



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1999

Huyton Churches Training Services

SUMMARY

Huyton Churches Training Services offers good training in business administration and foundation for work. Its training programmes in construction, engineering, hospitality, childcare and direct care are satisfactory. Placements are of a high quality and employers provide trainees with help and support. There are good equal opportunities practices, and the organisation operates an open-access recruitment policy. Trainees have access to excellent, comprehensive support systems. The management style is open and good teamwork is valued by all the parties involved in training. Quality assurance is underdeveloped in some areas, but focuses effectively on the way training is carried out.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Business administration	2
Hospitality	3
Health, care & public services	3
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent and comprehensive trainee support
- ◆ very good teamwork by trainees, trainers and employers
- ◆ well-qualified and suitably experienced staff
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ high-quality resources
- ◆ high level of trainee satisfaction with provision
- ◆ supportive attitude of employers towards trainees and training
- ◆ promotion of equality of opportunity through open-door policy

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' poor NVQ achievement rates
- ◆ low retention rates in some areas
- ◆ slow rate of assessment in some areas
- ◆ lack of involvement of workplace supervisors in training
- ◆ underdeveloped arrangements for initial assessment
- ◆ no dissemination of good practice across occupational areas
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous internal verification systems

INTRODUCTION

1. Huyton Churches Training Service (HCTS) was formed in 1980. It was sponsored by churches of all denominations within the borough of Knowsley in Merseyside to provide training for unemployed young people in the area. Since 1986, six other training schemes have been taken over by the company. As a result of these mergers, HCTS operates from a number of small bases around the borough. Recently, the organisation has rationalised its activities and these are now concentrated at two sites: Seel Road and Wilson Road. The company provides training and work experience for young people and adults through programmes funded by Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Huyton HELP, the European Social Fund (ESF), Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and New Deal. It also operates courses in conjunction with a local college of further education, local schools, Pathways Groups and a major vehicle manufacturer. HCTS has 23 staff working in four departments: management, training, administration and placement. There are currently 106 trainees on the Merseyside TEC contract and 16 on the Stepping Stones ESF and SRB-funded programme.

2. Approximately 57 per cent of trainees have special training needs which are endorsed by the Employment Service or the careers service. These trainees have learning difficulties and behavioural and motivational problems. Training is offered in construction, engineering, business administration, hospitality, health, care & public services and foundation for work. Training programmes include work-based training for adults and youth training. All occupational areas were inspected.

3. Merseyside suffers from extensive economic deprivation with high levels of unemployment and low levels of educational achievement. The proportion of unemployed persons aged 16 plus is 15.8 per cent in Merseyside, but it is 22.1 per cent in Knowsley and 32.3 per cent in Huyton. The unemployment rate for persons aged 18 to 24 in Merseyside is higher at 25.8 per cent, rising to 33.8 per cent in Knowsley and 42.6 per cent in Huyton. In Knowsley, long-term unemployment is prevalent. According to the Employment Department's statistics for January 1999, 33.4 per cent of unemployed people had been unemployed for more than one year. This proportion is substantially higher than the national average of 5.2 per cent for 1998. Those from minority ethnic groups accounted for 1.8 per cent of the population in the 1991 census, and unemployment among persons in these groups is particularly high.

4. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers in Knowsley achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 22.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. In spring 1998, the director of operations and the training manager participated in training on self-assessment offered by Merseyside TEC. The training manager then involved one vocational sector in a pilot exercise in self-assessment. Lessons were learnt from this and the training manager held regular meetings with training departments to work through the process of identifying strengths and weaknesses within each sector. In December 1998, the training manager and a vocational tutor undertook additional training in the self-assessment process. Each department contributed its own sector report to the final self-assessment report. Reports on all the occupational and generic areas lack detail. The self-assessment report as a whole does not adequately identify the company's areas of good practice and achievements of staff and trainees.

6. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 23 days at HCTS during May 1999. Inspectors met staff from the company, employers, staff of local further education colleges and trainees. They visited 33 employers' premises, interviewed 24 employers and 54 trainees. They observed 10 training sessions. They also examined assessment records, training plans, trainees' files and portfolios and numerous documents about training and its management. The following table shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed by inspectors.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction						0
Engineering		2				2
Business administration		1	1			2
Hospitality						0
Health, care & public services		3	1			4
Foundation for work		2				2
Total	0	8	2	0	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. HCTS has 11 trainees in the occupational area of construction. Approximately half the trainees are following a painting and decorating course, and half a course in general construction. Both courses lead to an NVQ at level 2. All trainees are in work placements for four days each week. Thirty-five companies in the Huyton and Liverpool areas provide work placements and on-the-job training. Trainees

undertake off-the-job training and assessment on a day-release basis at one of two colleges, depending on their chosen course. A placement officer undertakes site reviews every six weeks in addition to providing constant help, support and training co-ordination for trainees, colleges and employers. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors, but they awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good quality on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good teamwork between provider, trainees, employers and colleges
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of their programme
- ◆ imaginative use of live project work in training and assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ superficiality and lack of target-setting in progress reviews
- ◆ some employers' lack of understanding of NVQ programmes
- ◆ trainees' poor levels of NVQ achievement
- ◆ high number of early leavers

8. There are good, working relationships among HCTS, trainees, employers and colleges. The training is well organised and effective. Trainees value their training and are enthusiastic about their programmes. On-the-job training, although unplanned and often unstructured, is of good quality and provided by employers who are sensitive to the trainees' needs and committed to meeting them. They are well supported by the placement officer who provides briefing and documentation relating to the training provider's expectations, legislation and programmes. Work placement providers are vetted and monitored for their effectiveness in meeting training criteria and companies deemed unsuitable in this respect are removed from the register of approved firms. Prompt action is taken to address any difficulties or problems with regard to placements. When necessary, trainees are re-located to other firms. When it is in their best interests, some trainees are re-directed to HCTS's foundation for work programme to receive additional remedial support. Although on- and off-the-job training are not closely linked, they complement each other to a high degree. Induction undertaken at colleges builds on initial health and safety issues covered by HCTS in its own in-house induction process. The importance of health and safety is further reinforced in the workplace by employers, who are keenly aware of the potential dangers posed by on-site operations, particularly those involving the use of power tools. The quality of instruction and assessment of off-the-job training is good. Informative records of trainees' achievement are kept up to date and are easily accessible. College facilities are good and trainees have sufficient workshop space, materials and instructors to meet their needs. However, there is a lack of imaginative, up-to-date resources and literature for some classroom sessions. In the area of general construction, live project work is used imaginatively by one college, where appropriate, to provide realistic training and assessment opportunities for some trainees. In addition, the college encourages

the trainees to obtain authenticated evidence of their competency in the workplace for the purposes of NVQ assessment, but this practice is not widespread.

9. Trainees receive no initial assessment of their basic skills but the trainee support facility ensures that any shortcomings and remedial needs which trainees have are quickly noted and addressed. Reviews of trainees' progress take place frequently, but records are not maintained systematically. Reviews focus on pastoral support rather than the trainees' progress towards achieving the NVQ and trainees are not set targets. Although trainees find the reviews useful and value the close contact with the placement officer, they make little contribution to them and engage in no self-assessment. Individual training plans are not methodically updated. Some employers are unsure about the nature or content of NVQ programmes and others have little interest in college work undertaken by trainees. Many trainees obtain full-time jobs despite the high levels of unemployment in the area, but they often do so at the expense of leaving the programme early. A high proportion of trainees fail to complete their training. Of the 25 trainees who began the programme in September 1998, only 11 are still on it. In the contract year, 1998-99, only one NVQ has been achieved.

Engineering

Grade 3

10. HCTS provides training leading to NVQs in motor vehicle-related courses: service and replacement level 1; vehicle electrical maintenance and repair level 3; and vehicle mechanical & electrical systems unit replacement. There are 17 trainees undertaking training in motor vehicle courses, one of whom is a New Deal client on the subsidised employment option. The company uses a computer-based training package. The primary aim of the package is to cover the theory work for the NVQ in mechanical and electronic systems maintenance and repair (light vehicles) at level 3. In addition, the knowledge assessor computer-based package is used to assist trainees with accreditation of theoretical knowledge of the vehicle mechanical and electronic systems. Induction and the computer-based off-the-job training are carried out by HCTS in its own workshops. Additional off-the-job training is arranged for trainees to cover any identified shortfalls within the training programme and this also takes place in the centre. Assessments, where possible, are arranged in the workplace. Two awarding bodies have approved the training centre.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and properly documented off-the-job training
- ◆ well-qualified and suitably experienced staff
- ◆ excellent relationships between employers, trainees and training staff
- ◆ innovative computer-based learning system for trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

HCTS has introduced a student workplace diary. In this, the trainee records a description of each day's events which is agreed by the workplace supervisor. The blank document is pre-printed and well designed with a front page detailing trainee's placement, NVQ and level, contact name and phone number. The diary is collected by the tutor at the review and kept as a log at the training centre. The production of the diary is a good discipline and training exercise for the trainee. It is also useful when discussing training in the workplace and assessment planning with the workplace supervisor. The tutor is able to check that the trainee is being given appropriate tasks and that valid training is taking place.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low awareness of NVQs by employers
- ◆ little formal training in the workplace
- ◆ ineffective use of review documents
- ◆ trainees' low achievement rates

11. Off-the-job training in motor vehicle programmes is well planned, properly documented and it is carried out effectively. The training sessions are lively and interesting with examples of actual vehicle problems. Visual aids are well prepared and there is adequate use of overhead projection and video equipment. The training programmes are realistic. Training content is often presented to the trainees as assignments, using a wide variety of examples. The workshops at the training centre are small but adequately equipped. Printed worksheets are used extensively and are part of neat, well-presented portfolio work.

12. The motor vehicle staff are well qualified in their fields. Both have trainer and assessor awards, plus many years of experience working in the motor industry. The two trainers have achieved the key skills assessor awards. Good working relationships exist among the trainees, training staff and assessors, who all work as a team. In their feedback, trainees expressed appreciation of their tutors and said they valued the tuition they receive. Most of the placements are in small- and medium-sized companies. The employers maintain an interest in the trainees' progress and development, despite the considerable commercial pressure of the workplace. The Employment Service referred the one New Deal trainee on the subsidised employment option to HCTS. The same health and safety checks, reviews and progress-tracking processes and contract arrangements with the employer are carried out in respect of this trainee, as for trainees on programmes funded by Merseyside TEC.

13. A new state-of-the-art computer training package has recently been installed in the centre. The package contains video tape, animated and still graphics and text material covering the basic concepts and principles of all light vehicle systems from engine operation to electronic fuel injection and anti-lock braking. It is fully interactive, allowing trainees to move backwards and forwards between sections of the programme. It refers to scientific principles underlying the motor vehicle applications and checks trainees' knowledge by requiring answers to a series of questions on each topic. An assessment-based computer package has also been recently introduced. This is an assessment tool, to assist in accrediting trainees with the theory elements of the vehicle mechanical & electronic systems modern apprenticeship and NVQ at level 2 and 3. A record of trainees' achievements is stored in a personal directory. The record can be printed on request, in the form of a certificate. The certificate may be used as evidence in the trainee's portfolio.

14. In the workplace, supervisors help and support the trainees, but most do not have any knowledge of the NVQ specifications. They miss opportunities to pass on information and use their experience to help the trainees in their NVQ work.

Opportunities are missed to plan the trainees' workloads so that trainees can use workplace tasks as a means of gathering evidence of their acquisition of requisite NVQ competencies. Many workplace supervisors fail to understand that training in the workplace, like off-the-job training, has to be planned properly. The provider realises that a lot more work is needed to encourage employers to plan training. Furthermore, the provider is constantly seeking ways of encouraging the smaller business to plan and take part in training. Where possible, assessments are carried out in the workplace. If there are any gaps in trainees' evidence, arrangements can be made to transfer trainees to other employers or for them to gather the requisite evidence and be assessed in the centre's workshops.

15. The training reviews are mainly pastoral. They are not used to record trainees' progress and do not include any action-planning. Trainees' achievement rates over the last three years are low, and are decreasing. The organisation has an open-door approach to recruitment and the drop-out rate is high. In the past three years, the number of trainees who have completed training has averaged 20; in each year on average, six trainees have achieved an NVQ and 20 have obtained jobs.

Business administration

Grade 2

16. There are 27 youth trainees working towards qualifications in business administration at levels 1 and 2. Of these, eight are working towards an advanced diploma in business studies and administration and their training is funded through ESF and SRB. They spend four days in work placements and one day attending off-the-job training each week. They are assessed and trained by two qualified staff. Off-the-job training and portfolio guidance takes place in a large training room which doubles as an information technology training suite. Assessment is carried out in the workplace during monthly review visits. In addition to the normal NVQ programme, additional training is given to enable trainees to develop their office and business skills. The provider has awarding body authorisation to offer business administration training at level 3 although there are no trainees on this programme at present. The provider also has approval to offer information technology training at levels 1 to 3 and key skills at levels 1 to 4, although trainees have not yet been recruited for these programmes. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report. They identified weaknesses which the organisation had not identified. They awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and effective training
- ◆ well-resourced training facilities
- ◆ good opportunities for training and assessment in placements
- ◆ trainees' success in obtaining jobs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ workplace supervisors' lack of involvement in training
- ◆ slow rate of assessment

17. Most trainees joining the business administration NVQ programme have few office or information technology skills. Well-qualified staff at HCTS cover theory in depth in the off-the-job training sessions and these are very well prepared. Staff use overhead projector slides, with complementary paper copies, specially prepared training notes, sets of questions and graphic examples. Trainers are able to establish common ground with trainees by using everyday examples to highlight office problems and their solutions. Training is carried out in small groups of six to eight with time available for one-to-one assistance. Trainees' development of knowledge and understanding is periodically tested by verbal questioning sessions. Trainers have a sense of humour and display understanding of trainees' needs.

18. The main business administration room contains a large area for training and desk work. There is a well-stocked reference library containing books on a variety of office and information technology subjects. The large room also contains a complete information technology suite equipped with state-of-the-art computers, inkjet printers and word processing, spreadsheet and database software. Work placements also have a wide range of office equipment such as a fax, scanner, photocopier and e-mail facilities. Work placements are very well selected. They enable trainees to gain wide experience of office work, making it easy for them to collect relevant evidence for their NVQ level 2 portfolios. Supervisors are experienced, understanding and supportive of the trainees. They want trainees to succeed. As well as gaining day-to-day office experience, some trainees also receive additional training, for example, in management techniques, stock control and distribution and customer service. The work placements are provided in organisations such as a chamber of commerce, a hotel banqueting and conference office, a council for voluntary service agency and a major stock distribution agency. Subject to trainee requirements, HCTS moves trainees from one work placement to another in a prompt and flexible way. In-depth support is continuously available to trainees from HCTS's staff and there is a good rapport between trainees and trainers. Trainees are very positive about the training and respect the knowledge and professionalism of the training staff.

19. HCTS's work placement support team works hard to find trainees a good range of placements and many of these provide full-time paid work to trainees in this area of exceptionally high unemployment. Competition for work is high and trainees increase their employability through relevant office skills training. They know how to operate information technology equipment. Those who need extra training on specific software are provided with this on a one-to-one basis.

20. Although the workplace supervisors are keen to pass on their knowledge to trainees, they are not involved in the assessment process to best effect. There is little witness testimony in portfolios. Supervisors are not fully involved in trainees' progress reviews and discussions between trainers and trainees on progress towards

NVQ achievement. The potential for supervisors to act as assessors has not been explored. Although HCTS has begun to include details of NVQ standards in placement providers' information packs, some supervisors do not fully understand the NVQ standards.

21. Although assessors regularly observe trainees working in their placements and trainees collect good evidence of acquisition of competencies, they are unable to complete their NVQ units progressively. After attaining requisite competencies, trainees may have to wait until much later in the programme before they can be credited with the relevant units. This delay in assessment and the accreditation of trainees' competence leaves some trainees frustrated with their slow rate of progress towards achieving their qualification. Over the last three contract years, early leavers from the programme have dropped by over 50 per cent. In 1996-97, five trainees completed the NVQ and nine gained employment. In the following year, six trainees completed the NVQ and 10 secured permanent jobs.

Hospitality

Grade 3

22. There are nine trainees on hospitality programmes, of whom five are working towards NVQs at level 2 and four at level 1. The provider offers a combination of work-based training and off-the-job training and assessment at a local college of further education. Where workplaces are unable to provide trainees with opportunities to cover all NVQ evidence requirements, the college kitchen is used to provide assessment and training in accordance with awarding body and contractual requirements. All trainees are employed in a variety of catering establishments, including public houses, contract caterers and nursing homes. Trainees attend one day a week of off-the-job training at college. Training includes both theoretical and practical sessions with specialised and experienced tutors. Trainees can join the training programmes at any time on a roll-on roll-off basis.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ structured training and support for trainees at college
- ◆ high level of trainees' satisfaction
- ◆ commitment of the experienced workplace trainers to supporting trainees
- ◆ flexible work-based assessment procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of structured feedback to trainees and work-based trainers
- ◆ absence of established review procedures
- ◆ poor target-setting for trainees in the workplace
- ◆ no recording of monitoring visits

23. Training and support for trainees at college are well structured. Schemes of work are linked to NVQ units. Trainees are provided with one-to-one portfolio guidance and assistance on their weekly off-the-job sessions. Trainees' attendance at college, however, was below the target set by HCTS. Trainees have a clear awareness of the tasks required of them and progress well through the NVQ programme. The college provides HCTS with a two-weekly report on trainees' attendance and a bi-annual review of trainees' progress towards their NVQ. The working relationships between all participants within the programme are good and are developed through informal feedback, regular visits, phone calls and by shared support for the overall programme.

24. Trainees express their satisfaction with the workplace, the provider and the college. Work-based trainers speak highly of trainees' motivation, skill and commitment to their work. In addition, working relationships between the provider and trainees are good. Staff monitor trainees regularly and informally and give them good pastoral support. The environments in which trainees work are well resourced and conducive to training and meet current health and safety requirements. Trainees have a positive attitude and are motivated to succeed in their occupational area. All work-based trainers are suitably experienced and qualified. They frequently provide help and guidance to trainees. One trainee who suffers from dyslexia is using a dictaphone to record evidence for assessment. The college uses witness statements from workplace trainers for assessment purposes. Some employers and work-based trainers show an interest in becoming involved in work-based assessments.

25. There are no structured arrangements for obtaining feedback from all parties involved in training and assessment on the hospitality programme. Information on trainees' progress, assessment and training is not formally recorded or disseminated. Although HCTS's staff make frequent visits to trainees in the workplace in excess of contractual requirements, formal records of these visits are not kept. Visits are arranged informally and supported by regular phone calls. During these visits, staff do not attempt to make links between the work-based training and off-the-job training at college. Problems over training and assessment are not resolved speedily and some trainees make slow progress. Some trainees are confused about their progress and their commitment to training declines in some cases. Review procedures are not formalised. The college gives the provider six-monthly reviews on trainees' progress. In general, however, there are no systematic arrangements for the regular review of trainees' progress. The organisation is addressing this weakness. Both trainees and work-based trainers consider that more systematic reviews help them, respectively, to monitor progress towards achievement of the NVQ and the effectiveness of training.

26. In the individual training plans, NVQ units are regarded as targets. Apart from these, no other targets are set in the context of the overall programme. Progress sheets are not made available to trainees although they are in other occupational sectors within HCTS. There are no structured plans for work-based assessments. Currently, there is a shortage of work-based assessors and little assessment occurs in the workplace. Some trainees make slow progress towards achievement of their NVQ. In 1998-99, only five trainees have achieved an NVQ at level 1.

Health, care & public services

Grade

3

27. HCTS has offered training leading to qualifications in care and childcare since July 1990. Most trainees have employed status. They work in 11 local nurseries and six residential and nursing homes. Trainees attend HCTS weekly for off-the-job training carried out by vocationally qualified staff. There are 40 trainees, of whom 11 are working towards care level 2, 21 towards early years care & education level 2 and eight towards early years care and education level 3 qualifications. Three of these trainees are New Deal clients on the subsidised employment option. In 1998/99, 40 per cent of trainees achieved NVQs and 60 per cent went into employment. Dates for completion of training were extended where appropriate. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report, but they found weaknesses which the organisation had not identified and awarded a lower grade for childcare training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good resources for on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ effective teamwork among staff, trainees and assessors
- ◆ good support for trainees from employers
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to work at their own pace

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of workplace assessors
- ◆ inappropriate recording of direct observations in care
- ◆ no standardisation of assessment practice across the sector

28. Trainees are enrolled on the care and early years care and education programmes throughout the year and they are given one-to-one induction to safety procedures in the workplace before workplace training starts. All trainees receive induction to the workplace from the employer. The organisation's placement officer carries out risk assessment of the workplace. There are sufficient staff who have the skills, knowledge and qualifications to provide training for trainees with differing needs. Tutors have devised materials for assessing the trainees' theory work. Off-the-job training takes place in well-resourced classrooms. Trainees are able to use the resources to work on their own. Each session has a detailed lesson plan specifying methods, outcomes and resources. Assessment is an integral part of learning in the session. The Employment Service referred the three New Deal clients on the subsidised employment option to HCTS. The same health and safety checks, review and progress-tracking processes and contract arrangements with the employer are carried out in respect of these trainees, as for trainees on programmes funded by Merseyside TEC.

29. Employers visited were supportive of trainees, providing learning and assessment opportunities while fostering individuals' self-development. Workplace resources, including video tapes and training packs, are up to date and trainees are encouraged to use them. Employers and work-based staff involved in training have asked for information about new standards in childcare. The childcare tutors arranged one-to-one sessions with workplace assessors to raise their awareness of the new standards. Care providers have received training plans which include the revised NVQ units, and an interpretation of the requirements and examples of what the trainee needs to achieve in work practice. Workplace personnel have clearly identified responsibilities for training.

30. As external verifiers' reports confirm, trainees are assessed to awarding body requirements. Trainees are given time to develop competence in the workplace and identify their own readiness for assessment. Trainees have individual assessment plans, which are compiled by the trainee, assessor and employer. Assessment is carried out in the workplace and is fully recorded. Tutors track trainees' progress towards achieving the NVQ. Staff in childcare workplaces, however, are not given information about the trainees' off-the-job training and have to rely on the trainees to tell them about this.

31. Although there are qualified assessors in some of the workplaces, assessment of trainees in the workplace is carried out by the tutors. HCTS has appointed a second childcare tutor to carry out assessment in the workplace. Many opportunities to assess trainees in naturally occurring situations are missed because the tutors are not there at the time. Some trainees have to wait to have their performance assessed and the time they need in order to achieve their awards is prolonged. On the care programme, direct observations of the trainees' performance are written up by the trainees and then signed by the assessors. In some instances, trainees are not good writers and do not record the observation properly. At one time, when applying the old standards in care, the external verifier approved the practice whereby trainees write up the observations. The practice, however, is continuing even though the revised standards which are now in force, clearly state the requirements for direct observation by the assessor.

32. There are good working relationships among trainees, assessors, tutors and employers. Tutors contact the work placements every week by telephone to check on trainees' attendance and use this opportunity to discuss trainees' progress, training and assessment. Meetings are held in the workplace, as frequently as once a week, for staff to discuss assessment and liaise about the programme. In care, the tutor regularly talks to employers about the subjects being covered in off-the-job training sessions and is prepared to adapt these to relate to workplace activities. Reviews take place every four to six weeks or more frequently if needed. Records of these in a standard format are kept in trainees' files. Pastoral services and basic skills support are available to trainees. However, trainees' literacy and numeracy skills are not formally assessed on entry, and it is up to tutors to identify trainees' additional learning needs.

33. There is no system or procedure for standardising assessment practice. In

childcare, the two tutors work closely together and have adopted the same working practice. There is standardisation of assessment practice with work-based assessors in childcare. However, in care there is no standardisation of assessment practice. The last two external verifier reports have asked for standardisation of assessment documents. Standardised documents have now been introduced but as yet are not being used. The internal verification procedure is insufficiently rigorous.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

34. HCTS offers two programmes in this vocational area. The first is for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities and uncommitted, disaffected school leavers. It is funded through a contract with Merseyside TEC. The programme offers basic skills development and/or preparatory training for work placement. Those requiring literacy and numeracy skills can work towards the wordpower and/or numberpower certificates. Trainees attend the training centre for up to five days a week, depending on their work placement arrangements or training needs. The programme helps young people with no clear employment focus to clarify their occupational aims. Trainees are given the opportunity to sample three types of work. Once they are settled in a work placement, they can transfer to NVQ training in the appropriate occupational sector. In addition, they receive continuous personal support and careers guidance. The programme is tailored to meet the trainees' individual needs. It lasts for 13 weeks but can be extended to 26 weeks if the trainees require additional support. There are seven trainees on the basic skills programme and four on the preparatory work taster programme.

35. The second programme is Stepping Stones. This is funded through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and the European Social Fund (ESF). This programme was introduced in August 1997 to give unemployed local people with few or no qualifications the opportunity to return to education, training and employment. It offers a 21-week prevocational taster course, including a work placement for 18 weeks. An intensive three-week induction includes a three-day residential experience when trainees build their confidence and develop team skills. While on work placement, the trainees attend HCTS's centre for a computer literacy and information technology course. In addition, trainees are given intensive careers' advice and guidance. This programme is aimed at those who are over 25 years of age. Those trainees unemployed who are not covered by the New Deal initiative have to be unemployed for less than two years or classed as long-term unemployed. Trainees have training, meal, travel and care allowances while on programme. At the time of inspection, there were 16 trainees on this programme. Inspectors found many more strengths than those cited in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is higher than that given by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ responsiveness of staff to trainees' individual needs

- ◆ excellent working relationships among employers, trainers and trainees
- ◆ good individual coaching and support
- ◆ high-quality resources
- ◆ high retention rates and success in obtaining jobs by adult trainees
- ◆ regular progress reports and reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low retention rate on youth training programme
- ◆ insufficiently specific targets for some trainees

36. On both programmes, HCTS's staff work highly effectively with trainees to meet their individual needs. The rapport between staff and trainees is excellent. Staff are well qualified and suitably experienced. They have expertise in training people from disadvantaged groups. There are good links with the local careers services and careers officers work in-house with those trainees who have no definite career ideas, to help them to identify vocational areas of interest. HCTS's staff have strong links with local employers who provide a range of opportunities for training. HCTS maintains strong partnerships with host employers. Employers and trainees participate in the regular reviews that are conducted in the workplace by HCTS's staff. Most trainees receive substantial support at work from supervisors. Reviews are comprehensive and well recorded and monitor trainees' progress in completing tasks in the workplace. They include targets for the trainee to work on before the next review. Targets are discussed fully with the employer and trainee. Trainees on the Stepping Stones programme have three review visits by HCTS's staff during the placement. These focus on trainees' performance, reliability, attitude and aptitude. Both trainees and employers are encouraged to contact HCTS's staff if problems occur while on work placement. Staff respond rapidly if there are problems and, where necessary, another placement is found to suit the individual's career aspirations.

37. During basic skills sessions, trainees work in groups or on a one-to-one basis with the trainer when appropriate. The literacy and numeracy training sessions, although not formally structured, are carried out very well. Teaching is at a level and pace that suit trainees' abilities. A variety of activities is used to ensure that trainees' interest is maintained. The materials and assignments used to develop and assess basic skills are well designed and produced. They are also relevant to the trainees' interests and occupational areas. Trainees are enthusiastic and participate in sessions willingly. The training room is well resourced with a computer and separate tutorial room. Attractive posters relevant to the world of work and trainees' hobbies and interests, decorate the walls. Procedures for reviewing trainees' progress are thorough. Records of review sessions are kept and trainees are fully involved in their progress reviews. However, individual target-setting for some trainees is not specific or detailed. Opportunities are missed for trainees to achieve small goals to build their confidence and motivation.

38. There are high retention rates on the Stepping Stones programme and a high proportion of trainees obtain jobs. Between April 1997 and December 1998, a total of 78 trainees have been through the programme. Of these, 59 (76 per cent) completed it successfully and four trainees left early to enter employment. Thirty trainees progressed to employment and 19 to further education. Trainees achieved one hundred and sixty-one qualifications during this period. In the last contract year with the TEC, 167 trainees joined the youth programme. Of these, 22 completed the programme with a basic skills qualification and 14 gained employment. Of the remaining 131 trainees, some progressed to work placements with NVQ training provided by HCTS, some joined another training provider or went on to further education, and the destinations of others were unknown. HCTS is unable to provide accurate statistics on this breakdown.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

39. HCTS has an equal opportunities policy and this is contained within staff manuals and displayed on notice boards at the two centres. Codes of practice are currently under review as part of an overall review of policies and procedures. There is a clear resolve throughout the organisation to avoid discrimination of all kinds and this is put into effect in all staff activities. The proportion of persons from minority ethnic groups in the local population is low, but the proportion of trainees from such groups was lower. Inspectors found the provision to be good and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ successful open-access policy
- ◆ positive action to address issues of ethnicity and disability
- ◆ sensitive handling of trainees' personal problems
- ◆ use of positive images and community languages in promotional materials

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to address gender imbalance in most occupational areas
- ◆ lack of awareness by some trainees of importance of equal opportunities
- ◆ no reference to equal opportunities in induction process
- ◆ no systematic programme of staff training on equal opportunities

40. The organisation's strong commitment to equality of opportunity is detailed in a code of practice contained within its quality assurance documentation. This is reinforced by posters and notices, which include positive images and information in several community languages in the two centres and again in some workplaces, particularly in the childcare sector where costumes of different nationalities are used

well in childcare training. Staff are extremely supportive of the organisation's equal opportunities policy. Senior management is currently reviewing the policy with the aim of improving it further, taking current legislation and case law into account.

41. HCTS has an open-access recruitment policy and no potential trainee is turned away. This policy strengthens the promotion of equality of opportunity in the organisation and staff support it, despite some attendant difficulties and the high workload it often imposes. Staff development activity has addressed issues of disability and has covered guidance and deafness awareness. A survey has been commissioned to look at the current facilities at the two centres with the aim of improving provision for people with disabilities. The disability awareness group from the careers service has recently delivered a 'raising awareness day' seminar to all staff. Many trainees have significant problems in terms of both learning difficulties and those of a personal and domestic nature. Trainees' confidences are fully respected and personal problems are dealt with in a highly sensitive manner. The organisation employs a pastoral officer whose terms of reference include attempts to resolve such matters with the help of other staff, parents and other outside sources where appropriate.

42. There is a significant gender imbalance in training programmes in all occupational sectors except business administration, and the organisation has not taken effective action to redress this. In the construction and motor vehicle sectors, there are no women. There is a lack of awareness of the importance of equal opportunities among some trainees, who can not recall having covered the topic in their induction. While equal opportunities is mentioned in trainees' induction programme and documentation, in most cases it is not emphasised or reinforced during induction or afterwards. With some exceptions, equal opportunities awareness among employers is poor and many have very little knowledge of the provider's policy on equal opportunities. The proposed new equal opportunities policy contains a systematic programme of staff training, but this has not yet been formally approved.

Trainee support

Grade 1

43. All prospective trainees are interviewed and offered relevant advice on career options prior to starting on a training programme. In addition, marketing literature is available to potential trainees to give details of what is available and required from them in a work placement. A structured induction is used to inform trainees about their rights and responsibilities and the courses they are completing. This is also followed by an induction in the occupational area. In most cases, trainees on placement attend the training centre to cover theory work. In the motor vehicle area, they also attend for workshop training that cannot be covered in the workplace. Training and assessment co-ordinators who are qualified assessors are employed to monitor and assess the trainees at their workplace and to complete the review process. Trainees' reviews are carried out, normally every six weeks, in the workplace. Assessments are also conducted in the workplace where possible, although witness testimony is not extensively used. Professional counselling services are made available to trainees throughout their training. Inspectors identified more

strengths than HCTS had included in its self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ very effective induction to programmes
- ◆ high standard of pastoral support and guidance
- ◆ extensive personal and professional counselling
- ◆ opportunities and encouragement for trainees to obtain additional qualifications
- ◆ frequent progression planning and careers counselling
- ◆ well-defined and successful approach to solving behavioural problems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of initial assessment including accreditation of prior achievement

44. Induction is well planned. Trainees receive information on their rights and responsibilities plus practical and comprehensive advice on health and safety. All trainees receive an induction handout about facilities available to them. In addition, each programme has its own induction programme. This is often followed by workplace induction by the employers.

45. The appointment of a pastoral support officer is indicative of the provider's commitment to trainee support. The organisation regards the provision of good support for trainees as a prime objective, as its mission statement testifies. Support is offered to trainees during their time on the programme and up to a year after leaving their course. They are helped with issues such as homelessness, finding employment, low skills, disability, behavioural and parental problems and are given assistance in finding further training after their course ends. There is a clear commitment to supporting trainees with learning difficulties or disabilities. A wide range of personal and professional counselling is available to trainees covering issues such as learning difficulties, dyslexia, drug abuse, behavioural problems, and domestic problems. The training centre is situated in the centre of one of the poorest areas in Merseyside. There is close liaison with the employment services and their specialist counsellors. The organisation can call upon the professional expertise of occupational psychologists who work with people with disabilities. Trainees have the opportunity to increase their employability by taking additional qualifications in first aid, health and safety and computer literacy. They can also receive driving instruction and take a driving test.

46. Trainees with special learning needs or disabilities are given encouragement, good personal support and additional learning support. They receive extra training and additional one-to-one coaching. Dyslexic trainees have the opportunity to present evidence using audio tapes. Trainees with learning difficulties are often placed with particularly supportive companies, who understand their needs and have encouraged them to complete their NVQ, resulting in long-term employment for

some. Trainees receive support in the workplace more frequently than is contractually required. The advice given by the visiting tutors and assessors is valuable and comprehensive, and it includes progression planning and careers counselling. Trainees commend staff for their interest in them and their progress. Trainees are well motivated and enthusiastic. In some occupational areas, staff consider that the provision of effective support for trainees is essential as a means of reducing the number of early leavers. For example, in care, assessors and tutors often visit trainees at work in the evening and during night shifts.

47. Many trainees have behavioural problems. These are often the cause of complaints from placement providers but they are always quickly addressed. Usually, trainees with such problems are referred for prevocational training and sessions which aim to improve their attitude and curb their disruptive behaviour and use of bad language. After the prevocational training, another placement is found for them. Trainees continue with their previous training programme and are able to catch up quickly in collecting evidence for their portfolios. Records show that this method of resolving behavioural problems works well. Most trainees and employees are pleased with the support they receive. Considerable effort is made to help trainees to secure full-time employment with the workplace providers as soon as possible. In some cases, trainees have progressed to supervisory positions within the companies that they have been placed with and are then able to act as mentors to the new trainees. Placements are found for the majority of trainees. When trainees have to change employers, other placements are found for them quickly and their training leading to the NVQ continues with minimum disruption.

48. There is no initial assessment of trainees and the opportunity to accredit trainees' prior learning in the occupational areas is often missed. Some workplace supervisors do not have enough understanding of NVQs to support trainees well, plan workplace training and ensure that trainees achieve their qualifications within a timescale appropriate to their abilities.

Management of training

Grade 3

49. HCTS is a well-managed organisation with clear structures which are understood by staff. The chief executive manages the company and reports to a board of directors from local churches. Responsibility for the strategic management of work-based training lies with the management team. The training manager is responsible for day-to-day management of training and the way it is carried out. The management team has weekly, minuted meetings. The training manager meets on a regular basis with staff of the training department. There is open management, and staff are involved in decision making within the organisation. There are very good working relationships between HCTS and the employers and local further education colleges with which it contracts. There is a lack of formalised management systems in some areas.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented staff recruitment and induction procedures
- ◆ effective staff development programme
- ◆ strong working relationships with external agencies
- ◆ good management of work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no dissemination of good practice between occupational areas
- ◆ inadequate management information

50. HCTS's managers work well with staff and teamwork is encouraged at all levels. Staff are set targets by the training manager and these are linked to the TEC contract. Each training department is reviewed on a six-weekly basis. Staff recruitment policy reflects HCTS's commitment to equality of opportunity. There are up-to-date job descriptions for all staff. Recruitment materials include a standardised application form and candidate assessment form. The staff induction file is comprehensive and regularly reviewed. Staff turnover rates are low as are staff sickness levels, at 3.6 per cent. Staff are highly motivated and enthusiastic about training and they have a firm commitment to helping the trainees to succeed. Responsibility for staff training and development is shared between the training manager and the individual member of staff. The training manager identifies the training needs of each member of staff, and plans training to meet them. A number of tutors are taking the key skills practitioner award and another is in the process of gaining a teaching qualification. The staff appraisal system has been introduced recently, and is not yet established across the organisation. Management team members have been through appraisal interviews. At these, the progress of staff is discussed, job descriptions are reviewed and new targets are set. However, this appraisal process has not been extended to all staff.

51. HCTS has good links with external agencies involved in the training process. This includes the careers service and local community groups. It has contacts at local schools and links with pastoral care services, such as those providing counselling on drug misuse in the community. Through these contacts, the organisation also receives referrals of prospective trainees. Employers and work-based placements are well managed by the organisation. Employers are provided with a comprehensive information booklet and formal written agreements. The booklet includes information on the NVQ process, health & safety and equal opportunities. Trainees have the opportunity to undertake a two-week taster placement to assess whether they are suited to the occupational area and the company itself. If there are difficulties, the trainee can be moved to a more suitable placement. All trainers contact placements each week to check on trainees' progress, attendance and to discuss any problems which may arise. This regular contact with

employers and work placements ensures that problems can be dealt with promptly.

52. In the occupational sectors of motor vehicle, catering and business administration on- and off-the-job training is not effectively co-ordinated. There is a lack of feedback to and from the placements. There is also insufficient review of trainees' progress, particularly in catering. However, there are very good review practices in childcare. These have not been shared with all the other occupational sectors which need to improve their review systems. The training manager's meetings with the training departments are beginning to explore ways of sharing good practice. Management information is incomplete and lacks clarity. The data produced are sometimes inaccurate and are not necessarily helpful to managers in their monitoring of trainee transfers to other programmes, or strategic planning to improve the overall performance of the company.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

53. HCTS has a quality assurance manual which has been reviewed in the last financial year. The organisation is audited by Merseyside TEC bi-annually. It is also required to comply with quality audits by virtue of its receipt of European Social Funding and funding from the Single Regeneration Budget. The NVQ internal verification process is checked by awarding body external verifiers. It has a full-time health and safety officer who checks adherence to health and safety regulations in work placements and the company's premises. Staff were consulted in a series of meetings before the self-assessment report was compiled. Although not contractually committed to introduce key skills, the provider has encouraged staff to gain qualifications to teach and assess them with the aim of improving the overall quality of training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good quality assurance systems for training process
- ◆ trainees consulted about improvements to the programme
- ◆ good-quality subcontractors and work placements
- ◆ staff training in key skills to enhance overall quality of provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to apply quality assurance to some activities
- ◆ no regular audit of quality assurance system
- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification system
- ◆ inaccurate self-assessment report

54. HCTS has introduced quality assurance procedures which enable it to check the

quality of the training process. The organisation engaged a consultant as a temporary member of staff, with a full job description, to monitor the quality of off-the-job training provided by the college. The consultant observed training sessions at the college and made a written report. The consultant also asked trainees to complete a questionnaire about their satisfaction with their training and analysed trainees' responses. The training manager observes off-the-job training sessions. Merseyside TEC audit documents and audits from the subcontracted college do not reveal any significant weaknesses in the quality assurance of contracted provision. .

55. On the Stepping Stones programme, the trainees are given the opportunity to work with staff to review the entire provision and improvements have been made progressively. For example, the organisation introduced a three-day residential course at a local outdoor activity centre where trainees experience caving, abseiling, canoeing and rock climbing to increase their confidence and help them to develop team-building skills. The trainees who receive their off-the-job training in college are regularly invited to visit HCTS's headquarters where they meet with staff to discuss ways of making improvements. Trainees elect representatives to a student committee and open discussion takes place. This allows trainees who spend much of their time in the workplace to share problems and ideas with trainees on other NVQ programmes. The quality of training and other services provided by subcontractors is carefully monitored. The organisation expects subcontractors to give full support to its training and support provision for disadvantaged young people and adults. The placement officer monitors work placement providers for quality and will remove any provider from the list if there is any doubt about the appropriateness of the placement or the attitude of the placement staff towards disadvantaged people.

56. HCTS has no contractual requirement to provide key skills training. Staff have, however, received training in the teaching and assessment of key skills. Staff express confidence that they will be able to provide key skills training effectively if the organisation introduces training programmes for modern apprentices and national trainees.

57. Quality assurance processes work well in some area of provision, but they do not cover all activities. Staff in one occupational area do not use the standard review forms and quality assurance procedures employed in other occupational areas. Staff do not make the best use of the quality assurance manual to bring about the continuous improvement of provision. Staff induction does not emphasise the importance of staff compliance with quality assurance procedures. There is no schedule for monitoring the effectiveness of the quality assurance processes. There is no internal audit of staff compliance with standard procedures for quality assurance.

58. Checks on the quality of provision are carried out through the internal verification system. For example, types of evidence in portfolios are sampled. Internal verifiers of occupational areas are required to send copies of their sampling plans to the training manager who is also the internal verification co-ordinator. There is, however, no monitoring of the way trainees' achievement of NVQ units is tracked and recorded. The organisation does not have a systematic schedule for the assessment of trainees' work and action planning to improve it. The completion of



portfolios is, increasingly, left until the end of the programme and early leavers do not necessarily obtain their qualification. The internal verification co-ordinator is developing standardised procedures for scheduling assessment, action-planning and portfolio-building and completion.

59. Inspectors agreed with many strengths and weaknesses identified through self-assessment. They found other strengths and weaknesses, however, which the organisation had failed to identify. They considered that, overall, the organisation has undervalued itself and had failed to recognise many of its strengths, areas of good practice and the merits of some of its policies.