



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

# Blackburn College

## SUMMARY

Blackburn College offers good training in construction, business administration, hospitality, and hair and beauty. Training in engineering and manufacturing is satisfactory. Resources for all off-the-job training and the experience and qualifications of teaching staff are good, but very little on-the-job assessment of trainees' competency takes place. The college's commitment to assuring equality of opportunity is good, although trainees' understanding and awareness of equal opportunities issues are not checked on an ongoing basis. Trainee support mechanisms and practices are strong, but there is no basic skills assessment for adult trainees. The policies and procedures in place ensure that a sound platform exists for management of the training provision. However, there are few links between on- and off-the-job training, with little involvement in the process by employers. There is good understanding and awareness throughout the college of the need to maintain effective quality assurance systems backed up by comprehensive procedures in order to measure improvement. In some areas, good practice is not shared and there are weaknesses with the internal verification process.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	2
Hospitality	2
Hair & beauty	2

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-qualified staff
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ comprehensive policies and procedures
- ◆ effective, comprehensive support
- ◆ positive approach to promoting equality of opportunity

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ inadequate employer involvement
- ◆ no teaching or integration of key skills in some areas
- ◆ inconsistent internal verification practices

## INTRODUCTION

1. Blackburn College was established in 1888 and employs 1,000 academic and support staff. The college operates from a central site in the town of Blackburn, and a range of outreach community-based centres across the borough of Blackburn with Darwen. Within the college, a separate business support unit, the Centre for European and Commercial Operations (CECO) is responsible for the management of government-funded work-based training programmes. The unit is the responsibility of the director of European and commercial operations, supported by 13 staff, including an assistant director who is the signatory for training and enterprise council (TEC) contracts. Staff from the appropriate faculties within the college carry out off-the-job training and assessment.

2. Most of the college's work is funded through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), and in the current academic year there have been over 20,000 enrolments onto full- and part-time courses. Around 20 per cent of the college's provision is for higher education courses, delivered in partnership with eight universities. At the time of the inspection, 259 trainees were in government-funded work-based training. The college has contracts with East Lancashire TEC (ELTEC) and Lancashire Area West TEC (LAWTEC); 241 trainees are on the former contract and 18 on the latter. Of these trainees, 153 are modern apprentices, 25 are national trainees and 32 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. The modern apprentices, national trainees and all but two of the other young people are employed. There are also 49 adults on work-based training. In addition, the college is a member of the consortium for delivery of the New Deal in East Lancashire. Currently, 39 trainees are on the full-time education and training option of New Deal, and one on the employment option; they attend the college on a day-release basis.

3. Training is available in a range of construction trades, engineering, manufacturing, business administration, retail and customer services, hospitality, hair and beauty, and media and design. Trainee numbers were very small in some occupational sectors, and on this basis retail and customer service, and media and design were excluded from the scope of the inspection.

4. Unemployment in the borough of Blackburn with Darwen has fallen over recent years, and at 4 per cent compares favourably with both the northwest regional average of 5.6 per cent and the national average of 5.2 per cent. However, a number of wards in the borough have significantly higher levels of unemployment, peaking at 13.8 per cent. Minority ethnic representation in the community is high, at 18 per cent of the local population, and unemployment within wards with high minority ethnic populations can be significantly higher than the average for the area. Figures for October 1998 show that 70 per cent of unemployed people have been out of work for less than six months, with less than 5 per cent unemployed for over two years. However, 31 per cent of unemployed people are in the 16 to 24 age group.

5. Manufacturing remains dominant in the area; 36 per cent of employment is found

in this sector, almost twice the national figure. The other main employment areas are the public sector, at 23 per cent, and retail and distribution, at around 20 per cent. Almost 60 per cent of firms employ less than 100 people, and 32.8 per cent have less than 25 employees. A little over 11 per cent of the workforce is self-employed.

6. In 1998, 62.8 per cent of pupils aged 16 stayed on in full-time education. A little over 5 per cent left school into unemployment. Overall, only 80 per cent of young people participate in post-16 education and training. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 35.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. This was lower than the average achievement rates for both Lancashire as a whole, at 47 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. The college began its self-assessment in early 1998. The original report was submitted to the co-ordinating TEC (ELTEC) in June 1998. An amended version was completed in November 1998, with a final version accommodating some minor changes (particularly to the action plan) being produced in March 1999, immediately prior to the inspection. The self-assessment process involved input from staff at all levels and across all faculties within the college. Feedback was also sought from some trainees and employers, but this did not cover all occupational areas. At the time of the inspection, teams from the FEFC and the careers service were also carrying out their own inspections of the college's provision.

8. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 24 days at the college in March 1999. Inspectors visited 23 employers, and interviewed 82 trainees and 25 workplace supervisors. They also interviewed 60 college teaching, management and support staff. A broad range of documentation was examined, including 50 national vocational qualification (NVQ) portfolios and 43 trainees' files, together with assessment records, reviews and external verifiers' reports. Inspectors also observed 17 sessions of learning and assessment.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2				2
Engineering						0
Manufacturing	1		1			2
Business administration	2	1				3
Hospitality		5				5
Hair & beauty	1	4				5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 2

9. Blackburn College delivers NVQs across a range of construction-related occupations, including brickwork, wood occupations, painting and decorating, plumbing and electrical installation. There are 69 trainees on the programme. Of these, 20 are adults on work-based training programmes; nine of them are following qualifications in wood occupations, six in brickwork, and five in painting and decorating, all at NVQ level 2. The remaining 49 trainees are modern apprentices following NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Of these, 27 are in wood occupations, nine in brickwork, seven in painting and decorating, four in electrical installation and two in

plumbing. All modern apprentices are employed, most with local small businesses. Adult trainees attend the college on a full-time basis for a period of up to 26 weeks and upon completion of their NVQ level 2, they are placed with local employers for a period of work experience. The selection of work placements is subcontracted to another local training provider. Off-the-job training for modern apprentices takes place at Blackburn College on a day-release basis. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths and weaknesses. Although inspectors agreed with some of the strengths, they considered others to be no more than normal practice. They found both strengths and weaknesses which the college had not identified, and awarded the same grade as that given in the college's report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good integration of key skills into training programmes
- ◆ high NVQ achievement rates
- ◆ well-qualified staff
- ◆ good resources off-the-job
- ◆ very few early leavers
- ◆ effective relationships between training advisor and employers
- ◆ good understanding of assessment process by trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no work-based assessment
- ◆ no assessment planning
- ◆ lack of work-based evidence in portfolios
- ◆ no use of individual training plans as working documents

10. The college's workshops are well equipped, and include a computer suite. The standard of the electrical installation workshop is particularly good. Training staff are well qualified, with a good range of occupational and academic qualifications and expertise. Key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the occupational training programmes. In addition to their key skills workbooks, trainees use additional support material to help cross-reference key skills to the NVQ units.

11. The training advisor is the only link with employers, but this relationship is good and effective in ensuring that trainees receive the necessary support and guidance from their employers. The training advisor is also responsible for short-listing new trainees for employers, having built up a good level of trust and understanding of each employer's particular requirements. Trainees have a good understanding of the assessment process, and assessments are of a good standard, rigorous and fair. Trainees' achievement rates across all construction trades are very high, and over 80 per cent achieve at least one NVQ. There are no retention problems and very few trainees fail to complete their programme.

12. Although assessments are rigorous and fair, all assessment activity is carried out off the job. In addition, there is no forward planning of assessments. Internal verification is also weak. As all assessment is carried out off the job, trainees do not demonstrate occupational competency in a real working environment. Their NVQ portfolios contain little evidence generated in the workplace, and in most cases, the evidence generated is from off-the-job training activities.

13. Reviews are carried out regularly by the training advisor. Trainees' progress is recorded on the review documentation, but the individual training plans are not updated or amended to reflect individual trainees' progress. Furthermore, individual training plans only show the final planned completion date for the whole NVQ, rather than recording or amending on-going achievement.

### **Engineering**

### **Grade 3**

14. There are 17 young people undergoing training in a range of engineering-related occupations at NVQ levels 2 and 3. Six are in telecommunications, seven in engineering and four in motor vehicle body repair. All but two of the trainees are modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The other two trainees are on work-based training for young people, pursuing NVQs at level 2. All trainees are employed with local businesses, ranging from vehicle body workshops and computer repair companies to manufacturing organisations where trainees provide maintenance support for production machinery. Modern apprentices attend the college on a day-release basis. In addition, engineering and telecommunications trainees attend college for short block periods throughout their training. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths and weaknesses. Some of the strengths represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified further strengths and fewer, but significant, weaknesses. They awarded a grade lower than that given by the college.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective off-the-job training
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ effective use of project work for motor vehicle trainees
- ◆ good use of short-term target-setting for off-the-job training in engineering and telecommunications
- ◆ high-quality portfolios in motor-vehicle training
- ◆ high number of leavers with NVQs

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ unplanned on-the-job training
- ◆ slow assessment of NVQs in engineering and telecommunications

- ◆ key skills are not integrated in engineering and telecommunications

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*In motor vehicle training, trainees use a digital camera to take colour photographs of their completed work. These images are then imported into trainees' reports for their portfolios. As well as lifting the overall quality and presentation of the portfolios, these activities contribute towards demonstrating key skills competencies in information technology.*

15. College staff are well qualified and experienced. Most have assessor qualifications and three hold the internal verifier's award. Staff are highly respected by trainees. Some training at the college extends far beyond the requirements for underpinning knowledge as stated in the NVQ frameworks for levels 2 and 3. For example, in telecommunications, TEC-funded trainees have access to modern resources and workshops which are used to support the delivery of higher education courses within the college.

16. Links between the training advisors and employers are good and well established; these relationships have been built up over a long period of time. However, these are the only effective links between the college and employers. The training advisors have a good understanding of the needs of employers and are able to add value to the trainees' selection process. The training advisor carries out reviews of trainees' progress, but the content is often poor and their frequency sometimes falls outside the designated three-month period.

17. Off-the-job training is generally effective, and there are examples of practical training in telecommunications being tailored to match the tasks currently undertaken by trainees at work. The motor vehicle workshop operates a non-profit-making working garage, providing good experience and a wide range of real practical work. The NVQ portfolios for motor vehicle trainees are of an especially high standard, with good use made of photographic evidence to support claims to competency. Use of information technology is also integrated into the motor vehicle programme. Motor vehicle trainees benefit from a good range of learning resources, giving unit-by-unit guidance throughout their period of training. In engineering and telecommunications, portfolios are of a significantly poorer standard.

18. No assessment takes place in the workplace, and college teaching staff have little contact with employers. Opportunities are missed for assessing trainees' competency in a real working environment, although some motor vehicle trainees submit job-cards, endorsed by the workplace supervisor, illustrating the tasks they have undertaken at work. In engineering and telecommunications, trainees are given assignments to be carried out at college. These are used as the basis for assessment. Tasks completed by trainees in the workplace are not taken into account.

19. Although employers have been issued with copies of the NVQ programmes, most are unaware of the detail necessary to support trainees in the workplace. On-the-job learning is not planned and is coincidental to working, with no links to off-the-job training activities. In telecommunications and engineering, teaching staff have been very slow in assessing trainees, most of whom have made little progress with their portfolios. In engineering, no NVQ work was carried out during the first year of training, and trainees worked exclusively towards underpinning knowledge. However, this problem has been identified and remedial action has now been taken. The use of short-term target-setting by tutors has been effective in remotivating trainees and gathering evidence for their NVQs.



20. Key skills are not integrated throughout all programmes. Although well advanced in motor vehicle training, this is not the case in the other two disciplines, where some trainees are 18 months into their training without any exposure to key skills.

## **Manufacturing**

## **Grade 3**

21. Nine trainees are working towards NVQs in fabrication and welding. Three are modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The remainder are on work-based training for adults, working towards NVQs at level 2. There is also one modern apprentice working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 in glass processing. The modern apprentices are employed locally and attend college on a day-release basis. In addition to their NVQ, trainees undertake a vocational, exam-based qualification in fabrication and welding, to provide them with the underpinning knowledge for the modern apprenticeship framework. Trainees also complete three further units covering basic welding, tungsten arc gas welding and electrical appreciation. Adult trainees are also offered an additional option to underpin their NVQ. Adults joining the programme undergo a four-week taster session, including health and safety training and a basic introduction to welding theory and practice, before embarking on their NVQ programme. The adult training programme is delivered as a discrete group with no in-filling from other courses. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths and few weaknesses. Many of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded a grade lower than that given by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-equipped workshop facilities
- ◆ good retention rates for adult trainees
- ◆ additional vocational qualifications for adults
- ◆ comprehensive and well-presented assessment material

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no ownership of portfolios by trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ late introduction of key skills for modern apprentices

22. A small but dedicated team manages the fabrication and welding section. Training staff are very supportive of their trainees' learning needs. This is recognised by all trainees, who spoke highly of the college staff. The course is well planned with a generally good standard of supporting documentation. The workshop is compact, but well managed and equipped. The quality of the assessment material is very good, but limits individuality by trainees as all portfolios tend to appear similar in terms of content and presentation. Furthermore, the college keeps the portfolios, and trainees have no ownership of them or of the portfolio-building

process.

23. This is a relatively new programme, but retention rates so far among adult trainees are extremely good, with virtually no early leavers. In addition, achievement of the NVQ is good. However, a period of four weeks has elapsed since the portfolios were completed, and they have yet to be internally verified. There have also been no external verification visits for almost two years.

24. All the modern apprentices are close to completing their NVQ level 2, but have yet to commence any work on providing evidence to demonstrate competency in key skills. None have had any complete units of their NVQ assessed at this stage. Opportunities to use work-based evidence for the modern apprentices are missed, and their employers have little involvement in the training programme. The training advisor carries out all reviews in the workplace, but there is no realistic target-setting and action-planning to reflect individual trainees' progress and achievement. In addition, some reviews were overdue. For example, a few have not been carried out for a period of almost nine months.

## **Business administration**

## **Grade 2**

25. Blackburn College has 29 trainees following work-based training programmes in business administration. Of these, 19 are adults, eight are modern apprentices and two are on other work-based training for young people. The modern apprentices are working towards NVQs in administration at levels 2 and 3, and the two youth trainees are working towards NVQ level 2 in administration. The adults are working towards either an NVQ level 1 or 2 in the use of information technology. Seven of the modern apprentices are employed by Blackburn College and work in various departments throughout the college. The eighth apprentice and the two youth trainees work with local employers. Modern apprentices and youth trainees attend the college for off-the-job training one day each week. Adult trainees attend the college on a full-time basis for a period of approximately 18 weeks. This is followed by a period of work experience one day each week on internal placement within the college. Finally, full-time work experience is arranged with a local employer. Training and assessment for the adult and youth programmes are carried out wholly off the job. Assessment for modern apprentices takes place on the job. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths, some of which are no more than normal practice, and admitted few weaknesses. A later self-assessment report, submitted at the start of the inspection, found more strengths and weaknesses. This self-assessment also separated the administration and use of information technology parts of the provision, proposing a lower grade for the latter. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses not identified by the college and awarded a grade lower than that given in the original self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective initial assessment in administration
- ◆ well-structured programme to reintroduce adult trainees to work
- ◆ effective one-to-one coaching in information technology

- ◆ innovative use of project work for adult trainees
- ◆ effective targeting of trainees' achievement goals
- ◆ good accommodation and resources in information technology
- ◆ very clear links between on- and off-the-job training in administration

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no on-going assessment in information technology
- ◆ no integration of key skills into training programme

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Adult trainees are not employed and, therefore, have no access to work-based evidence. To overcome this, they canvas the college for work, thus gaining actual work products and experience. These requests are formally recorded.*

26. Trainees in administration and information technology have good opportunities for learning. Administration trainees are streamed following initial assessment. The more able trainees are targeted to achieve their NVQ level 2 in 22 weeks. The remaining trainees are expected to complete their level 2 within 34 weeks, but those demonstrating the necessary ability can transfer to the other group at any stage. Target dates for achievement of units are clearly set, and are also reflected on individual training plans. These form the basis for more detailed assessment, action plans and reviews. Initial assessment uses psychometric testing, but key skills are not systematically assessed on entry, nor is their teaching and assessment integrated at NVQ level 2.

27. Administration trainees benefit from clear links between on- and off-the-job training. Modern apprentices in the college have planned work experience, and have many opportunities to generate work-based evidence. Off the job, they are encouraged to share work experiences of using different systems and equipment.

28. The trainees are highly motivated. They are set milestone targets for units, and are encouraged to better them. There is continuous unit assessment and on-going internal verification. The NVQ achievements are satisfactory, although no apprentices have yet completed their full award. There are no retention problems on the administration programme.

29. The programme of information technology training for adults is delivered at three centres, one of which concentrates on recruiting trainees from minority ethnic groups, and Asian women in particular. Two different college faculties manage the centres, and there are some examples of varying practice, for example, in terms of documentation. However, the internal verification process is effective in ensuring common assessment procedures and standards. The programme is relatively new, so achievement and retention data cannot be measured effectively. However, based on performance to date, both are satisfactory.

30. The adult programme is well structured and forms a good platform for reintroducing trainees to work. The programme includes both on- and off-the-job training, and by increasing trainees' exposure to a working environment through work placements reinforces the work ethic and builds confidence. Trainees receive a high level of effective individual coaching from teaching staff. Trainees circulate

requests for real work throughout the college, thus ensuring that the evidence generated for their NVQ is not simulated. Accommodation and equipment are good, but some software is incompatible between training centres and requires upgrading. There is no on-going assessment of information technology portfolios. Assessment of evidence and portfolio development all take place towards the end of the programme.

## Hospitality

## Grade 2

31. The food division at Blackburn College has 69 trainees working towards a range of NVQs at levels 1 to 3. Of these, 61 are modern apprentices and eight are on other work-based training for young people. There are 22 trainees on food preparation and cooking at NVQ levels 1 to 3, nine on catering and hospitality level 2, three on on-licensed premises level 3, and five on food and drink services level 2. There are also five trainees on bar service level 2, one on housekeeping level 2, two on hotel reception level 2, and five on supervisory options at level 3. There are 17 trainees working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 in craft bakery. All modern apprentices are employed. Modern apprentices and youth trainees have the option to attend the college on a day-release basis where the resources and scope of work covered in the workplace do not cover the full criteria for their chosen NVQ. Trainees also have the opportunity to complete additional qualifications, such as in health and safety, food hygiene, cake decorating, and wines and spirits. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths claimed in the self-assessment report, but some represented no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified some additional strengths, but the self-assessment report did not recognise some of the weaknesses in the programme identified by inspectors. The grade awarded was lower than that given by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good accommodation and equipment
- ◆ well-planned and interesting off-the-job training
- ◆ additional qualifications to complement NVQs
- ◆ trainees encouraged to take part in events, exchanges and competitions
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ strong focus on trainees' employment goals

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor attendance for key skills
- ◆ lack of awareness by bakery trainees of assessment criteria
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ high proportion of early leavers without NVQ

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*The college provides a wide range of opportunities for trainees to gain practical, realistic work experience. For example, trainees are able to take part in a range of high-profile events, where the college is involved in providing catering facilities. These events include the Paris air show, the British grand prix, and international golf and cricket.*

32. Trainees following training programmes in hospitality benefit from spacious and well-equipped accommodation, which promotes effective learning and reflects the working environment found in catering, hospitality and bakeries. The production kitchens and bakeries are linked to restaurant and retail outlets, providing a strong customer focus to the training. Off-the-job training is planned, interesting and highly relevant to supporting the requirements of the occupational standards. Training sessions routinely involve good use of handout material, video, and question and answer techniques in order to involve all trainees and check levels of learning. Schemes of work are comprehensive and well written.

33. Relationships among trainers, the training advisor and trainees are constructive, with trainees commonly praising the level and quality of support they receive. This boosts motivation levels of trainees who often have to cope with demanding work and shift arrangements. The training advisor, in particular, is thoughtful and diplomatic, enhancing and promoting trainees' achievement through the attention paid to each individual. Teaching staff are well qualified, both occupationally and as trainers, and their breadth of knowledge is put to good use in setting challenging and demanding targets, particularly for trainees at NVQ level 3. Trainers give advice on career progression and opportunities within the industry, increasing trainees' interest and maintaining a strong focus on employment throughout training. Support offered to trainees who attend key skills workshops is good, with a wide range of staff expertise at hand. Trainees have good access to additional qualifications, and commonly take them up. This brings added value and additional skills to trainees' development within the modern apprenticeship framework. Trainees are also encouraged to become involved in a range of external commercial activities and foreign exchanges, including the opportunity to undergo language training. Catering and bakery trainees are also actively involved, with a good level of success and achievement in industry-organised competitions, some of which are high-profile events.

34. Trainees at work or in college are encouraged to complete occupationally relevant key skills assignments. However, key skills workshops are poorly attended by trainees in the first and second years of their programme, despite the considerable staff expertise available. The approach to key skills is too paper-driven and a little academic. Key skills assignments have recently been developed. These are used during off-the-job training and in the workplace for trainees who do not attend college. Most assignments are occupationally relevant, but some need to be more specific to work. Some trainees are unclear about the most effective way to demonstrate competency in key skills.

35. Employers' awareness of the content and often the structure of training programmes is low. Their understanding of the NVQs is poor, and their knowledge of the coverage of the occupational standards is mixed and sometimes confused. Some employers are unsure of the importance and application of key skills, or are dubious about their value within the training programme. Most employers are not aware of the content of off-the-job training at college and how this could be linked to workplace activities.

36. Most assessment for bakery trainees takes place in the college bakeries during

off-the-job training, although employers have indicated their willingness to become involved with work-based assessment. In catering, there is more widespread use of work-based assessment. This is particularly the case in bar and service-related programmes where qualified assessors are in place. However, opportunities are still missed for on-the-job assessment of trainees' progress. Some encouragement is given to employers to develop as assessors or to take a role in providing support for assessment, but this is not universal. Some employers have real barriers to developing this role, others do not wish to. In addition, the collection of relevant supporting evidence generated at work is not commonplace.

37. Bakery trainees use logbooks developed by the college to record their progress towards achieving their NVQ. However, these logbooks do not adequately cover the range of performance criteria needed to meet the NVQ standards. Trainees are not fully aware of the criteria to be applied during assessment of their practical work. Some aspects of their work during off-the-job training in college, such as the application of realistic time constraints, do not reflect a real working environment.

38. Over 50 per cent of trainees who leave the programme do so early. Most leave during the first two years of the programme before achieving their NVQ level 2. Labour turnover in the sector is high, and many trainees move on to other occupations where they perceive conditions to be easier and the pay more rewarding. However, some trainees find better work within the sector.

## **Hair & beauty**

## **Grade 2**

39. There are 51 trainees. Of these, eight are modern apprentices following NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing, 25 are national trainees and 18 are on other work-based training programmes for young people, working towards hairdressing NVQ level 2. Trainees are employed by local salons, and attend the college on a day-release basis one day each week. All modern apprentices, national trainees and all but two of the youth trainees are employed. The programme operates out of three large commercial salons within the main college campus, supported by a central reception area. All assessment is carried out off the job in the college salons. Trainees take turns managing the reception area, and also operate the dispensary and laundry facilities. Both the reception and the dispensary/laundry activities provide opportunities for assessment. Trainees sell hair and beauty products, and receive certificated annual product training from the supplier. Other training is also available to complement the main NVQ. The self-assessment report claimed many strengths and few weaknesses. A significant number of the strengths represent no more than normal practice. However, inspectors identified some additional strengths and further weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that claimed in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ good teamwork among teaching staff

- ◆ strong corporate image for trainees in off-the-job training
- ◆ innovative use of information technology
- ◆ good working relationships between employers and training advisor
- ◆ good integration of key skills into training programme
- ◆ effective introduction of industrial liaison team
- ◆ standard of trainees' work reflects high level of current commercial practice

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of employer involvement in learning programme
- ◆ ineffective induction process

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Information technology resources are available within the college salons. Software packages allow trainees to record and retrieve client data, prepare accounts and access other related information necessary to provide effective client service. In addition, specialist product knowledge supported by interactive software relating to hair colouring is used to support the teaching of the hair colouring unit of the NVQ. The use of such software offers trainees a rare opportunity to access sophisticated technology.*

40. Resources within the college are good, and all three salons are equipped with computer facilities for maintaining client records. Specialist products used in off-the-job training provide trainees with opportunities to gain retail experience. All trainees receive externally certificated product training, and staff use this opportunity to support their continued professional development. Teamwork among teaching staff is good, leading to effective management of the learning, and ensuring that trainees have access to support where appropriate. Tutors' time is well managed in order to give maximum support on a one-to-one basis without disrupting the realistic work environment found in the college salons. Trainees are highly motivated and enjoy the strong corporate image presented by the college through use of a standard salon uniform.

41. The standard of the trainees' technical skills and their work is high across all aspects of the hairdressing provision, and mirrors current commercial practice. There are excellent, well-developed relationships between employers and the training advisor, who acts as the main link between on- and off-the-job training activities. The work of the industrial liaison team also offers a useful forum for further development of working practices to ensure they match those found commercially, as well as promoting networking opportunities and developments in hairdressing training in general.

42. Key skills are effectively integrated into the training programme and trainees understand their importance in terms of completing their apprenticeship or traineeship. Evidence generated during off-the-job training is cross-referenced with the NVQ and key skills criteria. The use of computers within the college salons is especially effective in ensuring that the information technology requirements of key skills are met.

43. There is little employer involvement in trainees' learning, and opportunities for them to contribute to the planning of training are missed. Similarly, employers are not involved in assessing trainees' competency on the job. Most assessment is carried out at college during day-release, and there is a failure to recognise the relevance of trainees' on-the-job experience in respect of their individual learning programmes. Trainees' portfolios and assessment records are all held at the college,

rather than being used by trainees and employers at work.

44. The induction process is ineffective, as it concentrates largely on general programme detail. As a consequence, inspectors found that while trainees were aware that they were part of a TEC-funded work-based training programme, many were unclear about whether they were on a modern apprenticeship or national traineeship.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

45. Blackburn College has an equal opportunities policy which is reviewed and updated annually. The policy is distributed throughout the college and is accessible to staff and trainees alike. An equal opportunities and disability statement is issued to all trainees. It is part of the student diary issued at the start of each academic year. A commitment to equal opportunities also forms part of the employer agreement. The policy covers issues relating to staff as well as full-time and part-time students and trainees. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses claimed in the self-assessment report, but most of the strengths represent no more than normal practice. The grade awarded was the same as that given by the college.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ positive action to widen participation by minority ethnic groups
- ◆ good relationships with schools to overcome gender stereotyping
- ◆ effective trainee participation on equal opportunities committee
- ◆ comprehensive data collected on equal opportunities issues

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ minority ethnic and gender imbalance not addressed in some areas
- ◆ no checking of trainees' understanding and awareness of equal opportunities issues

46. The equal opportunities policy is regularly reviewed through the college's academic board subcommittee. The college also operates a minority ethnic advisory group and a race and ethnicity working group. Equal opportunities action-planning takes place to address emerging issues. The action plan is reviewed regularly. Representatives of staff, unions, students and trainees, including those from minority ethnic communities, are on the subcommittee. A member of the college's senior management is also on the executive of the racial equality council. Committee



members attend seminars to keep abreast of current developments relating to equality of opportunity. The college also employs a development officer who is from a minority ethnic group.

47. Each vocational area is monitored for ethnicity and disability relating to starts and leavers. There are significant imbalances of gender and minority ethnic representation in some vocational areas. These have been addressed by the college but with no tangible effect as yet. Recruitment trends are analysed from data showing new trainees across all representative groups, covering gender, disability and ethnicity. Equal opportunities data are comprehensive, analysed and acted upon where appropriate by the minority ethnic development officer. There is effective liaison with local schools and other multicultural agencies to inform school students of employment and vocational opportunities in the Blackburn area, and, in particular, to address recruitment from under-represented groups and break down gender stereotyping. A further development has been the 'first step' centre to provide training for women, including those from the Asian community. There is also a comprehensive and effective procedure to record and address staff and trainees' complaints.

48. During induction to the training programme, all new starters are issued with a diary which contain the college charter, code of conduct, and a brief equal opportunities and disability statement. Some policies, for example, on bullying and harassment, are not included in the diary, but can be found elsewhere. The training advisor carries out the induction. However, although general equal opportunities issues are included in the diary, trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is not checked, either at this stage or at any time during their training programme.

49. Access to the college is good for people with mobility difficulties. Its marketing material effectively shows positive images of people from minority ethnic groups and trainees in non-traditional roles. Where subcontractors have an effective equal opportunities policy of their own, that is what trainees follow. However, if subcontractors do not have one, the college's policy is then used.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 2**

50. Blackburn College demonstrates a clear intention to provide trainees not only with skills and knowledge, but also with the support necessary to help them achieve qualifications and gain employment. All trainees receive initial guidance interviews, and some undergo psychometric testing designed to help them to choose the right programme. Screening procedures are also in place to identify trainees who have additional learning support requirements. Once on the programme, trainees undergo induction and their progress is reviewed regularly. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths and weaknesses, some of which represent no more than normal practice or could not be agreed on by inspectors. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that claimed by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ frequent reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ strong pastoral support
- ◆ open-access recruitment for adult trainees
- ◆ trainees encouraged to compete for sponsored awards
- ◆ trainees employed by the college are encouraged to pursue staff development opportunities

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little systematic use of accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ some reviews lack detail
- ◆ no basic skills assessment for adult trainees

51. Trainees are recruited from a wide range of backgrounds. For adult applicants, access to the training programme is open to all-comers, regardless of their ability and individual backgrounds. However, unlike youth trainees and modern apprentices, adult trainees do not undergo formal initial assessment of their basic skills on entry. For modern apprentices and other young people, the initial assessment process is comprehensive and effective. The process establishes trainees' prior learning and achievements. Accreditation of prior learning is available within the college, however, it is little used on a planned or systematic basis.

52. Induction is well planned and supported by comprehensive documentation covering financial advice, counselling services, the complaints procedures and the availability of additional learning support, as well as operational rules and regulations. Once on the programme, with few exceptions trainees have frequent reviews of their progress. Reviews are often carried out more frequently than contractually required, although in a minority of cases this is not so, with some trainees being overdue a review by several weeks. Reviews involve input from workplace supervisors, but in some occupational areas they lack sufficient detail to act as a record of trainees' progress. In addition to formal reviews by training advisors, there are frequent informal reviews by trainers and assessors, personal tutors and even senior training staff. Pastoral support is strong, covering a wide range of activities from personal confidential counselling to the identification of additional learning support.

53. In construction, trainees are encouraged to compete with full-time college students for awards sponsored by local companies. In administration, modern apprentices employed by the college are encouraged to pursue personal development opportunities offered to other college staff. In both cases these efforts result in trainees having a high degree of motivation and ownership of their learning.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 3**

54. Blackburn College has a strategic plan and a management structure with formal

policies and procedures which are communicated by a variety of methods throughout the organisation. The college holds the Investors in People award, and was successfully reassessed in December 1998. Most of the strengths claimed in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice, although inspectors agreed with one strength. Inspectors also agreed with the weaknesses identified through self-assessment, but recognise that the college has taken action to address these issues. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and the grade awarded was lower than that claimed in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive policies and procedures
- ◆ good management framework and structure
- ◆ good working relationships with external stakeholders
- ◆ active staff input into management of training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor monitoring and control of service-level agreements
- ◆ inadequate employer involvement
- ◆ little contact in some areas between teaching staff and work-based supervisors
- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

55. The college's values, policies, strategies and targets are understood and supported by staff. The college has an appropriate appraisal scheme and responsive staff development programme which supports the training and focuses on the needs of trainees. There is a sound framework and structure for management, and in most cases, internal and external lines of communication are clear. All staff understand their roles and are effectively deployed. Managers encourage and acknowledge active staff involvement in contributing to the management of the training.

56. Good relationships exist with external organisations. However, there is a lack of employer involvement. Many employers have limited understanding of the content of the vocational training programmes, and there is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Contact between college teaching staff and employers is minimal in some areas. In most cases, contact is limited to the activities of the training advisors. Although these relationships are well developed and effective, it is rare for teaching staff and employers to liaise over the content of the training programme or an individual trainee's progress.

57. Service-level agreements between CECO and the college are robust. Performance figures are monitored, but there is poor control of the agreements from a contractual perspective, which would otherwise identify emerging problems at an early stage. Consequently, there is little awareness of such issues and action is not being taken to address them. The capabilities of the management-information system are not being fully exploited, but this area is expected to mature. There are, however, examples of innovative use of information technology management

systems to market wider access to TEC-funded programmes offered by the college.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 3

58. The college has comprehensive quality assurance arrangements. Parts of the college, including CECO, hold the ISO 9001 standard. The college's faculty of technology holds ISO 9002. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors did not agree with one strength. They agreed with the weaknesses claimed by the college, but recognise that these are being actively addressed. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that awarded by the college.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective internal marketing of self-assessment process
- ◆ good, well-documented quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ staff's positive attitude to quality assurance
- ◆ effective complaints policy, procedure and practices leading to continuous improvement

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ ineffective internal verification in some areas
- ◆ little sharing of good practice
- ◆ use of destination data not established in system

59. CECO has clearly documented policies and procedures with controlled documentation. An on-line software system for ISO quality assurance is currently being evaluated. All staff understand quality assurance issues and there is a strong developing culture of quality assurance throughout the college. This is supported by effective internal marketing and staff development in the self-assessment process.

60. There are, however, weaknesses in implementation, such as in the frequency of reviews and, more critically, the ineffectiveness of the internal verification system. These weaknesses are stark in comparison to the complaints policy, procedure and practice, which is working extremely well and is a model of good practice which could be shared with other areas. The quality of data, how data are handled, where the information goes, action taken, outcomes and satisfaction of the complainant are all clear and thoroughly analysed; where appropriate, policy and procedure implications are also well documented. This activity is effective in promoting and contributing to continuous improvement based on trainees' feedback.

61. Quality assurance arrangements do not ensure high quality training across all occupational areas and programmes. Historical and structural roles conflict within the management framework. CECO does not have access to reports from external verifiers. In addition, the route of external verification reports within the college

*assurance systems. All feedback is recorded and discussed at length. All complaints are dealt with effectively within this framework, and the system allows for the tracking of individual complaints from submission through to action and analysis of the outcome.*

#### INSPECTION REPORT: BLACKBURN COLLEGE MARCH 1999

means that trends identified at senior level are not translated into action at a lower one. This problem has occurred across several occupational areas.

62. The internal verification process is also weak and infrequent, and fails to identify problems with assessment or lack of progress by trainees. The sharing of good practice is limited, and analysis, feedback and continuous improvement opportunities are missed.

63. Training contracts are complied with, standards and targets are set and action plans drawn up and used. The systematic monitoring and analysis of destination data is recently developed, but the practice is not yet sufficiently embedded within the organisation.

64. Self-assessment is carried out regularly by the college as part of its quality culture, although the judgements need to reflect more closely the importance of work-based learning. The self-assessment report claimed a significant number of strengths which represent no more than normal practice. However, inspectors were able to agree with some strengths claimed by the college. With a very few exceptions, claims in the self-assessment report, even where these represented normal practice, were supported by evidence.