



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

Work Experience Centre Ltd

SUMMARY

Work Experience Centre Limited provides outstanding training in hairdressing. Programmes are flexible to meet trainees' diverse needs, there are effective working relationships with employers and retention and achievement rates are good. Training in health, care and public services is good, with an extensive range of good work placements and the opportunity for work 'taster' sessions so that trainees can decide which aspect of care they are interested in. There is satisfactory training in agriculture, construction, business administration, retailing and customer service, hospitality and foundation for work. Engineering training is less than satisfactory, with many weaknesses in the motor vehicle programme and poor achievement rates across all areas. Equal opportunities arrangements are satisfactory, with open access to training opportunities for all trainees, although trainees and employers' awareness of equal opportunities is poor. Support for trainees is good, with effective assessment of trainees' basic skills and well-developed specialist support available where necessary. Management of training and quality assurance arrangements are less than satisfactory. There is a well-developed and effective staff development programme, but there is no strategic management of training programmes and inadequate management of key skills training. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process but the company's quality assurance arrangements do not always ensure consistency across all programmes and divisions. There is no structured evaluation process and achievement and destination data are not used to make improvements.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3
Construction	3
Engineering	4
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Hospitality	3
Hair & beauty	1
Health, care & public services	2
Foundation for work	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good additional training in work skills and personal effectiveness
- ◆ extensive range of good-quality work placements
- ◆ well-structured basic skills support tailored to individuals' needs
- ◆ appointment of 'minority ethnic co-ordinator'
- ◆ good access to training for those with diverse learning needs
- ◆ well-established and effective staff development programme
- ◆ good involvement by staff in the self-assessment process

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate key skills training
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates across most occupational areas
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of rigorous target setting in many reviews
- ◆ poor job-search support for many trainees
- ◆ no strategic management of training programmes
- ◆ no accurate data available to guide management decisions
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements do not always ensure consistency
- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification

INTRODUCTION

1. The Work Experience Centre Limited (WEC) was established in 1983 to provide a wide range of vocational and skills training for unemployed and employed young people and adults throughout Staffordshire. The company is a wholly owned subsidiary of a registered charity. WEC consists of three divisions, three satellite centres and one special unit. The head office and Mid Staffordshire division are situated in the county town of Stafford. The North Staffordshire division is situated in Hanley, which forms part of the City of Stoke-on-Trent. There are also two satellite work centres at Goldenhill and Bucknall. The East Staffordshire division is situated in Tamworth with a satellite centre at Burton-on-Trent. The special unit is in the SCOPE centre in Stafford. This centre was specifically set up to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to train in information technology. WEC has close links with the Staffordshire education service and financially supports outreach youth workers in giving help to disaffected young people. It also works closely with schools to support pupils who do not attend school and to offer vocational training as part of the school curriculum.

2. WEC contracts with Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide training and assessment towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in 10 occupational areas. Manufacturing has very few trainees and was not included in the inspection. It offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships, other youth training programmes and work-based learning for adults and basic employability training programmes for adults. It also has a contract to provide the environment task force option under New Deal. New Deal clients also attend WEC for their training on the employment and voluntary sector options. There are 79 staff involved in training and 12 administrative and support staff. There are 378 trainees and 152 New Deal clients across the following occupational areas:

Youth and adult training

Occupational areas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Agriculture		1	2		7			10
Construction			9		2			11
Engineering		1	29		1			31
Business administration	14	10	38		20			82
Retailing & customer service	10	5	36		41			92
Hospitality		4	7					11
Hair & beauty		2	13					15
Health, care & public services		65	1					66
Foundation for work				8		48	4	60
Total	24	88	135	8	71	48	4	378

1 = modern apprenticeships, 2 = national trainees, 3 = other youth training, 4 = life skills, 5 = work-based learning for adults, 6 = basic employability, 7= job train

New Deal

Occupational areas	Environment task force option	Employment option	Voluntary option	Total
Agriculture	3			3
Construction	35	1		36
Engineering	10			10
Business administration	13	1	8	22
Retailing & customer service	26	8	36	70
Health, care & public services			3	3
Foundation for work	5		3	8
Total	92	10	50	152

3. Staffordshire has both urban and rural areas. The principal industries within North Staffordshire are ceramics, bone china, engineering, steel and tyre manufacture. In Mid Staffordshire they are engineering, electronics, diesel engines, abrasives and adhesives. In East Staffordshire they are brewing, earthmoving equipment and logistics. The unemployment rate for Staffordshire in April 2000 was 3.2 per cent compared with 3.8 per cent for England. The rates vary across the county from 2.1 per cent in Stafford to 4.4 per cent in Cannock Chase. Staffordshire is above the national average for trainee participation in government-funded training. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Staffordshire was 44.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

4. The proportion of 16 year olds participating in full-time education and training in Staffordshire is 63 per cent, compared with the national average of 69 per cent. The proportion participating in government-funded training is 14 per cent, compared with the national average of 10 per cent. Less than 1 per cent of the population of Staffordshire are from minority ethnic groups, although some areas have a higher proportion in East Staffordshire, the percentage is 3.3.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The company's self-assessment report was produced in January 2000 and was the second version of the report. It is updated on an annual basis. All training staff were involved in the self-assessment process. Awareness-raising workshops were held, so that staff had a clear understanding of the process and their roles and responsibilities in it. Feedback from trainees, staff and employers was gained through questionnaires and follow-up individual interviews. The results were analysed and judgements made based on the information. An action plan was drawn up and staff were involved in implementing it. The second version of the report has taken account of the improvements made and the report has been updated and grades adjusted. Inspectors considered many of the strengths to be no more than normal practice and some strengths and weaknesses were moved into other sections of the report. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with seven of the grades, judged four grades to be lower and two grades to be higher.

6. A team of 11 inspectors spent a total of 41 days at WEC during May 2000. They interviewed 145 trainees, 55 staff, 34 employers and three subcontractors. They visited 44 placements. They observed 23 training sessions, 16 reviews and 15 assessments. Inspectors examined trainees' individual training plans, review records and files. A wide range of other documents was examined, including contracts, external reports, records of meetings, staff personnel records, policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture		2	2			4
Construction		3	3			6
Engineering		1	1	3		5
Business administration		2	3	2		7
Retailing & customer service	1	2	7	3		13
Hospitality		2	2	2		6
Hair & beauty	1	2	2			5
Health, care & public services		1		1		2
Foundation for work	1	1	1			3
Total	3	16	21	11	0	51

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 3

7. There are 18 trainees and three New Deal clients across the programmes in the table below. There are also eight trainees on the basic employability programme. Trainees work towards NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in commercial horticulture at a semi-commercial production nursery at Bucknall near Stoke on Trent. Transport is provided for trainees. The nursery has one large commercial glasshouse, a smaller propagation house, several polythene tunnels and an outdoor standing area for hardy nursery stock. The nursery supplies mainly wholesale customers but there is some retail activity, mainly in the spring. Occupational skills and theory are mainly taught on the job. There are two workplace supervisors who carry out work-based assessment. New Deal clients work towards units of the amenity horticulture NVQ at level 1. This is carried out at the Burton-on-Trent site.

8. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Commercial horticulture	0	1	2	7	0	10
Amenity horticulture	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	0	1	2	7	3	13

1 = modern apprentices, 2 = national trainees, 3 = other youth training, 4 = work-based learning for adults, 5 = New Deal environment task force

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extra qualifications available to increase trainees' employment opportunities
- ◆ good use of appropriate training methods
- ◆ good on-the-job training resources
- ◆ effective progress reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient recording of commercial horticulture training
- ◆ insufficient commercial working environment for commercial horticulture trainees
- ◆ insufficient welfare facilities for commercial horticulture trainees
- ◆ low achievement rates for adult trainees
- ◆

9. Trainees work towards additional qualifications to improve their employability. These include forklift truck operations, emergency first aid and

retailing NVQ units. This training allows trainees to seek employment in other occupational areas such as warehousing and retailing. The combination of horticulture and retailing training provides a sound basis for employment in garden centres. Trainees enjoy the teamwork during their work experience and many are given the opportunity to be responsible for specific areas. Older trainees are used as mentors for younger ones which benefits both parties. Work-based supervisors ensure that trainees are kept busy and encourage them to take pride in their work. Trainers integrate the theory training with practical skills development. This style of training is greatly appreciated by the trainees, many of whom have little enthusiasm for classroom-based learning. Two youth trainees, both former school refusers, spoke about their learning experiences with enthusiasm. One trainee encouraged a friend to cycle several miles to WEC's training site to find out about joining the horticulture programme.

10. The range of sites available to the amenity horticulture trainees provides them with a wide range of opportunities for productive work experience. The training emphasises productivity and quality and enables trainees to understand and appreciate the rigour of the workplace. Commercial horticulture trainees gain work experience in a production nursery which carries out a wide range of operations and provides them with a good overall view of ornamental plant production. Trainees' progress is reviewed on a monthly basis. Reviews cover both pastoral and occupational training issues. Trainees are provided with clear measurable targets given support to achieve them. The review is an integral part of the training process and is used to develop both the occupational and personal effectiveness of the trainees.

11. Commercial horticulture training is primarily provided on the job and the content and timing of training sessions is not adequately recorded. Individual training plans do not provide sufficient detail on a trainees' training programmes or how they are going to be taught. The production nursery is operated on a semi-commercial basis, but the number of trainees is too high for a real commercial environment. The site is intensively cropped and operating space is restricted. Trainees work in groups for tasks which would normally be carried out by individuals in a real commercial environment. There is no rest room for breaks and meals. These are taken in the polythene tunnels which are very cold in the winter months. WEC is currently investigating the installation of a portable building on the site to overcome this problem.

12. Achievement rates have declined in the last two years. Many new trainees enter the programme with little understanding of what is involved in horticultural work and it does not meet their expectations. There is a disproportionate number of early leavers. In 1996-97, 71 per cent of adult trainees achieved their target qualification. In 1998-99 this figure dropped to 40 per cent. For youth trainees, the achievement rate has dropped from 71 per cent in 1997-98 to 8.3 per cent in 1998-99. Fifty per cent of the trainees in this group achieved some qualifications. The 1999-2000 group of national trainees shows a much better success rate. In 1999-2000 four trainees started, of whom three have achieved their qualifications and one remains in training.

13. Work experience for New Deal clients consists of renovating and maintaining a number of varied sites, including the grounds of a children's nursery, an RSPCA animal rescue centre and a local housing association. The work-based supervisor provides off-the-job training and assesses the competence of clients on the job. The off-the-job training is carried out one day a week using WEC's training facilities at Burton-on-Trent. A local land-based college provides some additional training when needed. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

Construction

Grade 3

14. There are 11 trainees in construction, two of whom are adults. The nine youth trainees are on other youth training programmes. There are also 36 New Deal clients, all of whom are on the environment task force option except one client who is on the employment option.

15. There is also one basic employability trainee. WEC provides construction training towards NVQs at level 1 in decorative occupations, painting and decorating NVQs at level 2, wood occupations NVQs at level 1 and the bench joinery option of wood occupations NVQ at level 2. There is one assessor for wood occupations and one assessor for decorative occupations and painting and decorating. There are craft training workshops in Stafford. Trowel occupations level 1 NVQ training and assessment is undertaken at the local further education college. Youth trainees start on level 1 NVQ programmes in decorative occupations and wood occupations. Most wood occupations trainees are found work placements and attend the centre one day a week. There are few placements available for painting and decorating and so trainees gain practical experience through project work. Adults on the basic employability programme work towards a national skills certificate and carry out practical painting and decorating project work. These adults can progress onto the painting and decorating level 2 NVQ. WEC also offers thermal insulation and draft proofing NVQs at level 1. The initial training is done at the purpose-designed facilities at the Goldenhill centre with the remainder of the training and assessment being undertaken while working with WEC's teams carrying out home insulation work. There were currently no trainees on this programme. The majority of the New Deal clients are based on projects in WEC's three divisions. In 1999-2000, 61 per cent of youth trainees gained employment. Over half of the jobs were in construction. Nearly 50 per cent gained some qualifications and three of the 22 trainees who started are still in training. During the same period, out of eight adults who started, two gained employment. Three completed their individual training plans, two are still in training and the remaining one left early with no job or qualifications.

16. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths given in the self-assessment report but considered the other strengths to be no more than normal practice. The

report failed to identify the weaknesses in the programme. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-organised workshop training
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ extensive range of project work

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little co-ordination of on-and off-the-job training
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ lack of rigorous targets set at reviews
- ◆ inappropriate targets set in individual training plans for some adult trainees

17. There are good working relationships between the trainers and trainees. Trainees understand what they are doing and are well motivated. Instruction in the workshops is good and well organised. Trainees work purposefully on tasks without unnecessary intervention by the trainers. Tutors are quick to identify, support and encourage trainees who are having difficulties. One of the vocational tutors checks potential work placements. A health and safety inspection is carried out and the type and range of work checked to ensure that trainees will benefit from the placement. There is a range of placements available providing a wide variety of different types of work experience. Tutors recommend appropriate trainees to the placement providers. Trainees gain valuable occupational experience and are well matched to the placements.

18. An extensive range of project work is available, on which trainees gain valuable experience. One project is a converted school building with an attached house. It is located in a conservation area and the use of specialist historic paints is a requirement. The external work includes preparing and painting a range of items including timber and metal windows, cast iron rainwater goods, timber fascia and doors and stonework. There is also internal painting and decorating work. Another project is a long-term one over at least five years. A disused colliery is being converted to a heritage centre. Trainees are involved in the construction of the new conference and exhibition centre, other new building works and the maintenance and adaptation of existing buildings. They work alongside contractors doing foundation, external works and painting and decorating. They gain valuable experience liaising with the contractors and working in a commercial construction environment. Other project work includes painting and decorating in private dwellings. Trainees meet the clients, estimate quantities, plan the work and obtain prices for materials. The trainees work in small groups, often with a more experienced adult trainee acting in a supervisory capacity. The company has

received praise from clients about the quality of work and the professional manner in which the trainees have worked.

19. The training carried out in the training workshop does not fully take into account the work being undertaken on projects or during placements. For example, instruction in the workshops on painting doors has been undertaken after some trainees have already spent some time on the projects painting doors. Placement providers do not have a clear understanding of the qualifications and the links between the workshop training and the experience they can provide. Placement providers are given some information about the qualifications but they do not fully understand it. They do not receive a training programme. They are not involved directly in the reviews with the trainees when these are carried out at the placement. There are no assessors or workplace staff who sign trainees' work sheets at the placements. A limited amount of work-based assessment is undertaken and it usually takes place when tutors visit trainees to review their progress at least every eight weeks. Three of the project supervisors have relevant construction qualifications and countersign the trainees' work records. They have not been trained as workplace recorders or assessors and trainees undertake simulated assessment in the workshops when they have already shown that they are competent on the project work.

20. Trainees' reviews do not include specific, short-term targets for achievement. The trainees have a general idea of their progress but do not know what they should achieve by a set date. They are unable to measure their own progress towards their qualifications between reviews. Most of the basic employability trainees who attend and successfully complete the prevocational programme move on to the painting and decorating level 2 NVQ programme. The training plan target for this NVQ for these trainees is unrealistic within the time allowed. The trainees have not taken an occupationally recognised qualification and are starting the programme with the equivalent of an entry-level qualification. Trainees are so determined to succeed that when they come to the end of their time on their programme, many attend on a voluntary basis until they are eligible to properly rejoin the programme and complete their NVQ.

21. Most New Deal clients attend the Stafford centre one week in four for their training. Those attending the college do so for two days a week during termtime only. Some clients make good progress and are encouraged to complete further units from the qualifications. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

Engineering

Grade 4

22. There are 31 trainees and 10 New Deal clients in engineering across the programmes in the table below. There is also one basic employability trainee. Engineering training programmes operate at two of the divisional sites. Mechanical engineering trainees attend on a full-time basis at Stafford for training and assessment. Motor vehicle training takes place at Stafford and Tamworth.

Trainees who achieve the level 1 NVQ in tyre and exhaust fitting can have this prior learning accredited towards a level 2 NVQ. Off-the-job training for the level 2 NVQ in vehicle maintenance service replacement takes place at the two training centres. All training for the level 2 NVQ in motor vehicle body repair takes place in the work placements. Fork-lift truck training takes place at Stafford. New Deal clients attend the training centre one day a week for their off-the-job training. There are six engineering staff, comprising one senior supervisor and five supervisors/assessors.

23. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses which were judged to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Mechanical			4		2	6
Tyre fitting			13		1	14
Vehicle body repair			1			1
Vehicle maintenance		1	7			8
Other			4	1	7	12
Total	0	1	29	1	10	41

1 = modern apprentices, 2 = national trainees, 3 = other youth training, 4 = work-based learning for adults, 5 = New Deal environment task force

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high priority given to health and safety
- ◆ effectively planned on-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding of NVQ programmes by motor vehicle trainees and employers
- ◆ inadequate planning for motor vehicle off-the-job training
- ◆ some poor assessment practices in motor vehicle training
- ◆ lack of focus on progression and target setting in reviews
- ◆ some poor achievement rates

24. Trainees are given a comprehensive induction to their training. Health and safety features high as a priority in raising trainees' awareness of the dangers associated with a high-risk area of employment. Employers reinforce health and safety when trainees have inductions into the work placement. In addition, trainees complete an assignment when they first start in their work placement. Trainees

continue to display a positive attitude towards safety in the workplace, particularly when using tools and equipment. The placement officer subjects all prospective placements to an extremely rigorous check for compliance with health and safety and other statutory regulatory bodies. Employers are assisted, if necessary, to set up systems to meet regulations. The visiting assessor continually monitors health and safety when carrying out trainees' reviews. Employers are enthusiastic and involved in training. On-the-job training is well planned to ensure that they obtain new skills and gain experience of different work areas by working with experienced staff. Employers give trainees time to attend WEC for two five-day training courses in tyre and exhaust fitting, or to compile portfolios. Employers are given good support by course supervisors.

25. Most motor vehicle employers have little knowledge and a poor understanding of the NVQ programme and their role in the process. They do not fully understand the importance of work-based assessment and miss opportunities to assess trainees in their everyday work. They have insufficient information on the structure and content of the NVQ. Trainees do not fully understand the NVQ they are working towards or how the different parts of it fit together.

26. Mechanical engineering is well structured and trainees make good progress. However, for motor vehicle trainees, the training in the workplace is determined by the production needs of the employer. Motor vehicle supervisors from both divisions work independently and do not plan the overall programme as a team. Off-the-job training is not effectively planned to complement on-the-job training and to ensure that trainees cover the range of required competencies. Motor vehicle staff have commercial occupational expertise but lack formal qualifications in instructional techniques.

27. Motor vehicle trainees are assessed in the workplace, with naturally occurring activities used as the main source of evidence. The checklists used when observing them at work do not meet all the performance criteria. Assessments are not planned and some trainees are not given clear guidance about the observation and assessment process. Some trainees are not given clear and constructive feedback at the end of the assessment. Motor vehicle trainees' portfolios are well organised and contain job cards signed by the workplace supervisor as the main source of work-based evidence. In most portfolios, the evidence is weak. Records do not clearly show how the evidence meets NVQ criteria. Most internal verification sampling is carried out on completion of the portfolio. Observation of assessors' performance and portfolio sampling is clearly recorded. However, the internal verification process is not effectively planned to cover the criteria as defined by the awarding bodies. Staff are unaware of recent documents on assessment and verification procedures. Internal verification fails to identify weaknesses in the motor vehicle assessment practices and relies on external verifiers' reports.

28. Staff visit trainees in the workplace every four weeks to carry out reviews. They also visit on a weekly basis in between reviews to meet with trainees and ensure there are no problems. Visits to workplaces to monitor trainees' progress are not always effective. Reviews are often hurried, merged with an assessment

and not always conducted in private. Outcomes of the reviews are fully recorded and employers are actively involved in the process by countersigning trainees' self-assessment reports. Trainees' general progress is discussed but no realistic targets for vocational achievement are set. There are some poor achievement rates. In 1998-99, none of the adult trainees achieved a qualification. In 1999-2000, 17 per cent achieved a qualification. In 1998-99, 57.5 per cent of youth trainees achieved a level 1 NVQ and in 1999-2000, 66 per cent achieved a level 1 NVQ. In 1998-99, 31.5 per cent of youth trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2 but this decreased to 8.8 per cent in 1999-2000.

29. There are 10 New Deal clients on the environment task force option. Clients are working towards three units of the level 2 NVQ in mechanical engineering. The units covered are health and safety, materials and effectively working with others. Clients who progress well have the opportunity to achieve additional units of their choice, in either welding or fitting. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

Business administration

Grade 3

30. WEC provides training in business administration and information technology within all of its divisions. Trainees work towards NVQs at levels 1, 2, and 3. Information technology training is also provided at the SCOPE Centre, which is specifically set up to meet the needs of people with disabilities. There are 82 trainees and 22 New Deal clients across the following programmes:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Business administration	14	10	38	20	13	1	8	104

1 = modern apprentices, 2 = national trainees, 3 = other youth training, 4 = work-based learning for adults, 5 = New Deal environment task force, 6 = New Deal (employment), 7 = New Deal (voluntary)

31. There are also seven basic employability trainees and two adult 'jobtrain' trainees based in business administration. Most trainees are in work placements across a variety of businesses including tyre distributors, council offices, hospitals, chemical suppliers and computer manufacturers. Some of the trainees attend WEC on a full-time basis. Others who are in placements attend on a day-release basis or have contact through assessors' visits with the opportunity to 'drop in' to WEC as required. There are five business administration tutors and five information technology tutors. Reviews take place every four weeks for trainees with additional support needs and every 13 weeks for other trainees. Assessments are carried out as required by individual trainees. Resource materials include textbooks, exercise handouts, computers, other hardware such as scanners and printers, and software, which includes Microsoft Office and Windows 98. There is also controlled access to the Internet. In 1998-99 achievement rates for level 2 NVQs in business administration and information technology varied across the programmes. Seventy-five per cent of national trainees, 67 per cent of adults and 26 per cent of other youth trainees achieved their target qualifications. Job

outcomes for adults have shown a decline, dropping from 35 per cent in 1996-97, to 16 per cent in 1998-99.

32. Inspectors did not agree with any of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They were either considered to be no more than normal practice or were more appropriate to a generic area. Inspectors identified extra strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of good work placements available
- ◆ good peer group support
- ◆ detailed action planning with clear targets

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for observing naturally occurring evidence
- ◆ lack of structured on-the-job training in some work placements
- ◆ some poor awareness by employers of NVQ programmes
- ◆ lack of work placements for some information technology trainees

33. Work placements are varied and offer a wide range of opportunities for trainees to learn and develop their skills. There are some good information technology placements where trainees are able to gain a whole range of skills, including working in a team, dealing with customers over the telephone and face to face, and learning how to build personal computers. Another placement provides one trainee with the opportunity to deal with a range of business clients, and also to operate the help-desk system. The trainee has the autonomy required for the level of qualification being taken, and organises and plans his own workload. Business administration placements enable trainees to gain a whole range of skills. In many cases these are over and above those required for the NVQ. In larger organisations, trainees are given opportunities to move around departments to increase their knowledge and experience.

34. Trainees who have gained experience, and who are comfortable within their environment, are actively encouraged to offer support and guidance to new, less confident, trainees. One former trainee is now employed at the SCOPE Centre as an assistant. Some trainees are given the opportunity to participate in running training courses for other trainees and WEC's staff. This provides them with evidence for the communication aspects of their key skills.

35. Action planning is detailed and clearly identifies which NVQ unit and elements trainees have to complete. Trainees know what they need to achieve, and which parts of their NVQ the required activities will count towards. Actions are

clearly linked to timescales which tie in with review dates. This helps trainees to progress and also to focus their efforts on producing appropriate evidence.

36. Work-based activities are not observed or directly assessed and opportunities are missed for including naturally occurring evidence in trainees' portfolios. Trainees spend time collecting hard copies of evidence or writing personal statements, which they show to their assessor. This is time consuming and trainees' progress is slowed. In some workplaces, on-the-job training is inadequately organised and structured. Trainees learn single aspects of the work and do not have the opportunity to see a job through to its completion.

37. Some employers have an insufficient understanding of NVQs in general, and of the specific programmes that their trainees are undertaking. Those employers who have a greater awareness and knowledge of the NVQ process and programme are able to identify ways in which the on-the-job training can be used to help trainees to gain and demonstrate competence in the different units and elements being undertaken. Not all information technology trainees have the opportunity to do work experience. The new information technology NVQs require that assessment takes place in the workplace. Some of the trainees who have been registered for several months have not yet been assessed in the workplace.

38. Most New Deal clients work towards information technology qualifications. Most assessment takes place in the training centre. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

Grade 3

Retailing & customer service

39. There are 92 trainees and 70 New Deal clients in retailing, across the programmes in the table below. There are also eight basic employability trainees and one adult 'jobtrain' trainee based in retailing and customer service. Trainees work in environments which include shops in the private and voluntary sector, horticultural nurseries, distributive and transport logistics, cash and carry, travel and healthcare. WEC also offers forklift truck training, testing and NVQs, to trainees in distribution and construction. Large goods-vehicle training and testing is subcontracted. Youth and adult trainees are matched to work-placement providers which offer work experience or potential employment. Non-employed trainees have an induction at WEC and employed trainees at their workplace. Training and assessment for distributive and service industries is carried out at WEC's sites, subcontractors' sites and in the workplace. During 1999-2000, 58 per cent of youth trainees gained an NVQ at level 2, 59 per cent gained employment and 35 per cent are still in training. No modern apprenticeships or national traineeships have yet been achieved. Sixteen per cent of adults gained an NVQ at level 1 and 16 per cent gained an NVQ at level 2. Less than 1 per cent gained employment and 34 per cent are still on the programme.

40. Inspectors agreed with one strength in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Retailing & customer service	10	5	36	41	26	8	36	162

1 = modern apprentices, 2 = national trainees, 3 = other youth training, 4 = work-based learning for adults, 5 = New Deal environment task force, 6 = New Deal (employment), 7 = New Deal (voluntary)

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent, flexible reviews and assessment
- ◆ wide variety of work placements available
- ◆ effective links between workplace supervisors, assessors and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practice
- ◆ missed opportunities to use naturally occurring evidence
- ◆ no key skills assessment

41. Assessors visit their allocated trainees on a weekly basis or monthly in some cases, according to the needs of each trainee. They give individual tuition based on handouts that are used for guided reading. Work assignments are adapted for each working environment. Reviews are carried out every four to eight weeks. Line managers, assessors and trainees all contribute to the review process. The focus of the review is to increase trainees' job skills to their full potential. Trainees are helped to find work placements. They work with assessors to compare their skills with job requirements and are given assistance in compiling curricula vitae, completing application forms and interview techniques. There are work placements within WEC which include a garden centre and stores. Disadvantaged trainees can develop their vocational skills in these placements where they are well supported. Assessors ensure that on-the-job learning takes place in a safe environment. Two placement providers offer the opportunity for trainees to gain experience in forklift truck work and large goods vehicle driving which is essential to gaining employment in this field. Many charity organisations regularly offer placements, in which trainees can improve interpersonal skills with other volunteers. They also learn practical skills such as stock control, pricing, labelling and customer care at a pace suited to their capabilities.

42. WEC's assessors agree specific training responsibilities with placement providers to ensure that trainees have the opportunity to gain their target qualifications. There are good links between workplace supervisors and assessors. This ensures that any problems can be dealt with quickly and extra support

identified and provided. Some placement providers offer flexible hours or attendance patterns for trainees with childcare responsibilities. The customer service subcontractor offers creche and holiday childcare schemes. Additional information technology training is also offered.

43. Opportunities to accredit trainees' prior learning are frequently missed, for example, certificates in first aid and health and safety are often not used as evidence. Few specific training or assessment plans are used and trainees are often unclear as to whether they are being assessed or whether it is an individual training session. A checklist of tasks is issued or dictated to trainees prior to assessment or is used as an observation report. Instruction and leading questions are used during observation which does not meet the requirements for using observation as a method of assessment. Trainees are required to complete questionnaires when they have already demonstrated knowledge and understanding, or answered oral questions which assessors have failed to record. There are few recorded observations of assessors in order to monitor assessment practice. Assessors' meetings do not include discussions on good or poor practice and there is no common policy or procedure for assessment.

44. A large amount of simulation is used to provide evidence for trainees, and opportunities to use work-based evidence are missed. Trainees repeat everyday work tasks in simulated sessions so that assessors can observe them. There is little use of witness testimonies from the work placement. Assessors are not confident about key skills and no assessment has yet taken place. Trainees achieve the individual NVQs required but are unable to achieve the full modern apprenticeship or national traineeship frameworks at present. Some members of staff have been trained in key skills, but this has not yet been done across all occupational areas.

45. New Deal clients are either on the employment or voluntary sector options and are working towards two units of an NVQ. WEC acts as a subcontractor to the training providers of these options. WEC's staff carry out training and assessment. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

Hospitality

Grade 3

46. The number of trainees in hospitality has been decreasing for the past four years. There are now 11 trainees on the programme and one adult 'jobtrain' trainee is based in hospitality. Three trainees are working towards NVQs at level 1 in food preparation and cooking. Eight trainees are working towards the same NVQ at level 2. Trainees attend WEC for five days a week until they are ready to go out on work experience. They spend the majority of this time working in the on-site kitchen. This provides a take-away service for breakfast, lunch and tea and lunch in the self-service dining room. This is open to all workers on the industrial estate where WEC is situated. In the afternoon the trainees have portfolio-building sessions and theory classes. Trainees on work experience normally attend WEC one day a week. The two staff from WEC visit the workplace every eight to 12

weeks as well as carrying out training and assessment at WEC. The training supervisor visits trainees more frequently if they are not attending WEC as part of their programme. The New Deal trainees work in the site kitchen on one or two days a week and work towards individual NVQ units which they choose from the range of the food preparation qualifications.

47. WEC's self-assessment report did not include all of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned training and assessment
- ◆ good use of personal evaluation by trainees in progress reviews
- ◆ good development of trainees' confidence and sense of responsibility
- ◆ trainees fully involved in all aspects of their training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of disciplined approach in training kitchen
- ◆ low achievement rates
- ◆ no specific targets set for some trainees
- ◆ no detailed plans for off-the-job training

48. Prospective employers are not only visited by WEC's staff to check their health and safety practices and their compliance with the contractual requirements, but also hold detailed discussions with the catering training supervisor on their ability to provide appropriate training and experience for the trainee. If employers are deemed suitable, they are involved in the development of a training and assessment plan for the trainee. Employers work with WEC's staff to plan and provide appropriate on-the-job training. WEC takes into account the business constraints of the employer when devising an off-the-job training programme. Trainees who receive additional learning support have reviews every four weeks. Trainees, their training supervisors and the support tutor are involved in the reviews. Other trainees review their progress with their training supervisor every eight weeks. If the trainee is on work experience, their workplace supervisor is also involved in the review. Trainees are asked to complete a personal evaluation form to self-assess their progress and this is compared with the workplace supervisor's or training supervisor's evaluation. Any differences are discussed before the review documents are completed and signed by all those involved.

49. WEC's staff allow trainees taking NVQs at level 1 to have an unusually high level of responsibility for their work. They work as team leaders in the kitchen and work with very little supervision. This is above the level required for NVQs at level 1. Trainees initially identified as having severe low self-esteem or low

confidence take a pride in their work and openly discuss their progress with visitors. Trainees choose the course appropriate to their needs and select the optional units they wish to take. They have ownership not only of their assessment logs and portfolios but also of their files, including individual training plans and reviews.

50. The site kitchen has an appropriate amount and range of equipment for the meals being served. However, the number of trainees who can safely use the kitchen at one time is limited by the size, layout, and equipment available. Some of the equipment is old and the fittings make the area difficult to keep clean and safe. These constraints make it essential to rigorously enforce appropriate working practices. This is not always done. Some hygiene regulations are not rigidly enforced. Correct protective clothing is not always worn and some storage requirements are not met. Some storage and working areas in the section are untidy and set a poor example for trainees. Modern sanitation practices have not been fully implemented. Insufficient attention is paid to detail in the kitchen and associated areas.

51. Over the last two years, 53 per cent of trainees achieved NVQs at level 1 before leaving the programme, but only 17 per cent achieved NVQs at level 2, which is the level usually required by prospective employers. The low achievement rates are partly a reflection of the high drop-out rate. Some trainees are disaffected and find it difficult to attend on a regular basis. Seventy per cent of those starting left the programme before their expected end date, many of them within the first few weeks. There is a lack of urgency about progressing towards qualifications, which also affects the achievement rates. Trainees' progress reviews state future actions for trainees but these are not time-related and are often unspecific. Some work-based trainees review their progress with their workplace supervisor and the placement officer. In these cases it is left to the training supervisor to set targets later, but this is rarely done.

52. There is little structure to the catering training given at WEC. Theory training takes place from week to week when there is time available but there is no programme timetable, nor are there co-ordinated session plans. Trainees do not know what they will be doing in the kitchen or the classroom in the next few weeks, or even in the next week. Trainees work repetitively on one unit over several weeks until they are competent in that unit. For some units, the work lacks imagination and the trainees are not sufficiently stimulated to move rapidly through the work required.

Hair & beauty (hairdressing)

Grade 1

53. There are 15 trainees on the hairdressing programme. Two are national trainees and the other 13 are on other youth training. Nine trainees are employed and attend off-the-job training once a week, the rest of their time being spent in their salons. Other trainees attend the training centre either on a full-time basis, or

with some work experience, as appropriate to their individual needs and aspirations. Trainees start their programmes at NVQ level 1, which is carried out entirely at WEC, and then progress to level 2 and are assisted in finding employment or a placement with a salon. Some trainees convert to the national traineeship programme. The programme is managed and taught by a team of two trainer/assessors. They carry out progress reviews with trainees in the training centre or in their salons if they are on placement or employed.

54. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of prior learning and achievement to produce training plans
- ◆ flexible programme to meet individual needs of trainees
- ◆ comprehensive, frequent and well-recorded reviews
- ◆ good retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some outdated equipment
- ◆ insufficient range of clients available for trainees to practise on

55. WEC liaises with local schools and provides two-week prevocational work tasters. Everyone has an informal interview to explore their interest in hairdressing. Many trainees have worked part time in hairdressing and this and other prior learning and achievements are used to inform their individual training plans. Care is taken to ensure that realistic and achievable targets are agreed and set which meet individual trainees' abilities and aspirations. All trainees start working towards NVQs at level 1, taught entirely at WEC. Trainees are matched to salons according to their needs and those of the employer. The programme is taught by two trainer/assessors who are supported by a qualified basic skills tutor. The programme is designed to be flexible to meet the diverse needs of the trainees. Some trainees, who feel that they lack the confidence and ability to work in a commercial salon, are only found work experience when they feel ready. There are various modes of attendance and additional coaching in the workplace. Trainees increase their time with employers as appropriate. By the time they achieve the level 1 NVQ, usually at about eight months, most have a full-time work placement and some are employed in salons. National traineeships are offered to trainees. The evidence gained in the level 1 NVQ is used and built upon for the level 2. Trainees are encouraged to take ownership of their programmes and select their own options for the level 2 NVQ.

56. Trainees who have been identified as having additional learning needs, such as

literacy or numeracy, are offered specialist support and additional individual tuition and coaching with their practical and/or written work. This is linked in with their hairdressing and helps them to progress towards their NVQ. The programme has a strong emphasis on personal development, such as confidence building, personal effectiveness, teamwork and pastoral care. Additional support is exceptionally well recorded during regular and comprehensive review sessions. All trainees have a 12-weekly individual progress review with their personal hairdressing tutor and many also have a separate weekly review with their tutor or the basic skills tutor. The review process covers NVQ achievement targets, general learning and personal development, and any personal issues that trainees wish to discuss. This ensures that extra help can be given immediately and, in the case of personal problems, appropriate support and guidance or referral advice given. Individual training plans are referred to and constantly updated, so that realistic and achievable targets are maintained.

57. WEC maintains close links with employers to ensure that they know the NVQ requirements and are able to offer suitable opportunities to trainees. Trainees are assessed in their salons and their progress is discussed with their employers or supervisors. This helps to maintain good working relationships with the salon supervisors, and there are good links between on- and off-the-job training. WEC's staff frequently visit employers to liaise with supervisors about the off-the-job training programme and their trainees' progress, and they try to ensure that the on-the-job training is planned to support this.

58. Assessments are carried out early in the trainees' programmes and trainees make steady progress. On average, trainees take just over 24 months to achieve both levels 1 and 2 of the NVQ. The standard of work, both written and practical, is good. Practical assessments are planned in advance. A wall chart prominently displays individual trainees' progress towards their qualifications. Both assessors and trainees use this, and trainees are encouraged to make steady progress throughout the programme. Retention and achievement rates are good. Of all youth trainees starting their programmes during 1998-99, only 12.5 per cent left without achieving their qualifications while 75 per cent went on to complete their individual training plans. In 1999-2000, 25 per cent left without achieving their qualifications and 64 per cent achieved an NVQ at level 1. All of the trainees completing level 1 NVQs have progressed to level 2. Most of the trainees secure full-time employment either during or upon completion of their programmes.

59. The product range in the training salon is narrow and some equipment is not up to date with current industry standards. There are no proper reception facilities or after-care retail area. There is a shortage of some modern commercial equipment found in most commercial salons such as steamers and accelerators. A regular clientele throughout the week meets the practical work needs of the level 1 trainees. However, the range of clients is not sufficiently broad to ensure that all techniques can be practised, especially at level 2.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

60. WEC offers training and assessment leading to NVQs in care and early years care and education at levels 2 and 3. There are 65 national trainees, one other youth trainee and three New Deal clients on the voluntary sector option. Trainees work for three or four days each week in supervised placements, including residential homes for elderly people, community centres, nurseries, primary schools and schools for people with learning difficulties. There are also 10 dental nurses, three of whom are employed, and all work in dental practices. Off-the-job training takes place on one or two days each week and includes guidance on portfolio building. There are two supervisor/assessors, qualified to assess trainees and to verify assessment decisions. One member of staff is qualified to assess and accredit trainees' prior learning and achievements. There is one training and development advisor for dental nursing. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to the local National Health Service Trust for dental nursing. All staff have occupational experience and are qualified to teach.

61. The self-assessment report included four strengths, two of which inspectors judged to be no more than normal practice and two of which they agreed with. One of the weaknesses in the self assessment report was confirmed by inspectors. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive range of good work placements available
- ◆ workplace 'taster' sessions available
- ◆ frequent, effective reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ good achievement rate and job outcomes
- ◆ high progression rates to employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no structured plan for off-the-job training
- ◆ duplication of evidence by trainees
- ◆ delayed training and assessment of key skills

62. There are good working relationships between all those involved in training. WEC has a database of workplaces which accept trainees who need extra support both on a personal level and with literacy and numeracy skills. Most of the workplaces have a qualified assessor. Where there is no work-based assessor, WEC's staff visit at least every two weeks to assess trainees during real work activities. Most employers and assessors identify a specific time each week for the assessor and trainee to plan and carry out assessments in the workplace. Some

employers have a plan for the practical training to be carried out during the trainees' first three months in the workplace. All trainees have the opportunity to spend up to three months in the workplace before they start their NVQ training. This gives trainees and employers time to decide whether the workplace and client group is suitable. Trainees are able to experience work in up to three different care settings during this period. All trainees are given this time to become accustomed to the demands of work and what is expected of them before they start assessment for their NVQ. Trainees work closely with their work-based supervisors and most employers have a list of simple tasks relating to the NVQ which trainees practise during this time. When trainees are competent in these tasks their achievement is used as evidence towards their NVQ. Experience in different settings help trainees to identify where they wish to work.

63. WEC's supervisors/assessors support assessors and trainees in the workplace. They review trainees' progress through the NVQ and their performance in the workplace at least every month. Employers complete a form relating to trainees' competence, achievement of skills, time-keeping and ability to work as part of a team. The trainees complete the same form to assess their own achievement and performance. Trainees are given the opportunity to meet with WEC's supervisor privately before all parties meet together. Activities for the trainee to undertake in the workplace are agreed and recorded. These specific activities are detailed and so trainees understand exactly what is expected of them. A workbook of questions and activities in the workplace is used to assess trainees' background knowledge. Trainees practise their skills under supervision in the workplace before arranging with their assessor to be observed at work and complete their assessment. Trainees are involved in planning their assessments and fully understand the NVQ process.

64. Once trainees have settled into their workplaces, most go on to complete their NVQ. Those who leave the programme early do so for reasons beyond the control of WEC, such as moving away from the area, and most return to complete their training. Some trainees have completed other courses related to childcare. Their previous learning and any written work is reviewed and, where possible, is accredited as prior learning. This helps trainees to progress more quickly towards their NVQ. During 1998-99, 58 per cent of youth trainees and 75 per cent of adult trainees achieved their level 2 NVQ. All care trainees became employed. In 1998-99, 80 per cent of the dental nurses completed their training. All dental trainees who stay on the training programme achieve the National Certificate for Dental Nurses and become employed either during their training or very shortly afterwards.

65. WEC offers a rolling programme of training for childcare meaning that trainees can start at any time. There is no plan for theory training and it is therefore difficult to monitor the training which trainees have received or the training sessions they need to attend. Employers have no record of the date of the training sessions which trainees may need to attend and they are unable to link on-the-job training with the theory training sessions. Some work-based assessors have compiled their own question sheets for trainees to complete as part of their preparation for observation in the workplace. WEC also gives trainees workbooks

to complete the theory work for their NVQ. This means that trainees complete similar tasks and questions twice, and their progress through the NVQ is slowed. Teaching and assessment of key skills has not yet been fully implemented. There are 17 national trainees working towards NVQs at level 2. Many of these trainees will have the opportunity to progress to level 3 on the modern apprenticeship programme. There are no documents for trainees to record their achievement of the key skills which they demonstrate during their daily activities in the workplace and these key skills cannot then be assessed.

66. The New Deal clients in childcare are on the voluntary sector option and are attending on a day-release basis from another training provider. They work towards two units of the NVQ at level 2 and are assessed in their work placements by WEC's assessors. The one New Deal client on programme has sufficient evidence in her portfolio to complete her two units and has started to collect evidence for other units. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

Foundation for work

Grade 3

67. There are 60 trainees and eight New Deal clients across the areas in the table below. The youth training programme (known as 'life skills') is new and is still being developed. It is offered in Tamworth as a structured programme. In the other divisions, trainees are based in an occupational area and have an individual programme with extra support sessions. An in-depth initial assessment is carried out using a variety of assessment techniques. The structured programme in Tamworth is operated in conjunction with various local partners. Most adult trainees on basic employability training are based in occupational areas and receive additional support where this has been identified. Apart from in construction, they work towards NVQs at level 1 and some progress to level 2. There is an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme offered in East Staffordshire. WEC offers off-the-job training to adult trainees on a 'jobtrain' programme. The contract is with the employer and training is usually provided on the employers' premises through individual sessions and mentoring. New Deal clients who have been identified as requiring additional support in basic skills spend one day each week with a basic skills tutor. In 1998-99, 70 per cent of adult trainees and 62 per cent of youth trainees completed their individual training plans. In 1999-2000, 40 per cent of adult trainees completed their individual training plans and 41 per cent are still in training. Sixty-three per cent of youth trainees completed their individual training plans, 6 per cent are still in training and the rest left the programme early.

68. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Other strengths were judged to be either no more than normal practice or were more appropriate to other areas. Three of the weaknesses were more appropriate to the generic areas. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Foundation for work	8	48	4	5	3	68

1 = youth (life skills), 2 = adult (basic employability), 3 = adult (job train), 4 = New Deal (environment task force), 5 = New Deal (voluntary)

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong focus on achieving occupational competence
- ◆ well-structured and individualised basic skills support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient time to assess support and training needs of adult trainees
- ◆ inappropriate initial assessment and certification for ESOL trainees

69. Adult trainees are placed in the occupational area of their choice and are integrated into the practical work and training. They work towards NVQs at level 1 and some of them progress to level 2. Trainees in construction work as a team with one supervisor. They are highly motivated and are working towards a prevocational award in construction which also includes personal effectiveness. They have the opportunity to progress to level 2 but it is not possible to complete this in the timescale of their programme. Many of them continue on a voluntary basis so that they can achieve their NVQ.

70. All youth trainees have an initial assessment to identify their basic skills and other support needs. They have a structured programme of basic skills support which leads to them gaining wordpower and numberpower certificates. They either attend the open-learning unit at Stafford or work with a basic skills tutor in the other two divisions. Trainees either work in very small groups or on an individual basis. They have access to a wide range of resources and there are computerised support packages available in the open-learning unit. Trainees bring their portfolios with them if they need help to record evidence. Basic skills tutors have begun to develop links with occupational supervisors and are beginning to integrate basic skills support with the occupational work. Some adult trainees have identified basic skills needs, but do not choose to receive extra support. Tutors work with them to encourage them to view the support as a positive progression towards work, but only a few take up the option. Those who do find it useful.

71. Adult trainees start in their occupational areas and have the same induction and initial assessment as other trainees. There is no opportunity to carry out an in-depth initial assessment of their support and training needs or to spend time working with them before they move into their chosen occupational area. There is a high drop-out rate for adult trainees. In 1997-98, 44 per cent left early, in 1998-99, 35 per cent left early and in 1999-2000, 21 per cent left early with 41 per cent

still in training. This rate is lower for adult construction trainees, who are highly motivated. They are the only group of adults who are working on a personal development programme as well as their occupational area.

72. ESOL trainees have a standardised initial assessment and then work towards a wordpower qualification as part of their individual training plan. This is part of the TEC contract. However, both the initial assessment and wordpower are designed for native English speakers and are not appropriate for ESOL trainees. The two ESOL tutors recognise this and also use specially designed initial assessment tests. ESOL trainees are given appropriate work for their individual needs and do plenty of oral work to improve their spoken English. The tutors give them a great deal of support to enable them to develop their wordpower portfolios but are aware that there are more appropriate qualifications specifically designed for this client group.

73. New Deal clients work on an individual basis with their basic skills tutor. They work towards wordpower and numberpower qualifications. Attendance is not good. There are no specific achievement data for New Deal clients in this occupational area.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

74. WEC has an equal opportunities policy which meets the requirements of legislation, the TEC and the Employment Service. Job advertisements contain a positive statement encouraging applications from people with disabilities. The equal opportunities policy is contained within the quality assurance manual which is issued to all staff. Overall responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the chief executive and the three divisional managers. Equal opportunities is covered in all induction programmes. A high proportion of WEC's trainees and New Deal clients have specific learning needs and disabilities. Inspectors agreed with four of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but did not agree with the other strengths listed. They identified an additional strength. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses and also identified additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective links with local community groups and agencies to recruit under-represented groups
- ◆ appointment of a 'minority ethnic co-ordinator'
- ◆ good access for trainees with diverse needs
- ◆ prompt action taken to resolve complaints

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities policy not fully comprehensive
- ◆ poor awareness by trainees and employers of equal opportunities
- ◆ no updating of staff on equal opportunity issues
- ◆ no systematic analysis of equal opportunities data

75. Quarterly reports on equal opportunities are prepared for discussion at board meetings. The board is working towards an 'equal opportunities quality framework'. This framework provides a comprehensive approach to developing an equal opportunities culture within an organisation. The framework is based around the business excellence model but with specific reference to the implementation of sound equal opportunities practice. Four members of staff from WEC have been given training and are now beginning the process of implementing the framework. This involves self-assessment, action planning, and continuous review.

76. WEC has established effective links with local community groups and agencies. Within Staffordshire, 1.1 per cent of the population have disabilities and in Stafford, the figure is 2.8 per cent. To meet the needs of this client group, WEC has increased the availability of specialised training by entering into a partnership arrangement with the SCOPE Centre in Stafford. WEC also has partnership arrangements with the local probation service, the Education Welfare Service and local schools. The partnership arrangements with schools ensure that school pupils who are excluded from year 10 onwards are referred to WEC. Within the county, 0.5 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups and within East Staffordshire, the figure is 3.3 per cent. WEC has taken positive action to make additional English language training available within East Staffordshire. It also co-ordinates a project to encourage people from minority ethnic groups to take up work-based training. A full-time minority ethnic co-ordinator has been appointed. The co-ordinator works with young people from minority ethnic groups in schools and in the community, to encourage them to view training as a good way of increasing their employability. He arranges open days and visits to the training centres.

77. WEC offers good access to training for trainees with diverse learning and support needs. The company operates an open-access policy for both youth and adults, offering all trainees a place, regardless of their background. Appropriate additional support sessions are available where identified. Access to sites is good, with the exception of Tamworth. This division is moving to a new site which does have ramps and appropriate facilities. Trainees are made aware of the grievance procedures and have a good understanding of the process involved in dealing with any grievance. Prompt action has been taken when complaints have been made. Details of complaints are kept on file along with details of the actions taken. These are regularly reviewed.

78. WEC's equal opportunities policy is not fully comprehensive. It does not make any reference to harassment and bullying and the policy has not been extended to

cover subjects such as ageism and HIV. The policy is reviewed annually as part of the company's quality assurance arrangements but copies of the policy currently held by staff were last revised in September 1998. WEC's equal opportunities policy is not on public display in any of its three divisions. Trainees in some occupational areas have a low awareness of equal opportunities. Equal opportunities issues are referred to during the induction process and briefly referred to in the induction booklet. Trainees are not given a full copy of WEC's equal opportunities policy. There is no reinforcement of the information given on equality of opportunity and it is not mentioned at reviews.

79. Equal opportunities practices are not routinely monitored in the workplace and employers are not fully aware of the importance of equal opportunities. Employers' training agreements include a reference to the requirement that they must observe WEC's equal opportunities policy, but they are not given a copy of the policy. Employers are not issued with a handbook containing guidelines on how WEC will monitor the implementation of equality of opportunity within the workplace. All new staff have an induction which includes equal opportunities. However, staff are not continuously updated on equal opportunities issues including any changes in legislation, nor are they given any guidance or support on how to monitor equality of opportunity in the workplace. The self-assessment report identified this as a weakness and the action plan records that a series of equal opportunities awareness sessions will be in place by December 1999. These have yet to take place.

80. A range of equal opportunities data is available to WEC, most of which is supplied by the TEC. This covers the gender of trainees, recruitment of minority ethnic groups, and of people with disabilities. Statistics are supplied for both youth and adult training. The data are not systematically analysed by WEC to inform management and are not used to set recruitment targets or to take positive action.

Trainee support

Grade 2

81. Prospective trainees are referred to WEC from local careers offices, the Employment Service and other agencies. WEC maintains close links with these referral agencies. New Deal clients are referred from the Employment Service onto the environment task force option. Referral agencies use WEC for trainees who need high levels of support. Forty per cent of TEC-funded trainees referred to the Stafford division in 1999-2000 had learning difficulties or additional support needs. The selection process includes initial interviews and tests, followed by interviews with supervisors from the vocational areas. All trainees have a general induction programme at WEC and an induction into the vocational area they have chosen. In smaller centres, the vocational supervisor may carry out both. Reviews of trainees' progress take place at least every eight weeks in most cases, but where trainees have additional support needs this is increased to every four weeks. Training supervisors in the vocational areas provide both training and pastoral support. Trainees are referred to specialists where more specific support is needed.

The self-assessment report identified many strengths and few weaknesses. Inspectors did not agree with all of these and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, impartial advice given to trainees on entry
- ◆ good assessment of basic skills needs
- ◆ well-developed specialist additional support for basic skills
- ◆ good support for people with disabilities
- ◆ good use of specialist agencies for support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment in some occupational areas
- ◆ no systematic initial assessment of trainees' key skills
- ◆ poor job-search support for many trainees

82. WEC attempts to find the most appropriate course for all those who apply to its programmes. This policy is known in the local community and, as a result, WEC receives applications from a range of prospective trainees who may have training or support needs which cannot be met within WEC's programmes. Considerable time and effort is therefore spent finding suitable programmes for trainees and providing an unofficial advisory service for prospective trainees even though they may not enrol with WEC. A high proportion of trainees are undecided as to which career they wish to pursue. Supervisors are realistic in describing the programmes and the jobs they may lead to. In some cases, short taster programmes are used to help trainees to decide on the most appropriate full programme. Despite the initial advice given, some trainees decide within the first few weeks of starting that they wish to change the direction of their programme. Trainees are given the opportunity to move from one programme to another following advisory interviews with the appropriate supervisors.

83. Most trainees take a Basic Skills Agency initial assessment test during their induction and this is marked by basic skills specialists. On some sites this process is less developed and more reliance is placed on the interview, with induction staff making a personal assessment of each trainee at this stage. Trainees who are identified as needing further support are normally offered in-depth diagnostic tests administered by qualified tutors. This service is offered in an encouraging and supportive interview and most trainees take the test. The diagnostic tests are used to draw up an appropriate programme of additional support, which is agreed with the trainee. The support may involve activities in the workplace or the vocational training workshop as well as in WEC's basic skills unit or open-learning centre. Learning support programmes are well planned and make good use of well-

designed, appropriate materials. Learning support is very well recorded.

84. WEC works with the SCOPE centre in Stafford to provide a high level of support for trainees with a range of disabilities, some of whom do not qualify for normal funding. WEC is taking part in a project to develop voice input on the computers of those with sight impairment or disabilities, which makes keyboard use difficult. WEC has also made arrangements for signers to accompany trainees with hearing impairments. All staff support trainees well regardless of whether they have direct contact with them as part of their normal job role. Trainees' reviews are used to address personal as well as training issues. When problems are identified, time is dedicated to help the trainee to resolve them. Most personal support is recorded, but there is no appropriate procedure for keeping confidential information and so there is a lack of records in some cases. WEC realises its limitations and involves other specialist agencies in supporting trainees with specific problems beyond the expertise of its own staff. It works closely with these agencies. A mini-bus is provided by WEC for some trainees who have to work in a rural area.

85. There is no systematic initial assessment of trainees' occupational skills. Some occupational training supervisors conduct detailed initial assessments, but in other areas the trainees' application form and initial interview are the only source of information. In many cases, the information about occupational skills collected is not used to develop individual training plans and there is little accreditation of trainees' prior learning. WEC has sent staff on courses in key skills training and assessment during the last year. Comprehensive materials for the initial assessment of key skills have now been introduced for use on all national traineeship and modern apprenticeship inductions. However, this material has not yet been used for all trainees taking key skills and, in many cases, initial assessments are not used to produce individual training plans.

86. Formal job-search training is not part of the programme for TEC-funded trainees although trainees looking for employment are given active support by training supervisors and work-placement officers. WEC offers job-search training and support for New Deal clients but the standard of the programme is inconsistent across sites and is classroom based. New Deal clients do not always attend. WEC is aware of these problems and has started to take action to raise the standard of all job-search programmes to the standards achieved in some parts of the organisation.

87. There are very low achievement and retention rates for New Deal environment task force clients. In 1998-99, there was a 5 per cent retention rate and in 1999-2000, a 14.7 per cent retention rate. This compares with an average from all published and unpublished Training Standards Council reports of 44 per cent for the environment task force option. The individual training plan completion rate is 4.4 per cent for 1998-99 and 14.9 per cent for 1999-2000.

Management of training

Grade 4

88. WEC has a well-defined management structure. The directorate consists of the chairman/managing director, director/company secretary, and general manager. There are five divisions within the company, for which the chairman/managing director has overall managerial responsibility. Three of these are concerned with training and two with commercial operations. Each of the three training divisions is located in a main centre of population within the county. Divisional managers are responsible for the day-to-day management of their respective division and associated satellite centres, including management of the devolved budget. The company produces an annual business plan which sets out divisional targets for the various training programmes. The budget is devolved to the three divisions in accordance with predicted numbers of trainees. Statistics on trainees are produced on a weekly basis by each division and sent to head office. The chairman/managing director usually visits each of the three training divisions on a weekly basis. He meets all staff in each division once a year, reviews the year's operations and gives projections for the forthcoming year. Staff are encouraged to ask questions, give their opinions and participate fully in the discussions. There are policies for staff recruitment, marketing, health and safety and staff appraisals. The company was accredited with the Investors in People Standard in December 1994, and was re-accredited in 1997. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and the weakness in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective internal communication process
- ◆ good networking with external organisations
- ◆ well-established and effective staff development programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no strategic management of training programmes
- ◆ employers not made aware of their roles and responsibilities
- ◆ inadequate key skills training
- ◆ no accurate data available to guide managerial decision-making

89. There is an effective two-way channel of communication between head office and the divisions. Central management meetings are held quarterly and these are attended by directors and divisional managers and by any member of staff who has knowledge of, or a special interest in, an issue to be discussed. The minutes are sent to divisional managers who, within five working days, hold a meeting with all divisional staff. Notes are taken and sent to head office so that the directorate is kept informed of the divisional responses to matters they have discussed. This two-

way channel of communication ensures that staff throughout the organisation are kept well informed about current issues. Other meetings, such as the quarterly staff development committee meetings and the monthly divisional managers' meetings, provide good channels of communication for management and staff. Communication within the company is facilitated by e-mail. Staff also have access to the Internet and the company is currently installing intranet facilities. A quarterly bulletin review is circulated to all divisions to keep staff informed and update staff on matters of general interest within the company. A journal is produced half-yearly and around 5,000 copies of each edition are circulated within the county. It is an effective means of raising public awareness about the company and its training and commercial activities.

90. The company has developed co-operative working relationships with a comprehensive network of external organisations. These organisations provide appropriate on-the-job training placements for trainees and also provide additional support in their specialist areas. The company has good links with other training providers which helps with the referral process when WEC is not the most appropriate training provider for trainees. Similarly, other training providers refer trainees to WEC. This co-operation ensures that trainees are placed on training programmes which best meet their needs.

91. WEC has an effective staff-appraisal scheme. Staff are appraised annually, with intermediate six-monthly reviews. The appraisal is based on a range of questions which each member of staff is asked. They are also asked to define their objectives for the next year. These objectives frequently highlight training needs which form the basis of the company's staff development plan. When staff undertake in-house training or external staff development programmes, they evaluate the training and assess its contribution to their knowledge, skills and job role. The staff development officer follows up issues with the relevant members of staff and systematically monitors the feedback given.

92. There is no strategic management of the training programmes. Not all programmes are planned, taught and evaluated according to procedures which apply throughout the company. There is inadequate overall planning of programmes to ensure that they are well organised. There is no effective system for monitoring the extent to which off-the-job training is related to, and supports, trainees' on-the-job experience. There is little communication among staff from different divisions within the company. They do not have enough opportunities to meet to discuss specific aspects of training within the same, or similar, occupational areas in order to bring about continuous improvements. When training programmes, based on the same NVQs, are carried out in different divisions or locations, there are no official procedures to ensure that they are of a comparable standard.

93. In all occupational areas, employers are not made aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to trainees and their training programmes. Some employers do not know which programmes their trainees are placed on or which NVQs they are working towards. Many of them have little understanding of the

trainees' complete programmes and how on- and off-the-job training complement each other. Some trainees have insufficient on-the-job training or time made available for training because their employers are not aware of the responsibilities they have for ensuring that on-the-job training is given. Opportunities for broadening trainees' experiences, by moving them around the workplace in a planned and structured manner, are often overlooked and trainees' experiences are restricted. There is insufficient involvement of employers when trainees' training targets are set and when their progress is reviewed. Trainers have incomplete information because they do not have the benefit of employers' detailed opinions and observations. Some employers provide witness statements testifying to trainees' competencies but few are involved in the direct assessment of trainees' occupational competence against the relevant NVQ standards. Some employers are unaware of WEC's policies and procedures, while others are unsure how they relate to their own organisational policies or how they apply to trainees.

94. There is no effective key skills training. Insufficient attention is given to the importance of key skills within the training programmes. Some members of staff have been trained in this area but they have not yet developed and implemented a key skills programme across the full range of NVQs.

95. Accurate data are not available to guide managerial decision-making. Although the divisions supply statistics, there are discrepancies with the statistics produced by head office. The figures reveal variations on the numbers of trainees on the programmes. Data relating to NVQ achievement rates cannot be accurately verified, since the paperwork is not available.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

96. WEC's managing director and quality assurance co-ordinator share responsibility for the management of quality assurance. WEC has a written quality assurance manual containing a quality assurance policy and a range of quality assurance procedures. These are made available to staff through the divisional managers, and are subject to ongoing development and review. WEC has carried out a programme of self-assessment leading to action plans which have been continuously reviewed. The managing director, in consultation with the divisional managers and training staff, wrote the self-assessment report. The views of trainees, staff and employers were used to make the judgements. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the report and identified some additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and well-established quality assurance procedures manual
- ◆ effective use of self-assessment in planning process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ quality assurance arrangements do not always ensure consistency
- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification
- ◆ no structured evaluation process
- ◆ no use of achievement and destination data to make improvements

97. WEC has a well-established quality assurance procedures manual covering a comprehensive range of issues relating to both staffing and key training processes. This is complemented by a further set of divisional site flowcharts. Controlled copies of the manual are distributed to each division and also to key management personnel. The managing director and quality co-ordinator, in consultation with the divisional managers, update the procedures, at least annually. Revised copies are systematically distributed to the holders of controlled copies. The revisions are discussed with staff under a standing agenda item at divisional team meetings and, where appropriate, as a staff development exercise. New or revised procedures are piloted within divisions and feedback sought before final implementation. There are also examples of individual divisions developing and piloting procedures, in consultation with the quality assurance co-ordinator.

98. Senior managers take the self-assessment process seriously. They began a programme of self-assessment over two years ago, which set out to identify strengths and weaknesses in its training programmes. Employers, staff and trainees are systematically asked, on an annual basis, for their views on training by means of detailed questionnaires. The results are analysed and reproduced in graphical form and used to produce reports which briefly describe the training in each occupational area and identify perceived strengths and weaknesses. Staff are consulted at each stage and action plans to address the weaknesses are agreed. The plans are monitored by the quality co-ordinator and several action points have been addressed. Progress is reported to staff via the divisional staff meetings. Although the resulting action plans have addressed many of the weaknesses, some still remain outstanding. Information from self-assessment is used as part of the planning process, both centrally and by divisional managers.

99. The quality assurance co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring cross-company compliance with the quality assurance procedures. There is informal checking of compliance with procedures but there is no formal schedule of auditing to ensure the consistency of quality across all divisions and programmes. There is therefore an inconsistent approach to some key training processes such as internal verification, progress reviews and job search, across the three divisions and between occupational programmes.

100. The quality of internal verification varies across occupational programmes. The staff development team has contributed to the development of the company's internal verifiers and to establishing common documentation and procedures and sharing of good practice. However, there is no co-ordination of internal verification on a company-wide basis. There are regular internal verification

meetings at programme level, but no consistent approach across divisions and between occupational programmes. Some occupational areas are more advanced than others in planning internal verification schedules which ensure full coverage of all assessors, across all NVQ levels and units and trainees. Similarly, the monitoring of assessors' practice and performance differs between programmes; in some areas this is more rigorous than in others. Assessment practices are influenced by external verification reports from individual awarding bodies, rather than by a proactive approach by the company to the whole system of verification. One division has produced an internal verification procedure but this has not yet been fully implemented.

101. Most evaluation of training at individual programme level is unrecorded. There are some group discussions with trainees at the end of training modules and a questionnaire is issued to those leaving. Improvements are made by staff as a result of feedback or suggestions but there is no structure to bring together all the information gathered in the organisation and use it to develop and improve the training programmes. Retention and achievement data are not used to improve the training programmes. Statistical information is produced on trainees' achievements and, to some extent, their destinations after completing training, but there is no in-depth analysis to make continuous improvements.