



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2000

Nescot Training Group

SUMMARY

The Nescot Training Group offers satisfactory training in management and professional, information technology and foundation for work. Management and professional trainees are highly motivated and committed to self-employment but are given no opportunity to train for NVQs. Information technology trainees are taught in small, highly effective training groups. However, they have experienced some poor assessment practice. Foundation for work trainees receive constructive and realistic advice on work opportunities, but they are only offered a small range of relevant qualifications to train towards. Construction training is unsatisfactory. Although there are effective links with local employers, who are committed to training, no use is made of work-based assessment or evidence such as witness testimonies to extend their assessment opportunities. Equal opportunities is satisfactory. Nescot Training Group promotes its services to widen participation from under-represented groups. It does not review its employers' understanding of equal opportunities. Trainee support is unsatisfactory. Initial assessment is not systematic and support given is poorly recorded although there are many individual examples of good pastoral support. Management of training and quality assurance are satisfactory. Good induction for staff is supported by a well-structured staff development programme. Management of training is hampered by the lack of an adequate management information system. There is a wide range of systems to collect trainees' views on training but procedures are too recent to have had a noticeable impact on the quality of training and assessment.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	4
Management & professional	3
Business administration	3
Foundation for work	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good accommodation for off-the-job training in construction
- ◆ up-to-date computers and software for information technology
- ◆ good business counselling
- ◆ wide range of suitable work placements for foundation for work trainees
- ◆ good links with appropriate external agencies
- ◆ clear strategic planning aimed at continuous improvement



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding of the NVQ system in construction
- ◆ no inclusion of key skills in construction
- ◆ no real workplace experience for information technology trainees
- ◆ no group activities after initial training for management and professional trainees
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of progress for foundation for work trainees
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities issues among trainees
- ◆ poor recording of information from trainees' reviews
- ◆ few written procedures for assuring quality of work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) was established as a college in 1954 and became incorporated in 1994. The college is in the prosperous suburban borough of Epsom and Ewell, on the Surrey borders of southwest London. Its catchment area includes Banstead, Guildford, the Mole Valley, Reigate and southwest London. The college has a green field site in Ewell. It is well served by direct rail connections with London and the south of England. It competes with a number of nearby institutions. There are six other further education colleges and 64 secondary and grant-maintained schools within easy travelling distance. All schools in Surrey have sixth forms. Nescot is a general further education college, with about a third of its students taking higher education courses. It has programmes ranging from full-time academic and vocational courses for school leavers, to part-time postgraduate qualifications and professional courses for working people. The total population served is just under half a million.

2. The Nescot Training Group (NTG), a department of Nescot, was established some 12 years ago to undertake work for unemployed people. NTG currently holds contracts with Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and AZTEC to offer work-based training for young people and adults. A new contract is being set up with SOLOTEC. The co-ordinating TEC for inspection is AZTEC. Contracts are also held with the Employment Service for the New Deal and the Home Office to deliver prison education for five local prisons. In 1998 NTG was awarded a contract to deliver the New Deal for a local consortium, to include offering the Gateway, the voluntary sector, and full-time education and training options, and the self-employment route. NTG operates from well-equipped accommodation in the centre of Epsom, close to the main college's site. There are 101 TEC-funded trainees and 48 New Deal clients. Many of NTG's trainees are disaffected and have problems which they need to overcome in order to proceed into employment.

3. The local population is predominately white and middle class. In 1998, some 76 per cent of adults owned their own homes. There are approximately 2,500 adults in Surrey in the severe to high learning needs category and 16,000 to 19,000 with low to moderate learning needs. Some 57,516 (9 per cent of Surrey's population) need help with mental health problems, of whom 3,732 live in Epsom and Ewell. According to the 1991 census, 2.8 per cent of the Surrey population are from minority ethnic groups. In 1999, the immediate area of Epsom and Ewell had a minority ethnic population of 5.7 per cent, similar to the national average of 5.5 per cent. (Statistics supplied by AZTEC and Surrey TEC.) Epsom is an area of high employment, and good participation and attainment in education. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 56.6 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Over 55 per cent of 18 year olds proceed to higher education. In 1999, the unemployment rate was low at 1.4 per cent compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. NTG produced its self-assessment report in September 1999 based on *Raising the Standard*. It was compiled with the help of several of NTG's staff from different sections, along with input from departments within the college that provide off-the-job training. Staff attend training sessions run by the TECs on self-assessment. Six of the eight grades awarded by inspectors are the same as those given in the self-assessment report, while two are lower. There is little mention of trainees' achievement as either a strength or a weakness in the self-assessment of the occupational areas.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days with NTG during January 2000. The team worked jointly with a team of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectors during this time, sharing information and each other's findings. They jointly inspected construction, and the generic aspects of training. Inspectors examined documents from NTG, the college and the awarding bodies. They interviewed a range of NTG and the college's staff. Seven employers were visited during which six employers were interviewed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work, records of trainees' reviews and portfolios. They observed 10 monitoring or assessment visits and instruction sessions, and interviewed 53 trainees and 20 trainees about to begin training. The following table shows the grades awarded to the on- and off-the-job training that was observed by inspectors:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		1	1			2
Management & professional		3				3
Business administration			2			2
Foundation for work			3			3
Total	0	4	6	0	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 4

6. NTG subcontracts construction training to Nescot. Training is offered in carpentry and joinery, brickwork and plumbing, leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Trainees are recruited directly from employers or by referral from the careers service or Employment Service. There are 29 trainees, of whom seven are modern apprentices and 22 are national trainees. Sixteen trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 and three towards level 3 in plumbing, five are working towards

NVQs at level 2 and four towards level 3 in carpentry and joinery, and one is working towards an NVQ at level 2 in brickwork. All trainees are employed and are aged between 16 and 25. They attend Nescot for one day each week. Training in carpentry and joinery and in brickwork consists mainly of practical training; training days in plumbing usually consist of half a day of theory and half a day of practical work. They have in-house training with their employers at a variety of construction sites. All assessment is simulated at Nescot, where the trainers are experienced in the industry and occupationally qualified as assessors. The self-assessment report is self-critical and its judgement of identified weaknesses is largely accurate. NTG has already begun to address some of the weaknesses, such as to encourage trainees to begin collecting work-based evidence. Many of the strengths identified in the report were descriptive accounts of procedures rather than real strengths. Inspectors identified some additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by NTG.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ good on-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ good accommodation for off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no use of work-based evidence
- ◆ little feedback on NVQ progress to trainees
- ◆ poor understanding of NVQ requirements among trainees and employers
- ◆ delays in training caused by lack of building materials
- ◆ no training in key skills
- ◆ inconsistent monitoring of trainees

7. There is spacious and generally well equipped accommodation for off-the-job training. Health and safety issues are addressed and both staff and trainees have a high awareness of health and safety at work. Simple steps are taken, such as having a box of hard hats next to entrance doors of workshops so that they are put on at entry and removed on leaving the workshops. The college's staff are appropriately qualified to train, monitor and assess trainees on the programmes offered.

8. The range of practical training opportunities within employers' premises and sites is comprehensive and provides ample opportunities for trainees to experience and learn every aspect of their trades. Many of these sites are vast, including major hotel refurbishment projects, new housing estates, manor houses, and tenement blocks. Trainees are exposed to repair of older properties and to construction of new properties using the latest materials and techniques. Employers are supportive

of the off-the-job training and of their trainees in the workplace, providing ample opportunities for trainees to progress. Off-the-job training programmes are well-designed in set patterns but with sufficient flexibility to allow trainees to progress at their own pace. Most trainees are well motivated and demonstrate a positive approach to the tasks they are given, both on and off the-job. Most work in a responsible manner without the need for constant direct supervision. There is generally a good working relationship between off-the-job trainers and trainees.

9. Most trainees, work-based supervisors and employers are unaware of the requirements of the NVQ system or of key skills issues and requirements. Site evidence is not collected for inclusion in trainees' portfolios, and trainees generally do not understand the value, or role, of their portfolios. Individual training plans are brief and are not significantly modified to take account of trainees' learning styles, previous experience or abilities. Trainees receive no initial assessment of their suitability to the programme in construction they are following. There is little evidence in trainees' portfolios to support rigid internal and external verification by proving that trainees have carried out the tasks assessed. The many opportunities for work-based assessment are not used, as no work-based assessment is carried out. Simple methods of capturing evidence to support assessments, such as witness testimonies and photographs, are not utilised. External verification reports have not identified that assessments in the college's workshops are based on simulation. Achievement is below the national average achieved by full-time students in 1999, but is not significantly poor. The proportion of trainees starting programmes who achieved an NVQ at level 2 is 54 per cent, which is below the national average in colleges of 62 per cent. Retention is 66 per cent, which is also below the national average in colleges of 69 per cent. The local construction industry is buoyant and trainees have no difficulty in obtaining employment with or without qualifications.

10. Trainees are not routinely or regularly informed of their progress during their off-the-job training. Trainees' punctuality at the start of the day and after breaks is often poor. Shortages in building materials, such as bricks and timber, have resulted in off-the-job training being disrupted from time to time. Tools are poorly maintained in some areas, notably in carpentry and joinery. Examples include points of chisels being rounded. Progress reviews carried out by NTG's staff have been carried out inconsistently, but the regularity of reviews is being rapidly restored and the approach to reviews has been reconsidered. Reviews are not rigorous and do not include target setting, tending to be of a pastoral and administrative nature. There is no system to ensure that the results of reviews are properly discussed with employers and off-the-job training staff. There is a lack of co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training and employers are not involved in the planning of the training. NTG's monitoring officer, while considerably experienced in the building industry, is not occupationally qualified. NTG is aware of the requirement for key skills training but has made no arrangements to teach them. There is no single, readily accessible record which gives an overview of the progress and standards of trainees.

Management & professional

Grade 3

11. NTG has clients taking the self-employment route of the New Deal, and trainees on another programme starting their own businesses. The latter is a programme for unemployed adults over the age of 25 and is funded by the TEC. NTG refers to all those taking programmes as participants and not as trainees or clients. Personal advisers in starting new businesses provide both the training and business support. All participants undergo the same training and support programme. There are 37 adults on the TEC-funded programme and 16 New Deal clients.

12. Following referral by the Employment Service or careers service, potential participants attend a one-day seminar to raise their awareness of the issues involved in self-employment. This is usually followed by an individual counselling interview, where they are appraised and advised before progressing to a four-day, off-the-job training programme covering most aspects of self-employment and leading to the production of a viable business plan. This course is spread over four weeks. However, the programme is flexible and participants are able to take the course later or not at all depending on their individual need. Some participants are accepted onto the programme prior to the attendance on the training course providing they have an acceptable business plan. Once a participant has produced an acceptable business plan, they are formally enrolled on the programme and can proceed to test trading under supervision. In the case of the New Deal clients, the successful submission of a business plan is the completion of stage 2. NTG maintains and manages the bank account for the participant. Participants are required to attend NTG's training centre at regular intervals for periodic business reviews. The precise length of time the participant trades under supervision varies according to their programme. In the case of TEC-funded training, this is 18 weeks. For the New Deal clients, the programme lasts for 26 weeks. In many cases, participants leave the programme before completion as their businesses take off more quickly than anticipated. Following completion of the programme, personal advisers offer continued support. The self-assessment report provided a reasonably accurate reflection of this occupational area and identified a number of strengths and weaknesses. Some of these described no more than standard practice or were more applicable to other generic areas. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and confirmed the grade given in the self-assessment report by NTG.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly motivated trainees and clients
- ◆ good business counselling
- ◆ good availability of information technology facilities and services

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no opportunity to take NVQs

- ◆ no group activities after initial training
- ◆ poor achievement compared to local and national averages

GOOD PRACTICE

An example of good practice in developing links with particular industries is shown by NTG and the music industry. Many aspiring self-employed musicians have developed their careers and businesses through the programme. Three members of a music group have recently undertaken the programme as New Deal clients and have produced two singles. One single has reached number five in the national top 20 music charts and the group is appearing on the BBC television programme 'Top of the Pops'. The group has since been invited back by NTG to keep the personal advisers updated on their progress. The personal adviser uses their success to encourage and motivate current trainees.

13. Participants demonstrate a high level of motivation and commitment to self-employment. Attendance at reviews is regular and frequent, and the occasional absence is usually due to unavoidable business commitments. Participants maintain rigorous progress towards the achievement of their own goals. They have a strong awareness of the details of the programme they are taking and considerable emphasis is placed on the development of personal confidence. There is a high standard of business counselling. NTG employs three personal advisers, all of whom have a wide experience of business, including setting up and running small businesses, as well as expertise in a range of additional subjects. Each personal adviser takes on a portfolio of participants. One specialises in the New Deal clients. However, all three consult one another on a regular basis. They also consult colleagues on occupational and trade issues to enable them to give the best possible advice available.

14. Participants receive a good deal of business coaching and formal training sessions are clear and effectively presented. Participants may be referred to other participants where personal advisers believe there might be mutual benefit or a joint venture may be possible. Personal advisers also refer participants to other business organisations including The Prince's Trust. In addition to business training, all participants have access to a range of facilities and corresponding training if appropriate. The main facility used is computer equipment for the production of advertising materials, correspondence and for analysing research and marketing data. Participants have access to the Internet. Extra training is provided to enable participants to use this technology. Alternatively, trainees in information technology with NTG provide the service required so they themselves can use the work as evidence towards their own NVQs.

15. NTG does not offer TEC-funded participants the facility to take either a full NVQ or units toward the full award. Participants have no opportunity of gaining a recognised qualification, despite the training and guidance received together with the preparation of the business plan and the development of marketing and other business strategies being a good basis for an owner manager NVQ. New Deal clients have the opportunity of working towards a well-recognised industry qualification. After the initial training when test trading commences, there is no further formal instruction, group talks, or meetings for participants during the remainder of the programme. There is little opportunity for participants to share their experiences, as future discussions are on a one-to-one basis with personal advisers. The recorded level of achievement is based upon participants progressing to sustained self-employment, meeting TEC requirements in respect of written evidence, within specified timescales. In 1998-99, this was 28.6 per cent. This is low compared with the TEC average of 37 per cent. However, beyond this timescale, NTG's participants are succeeding in excess of the TEC average.

Business administration

Grade 3

16. There are presently 21 trainees working towards using information technology NVQs at level 2. Of these, nine are on the youth training programme, 10 are on the work-based learning for adults programme, and two are New Deal clients. Thirteen of the trainees are female. They are generally referred to NTG by the careers service and job centres. There are three assessors. Most trainees attend an intensive in-house programme over an eight-week period. All of the trainees are employed, but the programme does not include the collection of evidence from the workplace, relying instead on simulated, off-the-job evidence. The programme is more varied for the New Deal clients who may undertake additional qualifications and training, such as an administration NVQ. NTG has recognised that a recent change in the information technology NVQ standards means that this course structure is no longer viable as work-based evidence must now be included. This is the last group of trainees who will follow the intensive programme, and not need to show understanding over time in a work-based setting. No firm plans have yet been made to accommodate trainees who want to work towards the revised standard in the future. The programme includes jobsearch support every week. The self-assessment report was out of date by the time of inspection, having been prepared several months earlier. The strengths and weaknesses were not a realistic reflection of the training. This was because the strengths were over-stated and the weaknesses had already been addressed by the time of inspection. Inspectors found different strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ up-to-date computers and software
- ◆ small, highly effective training groups
- ◆ well-structured training programme
- ◆ systematic initial assessment of basic and information technology skills

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no real workplace experience
- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ cramped working conditions in one training room
- ◆ inadequate printer facilities

17. There are three information technology training rooms that are well equipped with 45 personal computers. These range from basic machines to those with the latest technology, and reflect a broad range of equipment that is commonly found in

the workplace. Most of the training is delivered on the modern computers. All trainees have easy access to computer equipment and they do not have to share the facilities. Some of the furniture is not suitable. Chairs are uncomfortable and workstations have minimal desk space for paperwork beside the computers. Some trainees have to place papers on keyboards or lean them against monitors. Not all of the printers are of current industry standard. It is difficult to purchase new ink cartridges for one printer, as it is becoming obsolete. Others are slow to respond to print requests, and trainees are frustrated by the delays.

18. There are a series of handbooks that accompany training which guide trainees through the learning programme. These cover basic and intermediate applications in word-processing, database and spreadsheet programmes. Not all of the instruction sessions have relevant reference materials but, in such cases, trainees have good opportunities to practice their new skills as the course develops. All trainees understand what is expected of them, although they are less certain about the full content of the entire programme. Training is delivered at a pace appropriate to each individual. Training groups are small, of 10 trainees or less. Trainers are able to give individual attention to trainees without detriment to the needs of the whole group. The course is well organised so that groups progress on to new subjects together. Individual trainees who work at a faster pace are given tasks that keep them usefully engaged and further enhance their learning. Progress is reviewed every week, when trainees reflect on what they have learned and agree objectives with their tutor for the following week.

19. All trainees who apply to join the programme are assessed on their basic literacy and numeracy skills when they are interviewed. This identifies any additional support needs they may require. However, it is rare for trainees with any significant learning difficulties to enrol on the programme. In general, support is given on an individual basis by the tutor who is able to spend more time with, and to adjust the learning pace of, the trainee. On the first day of the course, trainees take another assessment that determines their existing level of information technology skills. This involves a knowledge questionnaire and some practical work using the computer. From the outset, tutors have a good understanding of the learning needs of each trainee and adjust their teaching styles to meet those individual needs.

20. Trainees' competence is assessed through observation in the training room, by questioning and by looking at the documents they produce during the eight-week course. Trainees progress through various exercises which enable them to develop appropriate skills. Trainees' portfolios comprise work that is undertaken largely for NTG's staff. This can include new forms, leaflets, posters, letters and other administration tasks. Deadlines are set for the completion of this work. Very occasionally, trainees may produce work for a customer outside the organisation. However, the usual extent of the trainees' involvement in producing real work does not reflect the conditions of a real working environment which trainees can expect in employment. Some aspects of the programme are entirely assessed on simulated exercises. This includes work on spreadsheets, for example. There are plans to change the structure of the programme to include an element of intensive training

followed by significant work-based experience, learning and assessment. However, this new initiative is still being developed and no firm plans have been decided.

21. Some of the portfolio evidence is weak or has been poorly assessed. There are examples of brief and largely pointless witness testimonies from fellow trainees being used to claim large parts of NVQ units. Some assessors' observation records acknowledge trainees' competence against specific aspects of the NVQ, but have been used to claim competence across a much wider and wholly inappropriate range of the standard. Questions have been used to claim evidence of actual trainees' performance, rather than just as proof of the trainees' knowledge and understanding. The NVQ element that covers working relationships with colleagues is mainly assessed through log sheets and questions. This produces light-weight evidence that has not been generated in a real working environment.

22. Achievement and retention rates have been high over the past two years. On average, 90 per cent of all trainees complete the programme and achieve the level 2 qualification. This is significantly higher than normal success rates. However, this level of achievement has been reached through a learning programme that does not support work-based training and which has included some weak assessment practice. The external verifier did identify some concerns about assessment in a recent visit. NTG responded by introducing new standard paperwork to ensure greater consistency among assessors. Sufficient time using this new paperwork has not passed to evaluate its effectiveness and the internal verification process has failed to identify some of the poor practice that is still evident in the most recent portfolios.

Foundation for work

Grade 3

23. NTG offers a variety of foundation training programmes in basic employability, project placement and the New Deal Gateway, full-time education and training, and voluntary sector to a range of young people and adults. Basic employability trainees are trained in-house for 10 weeks to achieve two personal targets and learn information technology skills. Trainees also gain certificates in health and safety and basic food hygiene, and have a work taster of 28 days with employers. Trainees on project placement are recruited for work experience placements only. They are interviewed at their local job centres and placed with a variety of employers for up to 15 weeks, but do not receive training. Gateway trainees attend the centre for three separate days over a three week period. They can learn how to prepare a curriculum vitae and how to present themselves for interviews. The New Deal training programme lasts 26 weeks. Trainees on the voluntary sector option are placed with a variety of employers for four days a week. Trainees on the New Deal full-time education and training option are on a range of college-based courses, most having started in September 1999. They attend college for four days a week. Courses include animal care, childcare, construction, information technology, engineering, horticulture and music technology. All trainees return to the

centre for one day a week to learn information technology skills and attend jobsearch sessions. The New Deal trainees receive information technology training that is delivered in-house and there is no assessment of qualifications in the workplace. Trainees receive a written induction pack.

24. There are currently eight trainees on basic employability programmes and eight on project placement programmes funded by the TEC. There are 14 clients on the New Deal voluntary sector option, 14 on the full-time education and training option and two on Gateway funded by the Employment Service. Not all trainees receive an initial assessment. Trainees who are based in-house are reviewed weekly, and those on work placements are reviewed every five to six weeks. Retention on the full-time education and training option for 1998-99, was 54 per cent of those starting the programme, and 34 per cent of those completing their programmes gained a qualification. The TEC contract for project placement has a target of 66 per cent of those leaving achieving jobs. NTG is currently achieving 44 per cent. The voluntary option had a retention rate of 38 per cent in 1998-99; 51 per cent of leavers were successful in achieving jobs or entering further education, while 32 per cent of leavers gained a qualification. The self-assessment report was not sufficiently self-critical. Some judgements in the report related to activities considered to be no more than normal practice. The report did not identify weaknesses in the range of qualifications available and in jobsearch. However, inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ constructive and realistic advice on work opportunities
- ◆ wide range of suitable work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ few relevant qualifications available to trainees
- ◆ no structured job-search training for a few trainees

25. There is a welcoming atmosphere in the training centre which is enhanced by a communal area that is the central reception point for all newcomers. There are large noticeboards with displays in this area. One lists the trainees who have achieved jobs over a period of two years and the other a range of jobs that are available in the local area. All staff are well qualified and experienced and form good working relationships with trainees and clients. Staff have many links with employers in the London area. As a result, they have built up a comprehensive database of nearly a thousand employers over a number of years. Staff make regular contact with employers to ensure they have updated information on these employers' vacancies. Employers are willing to assist and guide trainees in the workplace. Employers include a range of charities, leisure centres, medical

research councils, law clinics, community trusts and other commercial organisations. All trainees and clients are given constructive advice about work-placement opportunities. They have individual, in-depth interviews with staff to discuss their preferred type of employer and occupation. For example, trainees have asked for particular work placements in shipping, theatrical art and accounting companies, which NTG has been able to find. Time and attention are spent closely matching work placements to trainees' needs and preferences. Job descriptions are drawn up and agreed with employers which list a variety of basic tasks to be carried out by trainees in the workplace that will enhance their employability. Many trainees are motivated by achieving health and safety and basic food hygiene qualifications, as these are the first qualifications they have ever achieved. Some trainees have little confidence, and work tasters have been useful in helping them to develop skills such as timekeeping and personal presentation. This has improved their self-esteem.

26. There is no overall system to track the progress of individual trainees on the units of the course or towards completion of qualifications without checking individual files. Trainees on the New Deal full-time education and training option are monitored mainly by college tutors rather than NTG's staff, and interim goals towards achievement are not recorded on internal records. These trainees are not always aware of their achievements.

27. There are few opportunities for trainees to obtain qualifications on most programmes. Some trainees have expressed an interest to work in retail. Work placements are offered in retail environments but trainees do not receive appropriate occupational training or obtain relevant qualifications in retail or customer service. There is no customised in-house training to accommodate individual needs, such as computerised accounting. Childcare skills are sometimes developed through work experience while on work placements but not through structured on- or off-the-job training. Trainees on basic employability programmes work towards two personal targets and are only offered training in information technology skills, without an accredited qualification. There are also inflexible training arrangements, as trainees are unable to access training from the subcontracted college unless the training period coincides with the college's academic year. Trainees are therefore disadvantaged in their range of choice of qualifications that are relevant to the workplace.

28. All trainees are required to attend a weekly three-hour job-search session throughout the training period. Trainees who are based in-house receive structured job-search training that focuses on, for example, the production of curriculum vitae, practising interview skills, using agencies and speculative letter writing. Other trainees on work placements negotiate individually with employers as to when they can attend job-search activities at a convenient time for the work-placement provider. This means that some trainees do not receive structured training or benefit from a higher level of support, as they are not released from their work placements. In such cases, they are left to use computers and access employment journals or local newspapers by themselves. This is particularly true for trainees who attend

the centre on a Friday. Any job-search skills trainees are short of, such as interview skills, are therefore not immediately identified and dealt with. The onus is frequently on trainees to suggest the training they feel they need. NTG is currently setting up a record of individual trainees' patterns of attendance so job-search sessions can be arranged to suit these. Staff will then be able to monitor trainees' individual job-search skills requirements.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

29. NTG demonstrates that it is fully committed to providing equality of opportunity. Its policy and procedures are set out in the quality assurance management manual and are closely linked to those of Nescot. The policy meets the requirements of current legislation and covers all aspects of equality. It is clearly displayed on noticeboards and in rooms used by prospective trainees, current trainees and staff. Marketing and advertising literature produced by Nescot indicates that the training is open to all, but some NTG literature does not promote equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities data is maintained and analysed for both staff and trainees. All staff and trainees are given a copy of the policy. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were descriptive accounts of procedures. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and confirmed the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of training to under-represented groups
- ◆ good support for trainees with identified disabilities and learning needs
- ◆ good links to appropriate external agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ haphazard monitoring of equal opportunities issues among trainees
- ◆ no review of employers' understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities issues among trainees

30. The NTG has an established and regularly reviewed and updated equal opportunities policy, which covers all aspects of equal opportunities and meets both legal and the TEC's requirements. The policy is an accepted part of the terms and conditions for trainees, employers and staff. Most staff have a good understanding of equality of opportunity issues and support it in all they say and do. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda item at staff meetings, and the strategic plan includes a number of equal opportunities issues to be addressed. There are clear

disciplinary and complaints procedures, although these have rarely had to be used. NTG promotes its training well to under-represented groups. Staff have researched the needs of the local population, in areas identified as being deprived, in order to target recruitment. NTG has staff working full-time in local prisons to advise on training opportunities, and has recently become actively involved in seeking ways to help those from an area of particularly high unemployment who are in danger of social exclusion. A recent survey carried out by NTG identified a lack of job outcomes for trainees from minority ethnic groups, so specific additional training was arranged to prepare these trainees better for job interviews. NTG works closely with The Prince's Trust to provide relevant training opportunities for disadvantaged young people. Trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities are well-supported, with signers for those with impaired hearing, modified VDU screens and other equipment, as appropriate. NTG gives clothing to trainees who cannot afford to dress appropriately for job interviews. A member of staff visits trainees in their homes, if trainees are unable to visit NTG's premises owing to having a disability or being disadvantaged, at a time convenient to the trainees.

31. Some promotional literature does not advertise training opportunities as being open to all. Although equal opportunities issues are included as a part of trainees' induction, the training is not memorable to them. Few trainees have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues and some employers are also unaware. Reinforcement of equal opportunities issues is not inherent in the content of training programmes. On-the-job review visits do not include any discussion of equal opportunities issues. Although much is being done to encourage under-represented groups into training, there are no measurable targets for recruitment. Some under-representation remains, notably in construction, which is predominately white male. While there is a complaints procedure, it is not monitored by managers for trends, or used as a basis for making decisions.

Trainee support

Grade 4

32. NTG provides training for young people and adults. Trainees are referred from the Employment Service and careers services, or respond to advertisements. Potential trainees are interviewed individually at job centres or at NTG. Not all trainees receive an initial assessment. There is no initial assessment for key skills. Most induction programmes cover health and safety issues, grievance and disciplinary procedures and a separate explanation of the equal opportunities policy. Trainees are visited in the workplace. Visits are mainly monitoring visits to discuss trainees' progress. Feedback is not fully recorded. Few of the strengths claimed during self-assessment were confirmed by inspectors, and other weaknesses were found. The report failed to highlight weaknesses relating to training plans, reviews and induction procedures. NTG over-valued trainee support and inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ some good pastoral care and individual support
- ◆ good use made of referral links within NTG

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsystematically applied initial assessment procedures
- ◆ some poor induction procedures
- ◆ no individualisation of incomprehensive training plans
- ◆ poor recording of information on trainees' reviews
- ◆ no recording of individual support given

33. Trainees are supported in a variety of ways. Foundation for work trainees are sometimes accompanied to interviews and helped with personal, health and social problems in order to keep them in training so that they might achieve qualifications and complete their programmes. One-to-one learning support has helped to increase attendance and motivation for several trainees lacking confidence. Some trainees have changed careers and gained qualifications, such as in carpentry and joinery at NVQ level 2, with support from their tutors throughout. Staff have also helped trainees to continue with training in construction when they have lost jobs. One trainee is being funded for driving lessons in order to become a bus driver. Other trainees have been provided with clothing for interviews. Trainees with personal difficulties are also referred to qualified counsellors at the college. One trainee has now become a trained counsellor and works with current trainees who have problems with low self-esteem, confidence and domestic issues. Trainees with disabilities are given effective personal advice and support. Staff visit them in their homes to discuss their progress and to carry out reviews. Other trainees with medical problems are also visited at home, to help and encourage them with their programmes.

34. Trainees are encouraged to take other programmes with NTG if their current programme does not suit their individual requirements. NTG's staff work closely and have frequent informal meetings to ensure that all trainees are matched to an appropriate training programme. Their approach is positive and caring.

35. Trainees on basic employability, information technology and construction receive an initial assessment for basic skills only. Trainees do not receive an initial assessment for key skills in construction, although they are national trainees or modern apprentices. There is no systematic assessment of basic skills for trainees on the New Deal voluntary sector and full-time training and education options. Trainees have an initial guidance and assessment interview only. As a result, additional support requirements are not always identified at interviews and are not recorded on individual training plans. One trainee with literacy support requirements

was only offered such support after five months of a six-month training programme.

36. There are a variety of training plans in individual trainees' files. Information is therefore recorded in different ways and it is difficult to monitor and track individual trainees' progress. Training plans are not individual and are all completed with the same information. Dates of reviews are recorded but comments and the name of the reviewer are not completed. Details of NVQ units achieved or other qualifications completed are not included on review records. For example, information on trainees who are receiving learning support for literacy and numeracy, such as entry-level wordpower or numberpower qualifications, is not recorded. Training plans are used only to record support details, such as those relating to travel arrangements. Some training plans have been repeatedly photocopied and are of a poor quality.

37. Induction procedures are not comprehensive or consistent across the training programmes. Information technology trainees are given an induction on the first day of their training programme which is mixed in with practical activities. One trainee had a two-week induction into the course. There is a range of induction material used for each programme area. Most trainees are given general information on health and safety and equal opportunities. However, some trainees who start the construction programme two to three weeks late are not given a formal induction into their training programme. They are not given the necessary health and safety guidance. Foundation for work and construction trainees are frequently given written induction packs to read through. The language used in the packs is complex. The packs are difficult for trainees with literacy learning needs to understand. Some induction packs are sent to trainees through the post. Information on equal opportunities is given to trainees to read through and is not thoroughly explained. There is no comprehensive reinforcement of equal opportunities issues at induction.

38. Staff meet with foundation for work trainees on work placements every five to six weeks to review their progress. Construction trainees are visited every three months, in accordance with the contract. However, there has been some slippage in the frequency of construction visits owing to staffing problems. Some trainees have no recall of recent visits by staff, and one trainee on bricklaying has not been reviewed for over seven months. These trainees are not always aware of how much progress they have made. NTG uses a variety of progress review forms for different occupational areas. Several versions are in use and are completed to different levels of detail. Reviews for trainees on management and professional programmes contain information relating to health and safety and are specific to progress on marketing, customer development and cashflow activities. The reviews for the New Deal full-time training and education clients contain information relating to additional support needs identified and equal opportunities issues only. The quality of information recorded on reviews is generally poor. On one review document it was indicated that there were problems regarding health and safety issues, but no details were recorded or action specified to remedy the problem and increase safety for the trainee. Review documents do not include learning targets achieved during the period before the next review. Trainees are not set short- or

POOR PRACTICE

This is an example of poor recording in trainee support. One trainee with severe learning difficulties was receiving six hours of individual learning support. However, her training plan identified learning support needs simply as 'assistance with travel fares'. There was no recording of the detail of the support being received and whether this led to appropriate foundation or entry-level qualifications, such as wordpower.

long-term goals or challenging targets. Other comments on reviews are vague. There are no specific targets given to employers to improve the effectiveness of trainees' performance in the workplace.

39. There is no overall responsibility for trainee support in NTG. Trainee support is not emphasised during induction. Some construction trainees are unclear about the support that NTG can provide and do not know who to approach for assistance. There are no overall records of support for trainees that identify individual pastoral or learning support, or to monitor common issues that arise in order to better co-ordinate support activities.

Management of training

Grade 3

40. NTG is part of North East Surrey College of Technology. It operates from separate premises in Epsom although it maintains offices at the main college. NTG employs 22 staff, four of whom have been recruited in recent months. A head of the training group, who is assisted by a deputy, manages the organisation. NTG is divided into a number of sections, each headed by a co-ordinator. With the exception of the enterprise co-ordinator, who reports directly to the head of training group, each co-ordinator reports to the deputy manager. The unit has its own strategic plan, and targets are set and delegated to section co-ordinators. The head of the training group and her deputy hold meetings with section co-ordinators and members of each team on a monthly basis. Full staff meetings are held as required. Minutes of these meetings are maintained. Focus groups comprising volunteer members of staff consider and report on a wide range of issues. Many of NTG's procedures, systems and documents are relatively new and have been developed recently. The college holds the Investors in People Standard, which also covers NTG. This is reassessed on an annual basis. The self-assessment report was accurate in its overall assessment, with clear identification of several of the strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by the college and identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of staff induction
- ◆ good, comprehensive staff handbook
- ◆ well-structured staff development programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of effective trainees' progress tracking system
- ◆ inadequate management information system
- ◆ no contracts for subcontractors

41. NTG, as part of Nescot, follows the recruitment and induction practice as set out by the personnel department of the college. The induction of staff is carried out to a high standard and is comprehensive. It covers all aspects of equal opportunities, health and safety and all other areas required for a new entrant. Effective induction training sessions take place over two days. Good and comprehensive literature is issued to the new entrant. Line managers undertake an additional induction to a format set by the personnel department. This also includes a discussion on any individual training needs the new entrant may require and recommendations on how these may be met. A detailed checklist is used and after completion is signed by the entrant and line manager before being forwarded to the personnel department, who monitor the whole process. A comprehensive and detailed staff handbook is in operation and is used throughout Nescot. This is of a high quality, is well presented and is issued to all staff. All amendments and updates are controlled centrally. The handbook also gives detailed information on agreed procedures and copies of Nescot's policies. In addition to the more general subjects, wide-ranging issues such as harassment, whistle-blowing, employment stability, drugs and alcohol and jury service are included. The handbook is cross-referenced to the college's systems manual. NTG has developed, with Nescot, a well-structured staff development programme that is based upon Nescot's policy. Full advantage is taken of Nescot's five training and staff development days which staff attend whenever appropriate. These are relevant to the needs of the individual members of staff and are well run. Additional training and staff development needs are regularly reviewed at staff and team meetings. Once a year, during a formal job review, all outstanding issues are clarified and targets set for their resolution. All training and staff development issues are carefully monitored and evaluated.

42. Staff maintain individual records of trainees' progress within files. However, there is no easily maintained or accessible method of identifying the current position of any trainee or to measure the progress made at any one time. There is no formal tracking system, although NTG has advanced plans to introduce one. The management information system relies on two computer systems provided by the TECs. Both systems are designed by the TECs for accounting purposes, for both adult and youth schemes, and are limited in their flexibility. They do not give sufficient information to managers and staff to enable them to undertake accurate forecasting, to compare performance, assist with profiling and target setting, identify trends or assist with data analysis. There is no management information system to track New Deal clients. NTG uses two external contractors for specialist courses. It sets the criteria and negotiates the respective arrangements and finances. Periodic monitoring is undertaken, but there is no formal contract specifying these details for either subcontractor. Similarly, there is no internal service level agreement between NTG and the rest of the college. Areas which offer unsatisfactory training cannot be judged on how far the training falls short, as the standard of training required has not been set out.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

43. NTG has a quality assurance manager who is relatively new to the role. There has been some useful liaison with the mainstream college, which has more established systems, to create a quality assurance framework for work-based training. Feedback from trainees has been requested for some time, but other aspects of quality assurance are still being developed. The self-assessment report accurately identifies some of the minor weaknesses, but does not highlight the key issues that need to be addressed. Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths of quality assurance that were included in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given by NTG.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of trainee feedback systems
- ◆ clear strategic planning aimed at continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few recorded procedures for assuring quality of work-based training
- ◆ no measurable impact as yet of recent arrangements on the quality of training and assessment

44. All trainees are encouraged to formally express their opinions on their training at least once during their course, as part of a systematic process of collecting feedback using questionnaires. In some areas, there are fortnightly focus groups that are attended by trainees' representatives and management. The representatives prepare for the meeting by discussing issues and concerns with their peers, which are then freely discussed in the focus groups. Trainees' views are taken seriously and responded to appropriately. There is a suggestions box prominently positioned in reception that is drawn to the attention of trainees. This is well-supported and the comments are regularly evaluated. There is also a generic questionnaire that gives trainees the opportunity to give additional feedback at any time during their programme. Trainees are encouraged to use this, and their observations are collated and regularly reviewed. Not all of the feedback is anonymous, and the option to remain so is not made clear on some of the questionnaires.

45. NTG shares the same principal corporate objectives as the mainstream college, and has its own strategic plan that supports the achievement of these aims. This plan has replaced the original action plan that arose out of the self-assessment process and has added new targets which will further enhance the quality of training. This document is a list of desired improvements which are clearly linked to business and strategic planning. It demonstrates a good understanding by managers and staff of some of the key issues that need to be addressed, including several of

the key weaknesses found by inspectors which are not clearly identified in the self-assessment report. However, it does not state how NTG is planning to build on its strengths. The action plan is regularly referred to, but progress towards achieving the specified objectives are not recorded.

46. Quality assurance arrangements are informal. There is no written over-arching policy that explains how NTG monitors, measures and evaluates its performance. There is a comprehensive quality assurance framework that has been produced by the mainstream college. This is not entirely appropriate to the work-based training activities of the college. However, this framework is being used as the basis for a specific quality assurance strategy for work-based training. Managers aim to use the established good practice of the college system and to adapt it accordingly. New policies are being developed but there is still some way to go before a formal and complete quality assurance system is ready for use.

47. There are few quality assurance arrangements that are firmly established. There are some new initiatives in operation and others are still in the planning stages. At this stage, the system is not accurately identifying and addressing all of the areas in need of improvement. NTG did not realise that some aspects of its training is unsatisfactory. Internal verification procedures have not picked up on some of the key issues around assessment practice. Some features of sound quality assurance systems are still missing. No use is made of data to drive change, compare performance or monitor subcontractors. No feedback is requested from employers. Training sessions are not observed, and trainees' progress after leaving their programmes is not followed up. Plans are being made to look at all these quality assurance issues, and these are in various stages of development. The quality assurance arrangements already in operation have prompted the development of new documents and recording systems, the acquisition of new computer equipment, and the improvement of internal meetings. However, the quality assurance arrangements are not yet sufficiently established to be fully effective in assuring the quality of training and assessment.

48. The self-assessment report was produced after consultation with staff and trainees. There was little description about the methods of training, especially in the generic aspects of the report. Evidence was clearly referenced against each of the strengths and weaknesses. Many of the strengths were regarded by inspectors as no more than normal practice. Many of the minor weakness were identified in the self-assessment report but the key issues were not fully understood or explained. Inspectors agreed with all the self-assessed grades except in construction and trainee support, where they awarded lower grades. The action plan did not propose ways of building on existing strengths and focused just on the weaknesses. The action plan was also out of date, although many of the issues had been transferred onto NTG's strategic plan which was being regularly monitored.