetings. There is little use of data to monitor achievement and retention rates of under-represented groups or those with additional learning needs.

21. EEFWMTC has a comprehensive and recently updated equal opportunities policy and procedures which includes anti-harassment and complaints procedures. However, this policy has been written to apply to learners, employees and the companies who employ EEFWMTC's learners. It is not written in a language which is easy for learners to understand and is a lengthy, complex document. It is difficult for learners to identify the parts of the policy which are most relevant to them.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

22. The quality assurance arrangements are inadequate, but this weakness was only partly recognised in the self-assessment report. The organisation has a quality assurance manual containing policies and procedures. There is a quality assurance policy statement, but it places too much emphasis on meeting awarding body requirements, rather than stating the organisation's own commitment to quality assurance. Many of the policies and procedures are out of date and some have not been revised since 1999, although the manual states that they will be revised annually. The procedures consist mainly of checklists, which do not assure the quality of the processes. It is not clear to what standard the procedures should be carried out or who is responsible for them.

23. There are no performance indicators for the procedures. There are no systems in place to monitor, measure or evaluate any changes or improvements. Data are not used to measure the effectiveness of any changes or to update the procedures. Some documents are not clearly marked to indicate whether they are the most recent version. For example, the equal opportunities policy which is given to learners does not have a date or an issue number and it is not the same as the policy in the quality assurance manual. There is a schedule for internal audits but these do not cover all the quality procedures. The audits focus on checking that the procedure is being complied with rather than assuring that it is being carried out to the required standard.

24. There are no quality assurance policies for training, assessment or internal verification. EEFWMTC relies on awarding body procedures for internal verification. There are no policies to monitor or evaluate the performance of assessors and trainers. A recent external verifier's report indicated that the external verifier had disagreed with nine out of the 11 assessment decisions sampled. There is no observation of assessment, either on or off the job. The organisation subcontracts some of the off-the-job training to a local college, but the subcontractors' agreement does not have thorough quality assurance arrangements. There are no systems in place to check that the subcontractors are meeting their own quality assurance standards. Programmes are not routinely evaluated and performance is not monitored to identify areas which could be improved. No performance targets are set, and there is no analysis of learner's achievement data or destination data.

25. There is no procedure or policy for the self-assessment process. Although staff were consulted on the self-assessment report, some chose not to play an active part in identifying strengths and weaknesses. Employers who are not on the advisory group and learners were not involved or consulted during the self-assessment process. The current self-assessment report did not identify several significant weaknesses. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the centre manager, but there are no meetings to discuss or review quality assurance arrangements.

26. EEFWMTC collects feedback from learners and employers using questionnaires, but there is no systematic analysis and sharing of this information. It is not clear whether feedback from learners is always analysed and used effectively. Staff are only made

aware of specific problems which arise from feedback. There is no discussion of the results of learner or employer feedback at management or staff meetings.

27. There is a development plan which includes clear actions to deal with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Individual staff review their own responsibilities with their managers at monthly meetings. However, the plan is not updated or revised. At the time of the inspection, many target dates had passed but the plan had not been updated to show whether the actions had been successfully completed or what progress had been made. Staff know what progress has been made in their own area of responsibility, but do not know how far the organisation has progressed towards fulfilling its development plan.

Good Practice

Each year EFFWM presents an award to the best first year and the best apprentice overall. The ceremony takes place in a national conference centre and is attended by over 300 guests which include major employers. This motivates learners and provides good publicity for the centre and engineering as a career.

EFFWM has established and maintains a website to promote engineering as a career. The web page links to other pages and also allows employers to advertise employment opportunities for learners free of charge.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	165	3

28. There are 165 work-based learners, 122 advanced modern apprentices, 18 foundation modern apprentices, and 25 learners on NVQ programmes. In addition, there are 27 New Deal clients. However, it was not possible to verify these data during the inspection. The organisation is in the process of establishing a new database but neither the new system or the original database had data which matched. Prior to the inspection, the data showed only two New Deal clients, but the number had increased during the week before and during the inspection. It was decided not to include these New Deal clients in the current inspection.

29. Modern apprentices are employed by local engineering companies or secure employment during the first year. During the first year, learners attend off-the-job training at the provider's training centre. In this year, they work towards the NVQ at level 2 in performing engineering operations with the addition of two optional NVQ units to reflect their employers' needs. They also attend a further education college on day-release for appropriate technical qualifications. The colleges are subcontracted to teach key skills during the first year.

30. After the first year, learners return to their employers and undertake a programme of work-based learning, leading to the achievement of an NVQ at level 3 or 4. Qualifications include engineering, manufacturing engineering, and electrical installation. Learners continue to attend a local college where they follow a programme of study for a vocational qualification and key skills. Assessment is carried out by EEFWMTC's staff and by work-based assessors. College staff carry out key skills assessment. Work-based learners are training for between three and a half and four and a half years.

31. New Deal learners attend the training centre and, working alongside work-based learners, are trained on different aspects of engineering. They can then select a specialisation. Some prepare to gather evidence for a level 2 NVQ.

32. The training centre has seven full time instructors reporting to the workshop manager, in addition to associates who are used for assessment and verification.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																	
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	52		61		43		8		12							
Retained*	0		45		32		2		5								
Successfully completed	0		8		0		0		2								
Still in learning	48		37		32		2		3								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	5		55		2											
Retained*	3		16		1	50											
Successfully completed	1		0		1	50											
Still in learning	2		16		0	0											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	37		45		16											
Retained*	14		20		8												
Successfully completed	0		17		0												
Still in learning	14		3		8												

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good training opportunities
- good range of additional qualifications
- good level of learners' and employers' satisfaction
- good portfolio work

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate individual learning plans
- poor internal verification
- over reliance on witness testimony for work-based assessment
- little structured learning support

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more targeting to increase achievement rates

33. There are experienced staff working in a well-resourced training workshop. It is well maintained with attention to health and safety and industrial practice. Machinery and equipment is to industry standard. Instruction is well structured and is supported by documents. Work-based learners are employed by a wide range of companies which represent a cross-section of the industry. Employers are very supportive and offer good training under the supervision of very experienced staff. The learners are given varied programmes of experience and many companies have a planned, but flexible training programme. This was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Learners are given increased responsibility and are soon working unsupervised. Some learners are working in traditional toolrooms making casting tools. Others are operating computer numerically controlled machines, machining high cost components for the aerospace industry. In other companies, learners are operating sophisticated computer-aided design systems and in one company, learners are acting in a troubleshooting capacity, supporting the work of experienced technicians.

34. Work-based learners are trained beyond the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. EEFWMTC has a commercial link with a pneumatics company and hosts a sophisticated training facility in its training centre. In their first year of off-the-job training, the learners are given access and training using this equipment. They also work towards a qualification in information technology (IT). During their on-the-job training, many learners also attend additional courses such as specialist welding, health and safety, manual handling, first aid and abrasive wheel regulations. Many

learners also achieve higher qualifications at college. Some learners attend specialist courses at the EEFWM's training centre to meet an identified employer's need. The employers and learners interviewed expressed a high level of satisfaction with the training and the support given by EEFWMTC. Most employers rely on EEFWMTC for the recruitment of their learners. Employers are sent details of applicants, including the initial assessment and aptitude test results. However, these results are not given to the learners or recorded in their learning plans. The close working relationship with the employers enables EEFWMTC to support the learners when they are faced with difficulties such as redundancy. EEFWMTC are readily able to find alternative employment with minimum interruption to the training.

35. As identified in the self-assessment report, there is good work in the NVQ portfolios. They are well maintained with good examples of learners taking ownership of the portfolio and its construction. They are not standardised and learners take pride in their presentation by using computer graphics. There is also good use of diverse evidence such as photographs, drawings and even small scale artefacts. Individual learning plans are prepared and kept in learner's files at the training centre. However, they are not consistently used to drive the learning process. Learners do not have a copy in their portfolios and they are not used in the progress review process. Many files contain learning plans which are incomplete, undated and refer to attachments which are not present. Few learning plans have been amended and although there is space to record review dates, learners' reviews have not been recorded since 1999-2000. One file contains three learning plans which show conversion from an NVQ programme to a modern apprenticeship on the same date.

36. All verification takes place at the end of the assessment process for NVQs and key skills. It is used as a confirmation of compliance with the awarding body regulations and the sufficiency of evidence in the portfolio. No written feedback is given to either the assessor or the learner on the quality of the assessment process or materials. There is no verification of the observation process. Verifiers do not meet regularly with assessors to share best practice and ensure consistency of the processes. Verification is not used to improve the quality of assessment or to improve the quality of the feedback to the assessor and learner. Recent changes have been made and a lead internal verifier has been nominated. Meetings of verifiers are now taking place, but it is too early to make a judgement on their effectiveness.

37. There is insufficient assessment by direct observation in the workplace. Learners collect evidence in the form of job records, material specifications and drawings. They write their own evidence account of the tasks undertaken, and an approved witness signs the account. Training officers or assessors approve the evidence at a progress review meeting. Learners are not formally observed completing assessment tasks without the aid and support of a skilled witness. Learners are also not formally questioned on their knowledge as part of the assessment. A number of learners who are approaching the end of their training had no evidence of assessment by observation. Although work-based learners are subjected to an initial assessment, there is no evidence of a structured approach for providing the appropriate support. Learners

who have additional learning needs have been helped on an informal basis by individual instructors. However, there is no record of the support and information is not formally passed to other instructors.

38. Based on the information provided by EEFWMTC, the retention rates are consistently better than satisfactory. Achievement rates are also satisfactory. However, there are insufficient targets for staff, employers and learners.