

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
JANUARY 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION MAY
2001

Nescot Training Group



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's *learndirect* provision
- ◆ adult and community learning
- ◆ training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

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

Grading

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

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

SUMMARY

The original inspection of Nescot Training Group was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for construction and trainee support. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with construction and trainee support have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

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. They have, however, experienced some poor assessment practice. Foundation for work trainees receive constructive and realistic advice on work opportunities, but are offered only a small range of relevant qualifications to train towards. At the time of the original inspection, training in construction was unsatisfactory, it is now good. Construction trainees are in work placements which provide good opportunities for on-the-job training. Equal opportunities is satisfactory. Nescot Training Group promotes its services to widen participation from under-represented groups. It does not, however, review its employers' understanding of equal opportunities. At the time of the original inspection, trainee support was unsatisfactory; it is now good. Initial assessment is used systematically and there is effective personal support for trainees. There is some poor recording of information on trainees' files. 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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Construction	2

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good accommodation for off-the-job training in construction
- ◆ high standard of trainees' practical work 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
- ◆ good additional learning support
- ◆ clear strategic planning aimed at continuous improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding by employers of NVQs 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
- ◆ 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 greenfield 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 training 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 13 years ago to provide work for unemployed people. At the time of the original inspection, NTG held contracts with Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), AZTEC and SOLOTEC to offer work-based training for young people and adults. The co-ordinating TEC for inspection was AZTEC. At the time of reinspection, this contract had passed to the London South Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). A further contract is held with the Surrey LLSC. Contracts are also held with the Employment Service for New Deal and with the Home Office to provide education in five local prisons. In 1998, NTG was awarded a contract to provide New Deal for a local consortium, to include offering the Gateway, the voluntary sector, and full-time education and training options, as well as the self-employment route. NTG operates from well-equipped accommodation in the centre of Epsom, close to the main college's site. At the time of the original inspection, there were 101 TEC-funded trainees and 48 New Deal clients. Many of NTG's trainees have problems which they need to overcome in order to proceed into employment. At the time of the reinspection, just before summer recruitment, there were 59 LLSC-funded trainees and 16 New Deal clients.

3. The local population is predominately white and middle class. In 1998, 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. 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, compared with the national average of 5.5 per cent. 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 secondary 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 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 57.6 per cent compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 1999, the unemployment rate was low at 1.4 per cent compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. In January 2001, it was 1 per cent compared with a national average of 3.5 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. NTG produced its self-assessment report for the original inspection 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 attended training sessions run by the TECs on self-assessment. Six of the eight grades awarded by inspectors were the same as those given in the self-assessment report and two were lower. There was little mention of trainees' achievement as either a strength or a weakness in the self-assessment of the occupational areas. For the reinspection, NTG submitted comprehensive updates on its action plan and a summary of self-assessed strengths and weaknesses for construction and trainee support. Both grades awarded by inspection in the reinspection were higher than those given in the self-assessment report.

5. At the original inspection, 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 and six employers were interviewed. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' work and records of trainees' reviews and portfolios. They observed 10 monitoring or assessment visits and instruction sessions, and interviewed 53 trainees as well as 20 trainees about to begin training.

6. Reinspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors who spent a total of 10 days with NTG during May 2001. Construction and trainee support were reinspected against the *Common Inspection Framework*. Inspectors interviewed 24 trainees. They examined eight portfolios and assessment records, and trainee support documents and interviewed NTG and Nescot's staff. They observed three off-the-job training sessions at the college's main site as well as five trainees' progress reviews. They visited three employers' premises and interviewed four employers. The tables below show the grades awarded to the on- and off-the-job training sessions observed by inspectors at the original inspection and the reinspection:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions in original inspection

	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

Grades awarded to instruction sessions in reinspection

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

7. NTG subcontracts construction training to Nescot. Training is offered in foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in carpentry and joinery, brickwork, plumbing and plastering, leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and key skills. Trainees are recruited directly from employers or by referral from the careers service or Employment Service. There are 42 trainees. Nine are advanced modern apprentices and 33 are foundation modern apprentices. In plumbing, 16 trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 and eight towards level 3. In carpentry and joinery 15 trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 and one towards level 3. In both brickwork and plastering, there is one foundation modern apprentice working towards an NVQ at level 2. Trainees attend Nescot on a day release basis for theory and practical work as well as some assessment. They have on-the-job training with their employers at a variety of construction sites. Some assessment is simulated at Nescot, where the trainers are experienced in the industry and are occupationally qualified as assessors. Since the original inspection, some assessment in the workplace has started and eight carpenters and joiners, two plumbers and one bricklayer have had elements of the NVQ assessed on site. Sub-contract staff have also received training in the use of work-based recording systems to encourage them to observe and record work-based evidence. Trainees are now encouraged to provide witness testimony as part of their assessment evidence. Trainees have started key skills training and are aware of the requirements in relation to their modern apprenticeship. At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ 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

8. In its action plan, NTG identified the evidence to show how the weaknesses had been rectified since the original inspection. Inspectors found that all the weaknesses had been remedied with the exception of employers' understanding of NVQs. Trainees are encouraged to use witness testimony and some work-based assessment has taken place. Training reviews are now regular and NTG's monitoring officer meets off-the-job training staff to discuss trainees' progress towards the qualification. Trainees understand their NVQs. Targets relating to achievement are reviewed and new targets set. Building materials budgets have been increased and are now adequate. Key skills training has begun and trainees are aware of the requirements in relation to the completion of their qualification. The weaknesses identified by the original inspection have now been rectified and significant improvements have also been made. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

In the plumbing section, a major systems-control manufacturer provides a two-day course free of charge to all level 2 and 3 NVQ trainees. The course is based upon domestic and advanced control systems during which all aspects of the systems and wiring circuitry are covered, including fault finding sessions. The training programme enables trainees to become familiar with modern industry standard equipment. On completion, trainees receive a certificate.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good practical training areas for off-the-job training
- ◆ good opportunities for training on the job
- ◆ good standard of trainees' work
- ◆ effective links with industry
- ◆ good assessment of trainees' progress
- ◆ good and improving retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding of NVQs by employers

9. There is spacious and generally well-equipped accommodation for off-the-job training. Health and safety issues are reinforced and both staff and trainees have a high awareness of health and safety in the college workshops. 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 when leaving the workshops. Since the original inspection, additional accommodation has been built to improve the facilities for training in plastering. The accommodation was used as a design and build project for trainees on NVQ programmes. The college's staff are appropriately qualified to train, monitor and assess trainees on the training programmes offered. Internal verification is carried out to awarding body standards.

10. There are good opportunities for on-the-job training allowing trainees to

POOR PRACTICE

Issues relating to health and safety are covered at induction and by the subcontractor at the start of the training programme, and specific health and safety units form part of the NVQ. Despite this work, two trainees working in a company producing a wide range of purpose-made joinery items were observed working without the appropriate protective footwear which had been provided by their employer.

experience and learn every aspect of their trades. Many of these sites are large, including major hotel refurbishment projects, new housing estates, manor houses, and tenement blocks. Since the original inspection, the number of employers used has increased and the range of work provided for trainees has widened. Trainees have opportunities to experience all types of building work such as the repair, maintenance and refurbishment of older properties and the 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 in their NVQ programme.

11. The standard of work produced by trainees is high. From an early stage in their training, trainees are given tasks to help them to develop appropriate craft skills. Trainees are encouraged to produce work of a high standard and are able to link skills developed in the workplace with work covered in their off-the-job training programmes. The off-the-job training programmes are co-ordinated well with sufficient flexibility to allow trainees to progress at their own pace. Trainees' progress is monitored and recorded by tutors and is supported by the internal verification process.

12. Subcontractor's staff have developed good links with local firms who donate materials and equipment, either free of charge or at subsidised rates. Trainees benefit from this by being able to use up-to-date equipment and good-quality materials in their practical classes. 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.

13. Assessment of trainees' progress is good. Trainees receive a regular progress review every eight weeks. This is carried out by NTG's staff. More frequent reviews are available for those trainees who require them. The monitoring officer meets regularly with tutors to discuss trainees' progress reviews and targets for completion, which are then agreed with the trainees. Individual training plans are now updated at review to record trainees' achievements. All trainees undertake basic and key skills assessment at the start of the training programme. The assessments guide the individual training plans and additional support to improve communication and numeracy skills is given to those trainees who require it. A new induction programme, together with improved reviews of trainees' progress which set NVQ-related targets for trainees, has improved trainees' understanding of their NVQ. Key skills training has started on all training programmes and trainees are aware of the role and requirements of key skills in relation to their qualification. Trainees are now encouraged to provide work-based witness testimony and photographic evidence from the workplace to support their assessments. In addition, a number of work-based assessments have taken place, using a member of the subcontractor's staff and two visiting assessors employed specifically for this purpose. Further assessment in the workplace is planned and NTG has held seminars for employers at which the role of work-based assessment

was explained. One company has indicated an interest in giving its supervisors the opportunity to complete assessor awards, thereby increasing opportunities for assessment in the workplace.

14. Retention rates for foundation modern apprenticeships have improved from 66 per cent in 1999-2000 to 82 per cent in 2000-01. The achievement rate is moving from being below the national average of 54 per cent in 1999 to meeting the national average for foundation modern apprentices. In 1999-2000, the proportion of trainees achieving an NVQ at level 2 was 55 per cent, of whom 44 per cent have achieved the full framework. All trainees are working towards completion of their key skills.

15. Although some employers have attended a seminar at the college, many are still unsure about the range and requirements of the NVQ. The opportunity to inform employers of the details and range of the off-the-job training is not reinforced during monitoring visits. The planning of on- and off-the-job training is weak.

Management & professional

Grade 3

16. 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.

17. 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

18. 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.

19. 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

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.

work as evidence towards their own NVQs.

20. 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

21. 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

22. 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 work-stations 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.

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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

28. 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.

29. 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

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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

34. 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

35. 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.

36. 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 2

37. NTG provides training for young people and adults. Trainees are referred from the Employment Service and careers services, or by responding to advertisements.

Potential trainees are interviewed individually at jobcentres or at NTG. Trainees receive an initial assessment in basic skills and many are also initially assessed in key skills. 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 and also have reviews off the job. Visits are mainly to monitor trainees' progress. Feedback and agreed action is recorded. One of the management team has overall responsibility for trainee support.

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee, who was partially sighted as a result of diabetes, was taken onto an information technology course. NTG purchased specialist software which allows magnification of parts of the screen and also provides special stickers for the keyboard. The trainee was able to take home a set of stickers. The trainee achieved a recognised Diploma in information technology.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ 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

38. Since the original inspection in 2000, there has been a review of trainee support as part of the inspection action plan to identify any deficiencies. This review has included initial assessment, accreditation of prior learning, use of training plans and progress reviews and recording of trainee support. By the time of the reinspection, new procedures had been implemented and new handbooks issued for all the courses run by NTG. The weaknesses identified at the original inspection have now been rectified. NTG prepared a reinspection report which gave extensive details on how it had managed the change from last year's position. It also prepared new self-assessed strengths and weaknesses for reinspection. Inspectors agreed with all the strengths except one about well-designed documents. These were not yet firmly established and consistently used by staff. NTG also cited four weaknesses. All of these had been partially remedied by the time of the reinspection and inspectors did not find them to be key weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by NTG in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective systems to identify and remedy individual trainee's support needs
- ◆ good additional learning support
- ◆ good links with external agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor recording of information on some trainees' files

39. There are good systems to identify individual trainee support requirements. The initial assessment process accurately identifies learning and social support needs. Several trainees have benefited from accreditation of prior learning for their key skills. Induction is thorough and is well documented. It covers a wide range of trainee support issues such as grievance and appeals procedures, specialist support such as English for speakers of other languages or dyslexia, counselling and

careers advice. Most of the individual training plans clearly detail all support requirements. They are well designed and encourage target-setting and modification to the training programme where appropriate. Trainees' progress is regularly reviewed against set targets. Action-planning is clear and comprehensive in most cases. Levels of support are promptly adjusted to respond to changing circumstances. Individual support is recorded in trainees' files. One of the managers monitors and co-ordinates support needs to ensure that the trainees' requirements are fully met. NTG also has a monitoring officer who is permanently located at the subcontracted mainstream college where construction trainees spend most of their time. Their job is to liaise with curriculum tutors and assessors to ensure trainee support is satisfactory.

40. There are many examples of good training and personal support for trainees. These include: visits to trainees' homes to help them overcome confidence and social problems; purchasing software to help visually impaired and dyslexic learners; providing tools, clothing and personal protective equipment for trainees; good basic and key skills training; regular telephone calls to help motivate and reassure trainees; help with housing and benefits, and effective careers guidance and jobsearch programmes. This support is evaluated through feedback questionnaires which are completed by the trainees and the employers. One member of staff has extensive experience in psychotherapy and counselling and uses these skills to help trainees when required. The high level of support is recognised by trainees as a valuable benefit of their training programme.

41. NTG refers trainees to the organisation which can most effectively meet their support needs. In many cases, these needs are dealt with internally using existing staff and resources. NTG also refers trainees to external specialist agencies when necessary. For example, trainees with alcohol or drug dependency problems have been given additional support after referral to an appropriate health advisory service. Managers clearly recognise any limitations in NTG's own areas of support expertise and are developing good working relationships with a number of other organisations. There is a good partnership with the local careers service for trainees on the Life Skills training programme. The careers service undertakes an initial assessment of basic and social skills and effectively shares this information with NTG. It also visit trainees to review their progress and to get feedback on their training. The careers service evaluates these data and passes on its analysis to NTG so that trainee support can be improved where appropriate. There are also good links with local business organisations, The Prince's Trust, business and financial advisors, disability support groups and minority ethnic employment groups. Recently, some of these specialist groups have offered to visit NTG and give presentations on subjects of particular interest to trainees. Some large corporations have provided industry-specific training to construction trainees. This has helped them develop their product knowledge and stay up to date with technological developments in this field. These partnerships are working well to benefit trainees by giving them good vocational and specialist support.

42. NTG has completely revised its trainee support systems since the original

inspection. The new initial assessment and induction procedures are working well. Other aspects of trainee support are not as well established. Some trainee support records are incomplete or contain only superficial information. For example, some trainees' files were missing essential information such as anticipated leaving dates or the duration of the training programme. There are many examples of records which clearly demonstrate that staff have a good understanding of how to make the most of individual training plans and progress reviews. In other cases, there is little useful information recorded which will help to support trainees and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning and to drive their progress forward. Not all staff are using the support processes and records effectively. In one instance, a training plan states that initial assessment is not necessary because the trainee is employed. There are general inconsistencies in the way that information is used and recorded. NTG has run a training programme of staff development to support the new systems and the use of new documents. This has not been effective in all areas.

Management of training

Grade 3

43. 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

44. 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.

45. 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

46. 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

47. 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.

48. 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.

49. 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.

50. 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.

51. 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 weaknesses 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.