



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2001

# North Staffordshire Training Consortium

## SUMMARY

North Staffordshire Training Consortium has as its leading partner a local college of further education, which directly manages the work of 75 per cent of the consortium's trainees. Those activities which occur within the college, including off-the-job learning, the promotion of equal opportunities, support for trainees and quality assurance, are well managed or satisfactory. However, this standard of management is not extended to trainees' work placements, where they spend over 80 per cent of their time. There is weak management of the North Staffordshire Training Consortium as a whole, and the college's quality assurance arrangements are not extended to work-based learning or other consortium members. Facilities and resources across the college, and particularly in construction and engineering, are of a high standard. There are also good learning resources for hospitality training. There is, however, little use of work-based assessment or the observation of trainees' performance in the workplace. This is reflected in the unsatisfactory standard of internal verification across most occupational areas.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4
Business administration	4
Hospitality	3
Hair & beauty	4
Health, care & public services	4

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training in most occupational areas
- ◆ good learning resources at college in construction and engineering
- ◆ effective initiatives to widen participation in training
- ◆ wide range of support services at college
- ◆ strong networks providing individual support for trainees
- ◆ good collaboration with employers regarding appropriate training
- ◆ systematic observation and evaluation of training at college
- ◆ rigorous reviews of college's courses

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of work-based assessment
- ◆ low achievement and retention rates in most occupational areas
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no overall equal opportunities plan for consortium
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment in most areas
- ◆ little support for trainees with some consortium members
- ◆ little co-ordination of support for trainees



- ◆ poor management of consortium members
- ◆ slow implementation of key skills training
- ◆ insufficient quality assurance arrangements for work-based learning
- ◆ poor internal verification in some areas

## INTRODUCTION

1. North Staffordshire Training Consortium (NSTC) has a local college of further education as its leading partner. It is the college which holds the contract with Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide work-based training for young people. In turn, the college subcontracts to 10 of the consortium's partner organisations, which range from national training providers with many trainees, to local employers with perhaps only two trainees. One of these subcontractors is a subsidiary company owned by the college. This company holds a contract with the TEC to provide work-based training for adults. The college manages and provides training for approximately 75 per cent of the consortium's trainees. Its directorate of community and commercial development manages the work of the college's trainees. For the trainees based at the college, training is provided within five of its faculties. The college's subsidiary company provides administrative support, including management-information systems, for all of the consortium's work-based learning.

2. There are 652 young people and adults on learning programmes with the consortium and 22 New Deal clients. The trainees and clients come from across central and north Staffordshire and the city of Stoke on Trent. The trainees are following advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships and other work-based learning programmes, mostly leading to the acquisition of national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Training is offered in a wide range of construction areas and engineering disciplines, business administration, hospitality, hair and beauty, health, care and public services, manufacturing, retailing and customer service and leisure, sport and travel. There are also adult trainees following foundation for work programmes involving basic employability training and work-based learning. Manufacturing, retailing and customer service, leisure, sport and travel, and foundation for work were not inspected owing to the low numbers of trainees. There were only 16 trainees in these four areas. The college is a direct contractor with the local unit of delivery for the New Deal. New Deal clients follow the full-time education and training, environment task force and employment options.

3. The leading partner is a large further education college with 1,301 staff. It has two main campuses: to the north of the city and near the city centre. The college provides a very wide range of courses, including courses for school pupils, community groups and undergraduate students. The college is an active partner in a range of community groups and organisations within Stoke on Trent, including large Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects, which provide training for under-represented, disadvantaged and minority groups within the community.

4. The city of Stoke on Trent is facing various economic problems related to the contraction of the ceramics industry and the decline of the manufacturing sector. In December 2000, the unemployment rate across Staffordshire was 5.5 per cent, with a rate of 4 per cent in the city of Stoke on Trent, compared with 3.4 per cent nationally. However, unemployment is concentrated in a few wards in Stoke on



Trent. One ward in Stoke on Trent is the 24th most deprived ward in the country. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups in Staffordshire is 2 per cent but this rises significantly in the inner-city areas where unemployment tends to be highest. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 46 per cent in Staffordshire and 30.3 per cent in Stoke on Trent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. NSTC produced its first self-assessment report in 1999. A second report was produced in 2000 in preparation for the inspection. The production of the self-assessment report forms part of an annual cycle of the college's quality assurance system to comply with its TEC contract. The self-assessment report was produced using a detailed set of procedures, which are externally audited to comply with the requirements for a quality assurance system set by the International Standards Organisation. The format of the report was specified by these procedures and the report took into account the judgements of staff and trainees. The structure of the report was based on the curriculum areas of the college, which are different to the occupational areas used by the Training Standards Council (TSC) in *Raising the Standard*. Individual reports for specific occupational areas were also included from other members of the consortium. These included parts of reports produced by consortium members which are national training providers and are subject to inspection by the TSC in their own right. Senior managers reviewed each section of the report. Managers from the directorate of community and commercial development collated the final report. Every section of the self-assessment report had an action plan attached to it. Steps had been taken to address some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report before the inspection.

6. In January 2001, 16 inspectors spent a total of 79 days with NSTC. They examined operational and strategic plans, internal and external verifiers' reports, trainees' files, individual learning plans and portfolios, lesson plans and learning schedules. Inspectors interviewed 187 trainees, 184 of the college's staff, 10 staff of other consortium members and 80 workplace supervisors. They visited 79 work placements and employers. They observed 36 learning sessions. Inspectors also interviewed one of the college's governors and three staff from the college's subsidiary company.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1	5	5	1		12
Engineering		4	5			9
Business administration				1		1
Hospitality	2	1	2			5
Hair & beauty		1	4	1		6
Health, care & public services		1	2			3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>36</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 3

7. NSTC has 242 trainees and New Deal clients in the two main areas of building engineering services and construction on programmes described by the table. All the trainees in wood machining, sign writing, gas fitting, and heating and ventilation are employed and none of those taking building crafts are employed. Also in employment are 22 trainees and clients in brickwork, five in painting and decorating, 39 in carpentry and joinery, 38 in plumbing and 44 in electrical installation, giving 221 overall. Of the nine New Deal clients, one is on the environment task force option taking carpentry and joinery, one is on the employment option taking brickwork, and one is on the full-time education and training option, four are taking brickwork, one is taking carpentry and joinery, and two are taking plumbing.

Area	Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based learning for young people	Other work-based learning for adults	New Deal	Total
Brickwork	6	8	7	0	5	26
Painting & decorating	1	1	3	5		10
Carpentry & joinery	20	19	1		2	42
Wood machining	10	3				13
Sign writing		2				2
Plumbing	21	7	11		2	41
Gas fitting	6		2			8
Heating & ventilation	50					50
Electrical installation	44			4		48
Building crafts				2		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>242</b>

8. Trainees on advanced modern apprenticeships are taking NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and those on foundation modern apprenticeships are following NVQs at level 2. The frameworks for modern apprenticeships require key skills training at prescribed levels. Trainees on the other work-based learning programmes are taking NVQs at levels 1 and 2. Most work placements are with small, local employers or the local authority, although the NSTC has links with larger national

companies which it can use to acquire work placements. Most trainees and clients in employment attend off-the-job training for one day a week. Trainees on gas fitting programmes take an additional evening class as well as attending weekly day classes. Heating and ventilation trainees take four-week block-release programmes and electrical installation trainees have a mixture of day-release classes and block release in their first year followed by day-release training only in the following years. The remaining clients and trainees are in full-time training for the New Deal or have on-the-job training in their work placements. A subcontractor is given all but six of the heating and ventilation trainees. For all trainees and clients with the college, all off-the-job training is given in the college's own workshops, classrooms and resource centres, at its training centres for construction crafts and for electrical installation. Apart from the areas of gas fitting and electrical installation, in which there is some observation of the trainees' performance at work, trainees are assessed off the job at the college. Most trainees do gather evidence from the workplace, although the volume of workplace evidence used varies between the programmes. The college's work-placement officers carry out frequent and regular monitoring of its trainees' progress. Ten trainees have been identified either through initial assessment or by their trainers, as requiring additional learning support to achieve all the targets on their individual learning plans.

9. All the trainers are occupationally qualified. Out of the college's 30 trainers, 27 are accredited assessors and have teacher training qualifications. Fifteen staff are qualified as internal verifiers and 11 are qualified to accredit trainees' prior learning. The self-assessment report gave three separate sets of strengths and weaknesses for the programme area of construction. During the inspection, NSTC combined the grades for these three areas into a single grade. NSTC accurately identified a strength in the good off-the-job learning resources and a weakness in little work-based assessment. NSTC underestimated good practice in wood machining and the use of work-based evidence in building services. NSTC did not recognise the weaknesses of some poor monitoring of work placements and the narrow range of assessment opportunities in some work placements. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job learning resources
- ◆ excellent off-the-job training in wood machining
- ◆ good use of work-based evidence in building services

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no monitoring of some work placements
- ◆ insufficient use of work-based assessment
- ◆ narrow range of learning opportunities in some workplaces

10. The college has secured funding from a range of external sources to improve and extend its resources in construction. These range from additional materials and

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*The plumbing section has developed a computer-based system for monitoring trainees' progress. All assessment and training by both full- and part-time staff is regularly recorded. Employers receive copies of the information and this has assisted them in linking trainees' on- and off-the-job learning. The initiative has been recognised as an area of good practice by the college and has been extended to other areas of construction.*

tools in most construction areas to extensive, up-to-date machinery in sign writing and wood machining. The resources in wood machining are excellent. These include new basic machinery and a modern computer numerically controlled overhead router. There are a series of moulding machines, which are digitally programmed by staff and trainees to produce all the moulded materials for the joinery section, and so these do not need to be purchased from building suppliers. The trainees have the opportunity to use an extensive range of tooling equipment. They are able to design moulding cutters on a computer, produce a plastic profile on a trimming machine and then transfer this to a grinding machine which uses the profile to produce the steel cutter. There has been substantial investment in the area of sign writing, which has enabled the college to purchase computer-linked machinery to produce vinyl and thin metal sheet signage. The staff and trainees have produced most of the new signage around the college's campus. This is of a very good quality and gives the construction area in particular a very professional and corporate image. The plumbing section has obtained oil boilers and equipment from a national manufacturer to enable it to provide up-to-date training.

11. The achievement and retention rates across the programmes over the past two years have been mixed, but mainly unsatisfactory. In brickwork and building craft, 11 trainees began in 1998. They achieved five NVQs between them. Two achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans, and six remained in training. In 1999, 14 began training. An NVQ was achieved by only one trainee, who also achieved all the targets on the individual learning plan, but nine trainees remained in training. In 1998, six trainees began the painting and decorating programme and all left without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plans. In 1999, three began this programme and, although none achieved NVQs, two have remained in training. In carpentry and joinery, wood machinery and sign writing in 1998, 14 NVQs were achieved by 23 trainees beginning programmes, and three trainees achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans. Seven remained in training. For the same programmes in 1999, two NVQs at level 3 were achieved by the 21 trainees who began the training and two trainees achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans. Eleven trainees remained in training. In plumbing and heating and ventilation in 1998, five NVQs were achieved by the 18 trainees who began training. Two trainees achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans and just four remained in training. In 1999 on these programmes, out of 13 trainees, only one achieved an NVQ, but eight remained in training. Out of the two trainees who began gas-fitting programmes in 1998, one left without achieving their targets and the other completed the individual training plan. Four trainees began this programme in 1999 and two achieved all the targets on their individual learning plan. Two remained in training. In electrical installation, results have been particularly poor. In 1998, 42 trainees began training and none achieved NVQs. Eight remained in training. In 1999 on this programme, 33 began training and none achieved NVQs, while 22 remained in training.

12. The need for trainees to access appropriately equipped learning centres in addition to workshops and classrooms was identified by the college's staff through programme reviews, which focused on the need to improve retention and achievement rates. This led to well-equipped learning resource centres being

created alongside workshops in each occupational area. They are well furnished with new desks and chairs and contain relevant textbooks and learning materials. The construction area also has a suite of computers linked to the Internet with speakers and a printer. The rooms are effectively used to provide training in theory and there is a quiet area for trainees to prepare for test papers and to do private study. Trainees are also able to use the computers and the Internet for updating their knowledge and developing their computer skills. These resources are used regularly and trainees speak highly of the learning materials available to them. It is too early, however, to report if these measure have been effective in improving retention and achievement rates on work-based programmes, although there has been an improvement in achievement rates across the college's construction programmes as a whole over 1998 and 1999.

13. The off-the-job training in wood machining is very well planned. The standards for achievement are specified clearly and good use is made of different learning opportunities. All of the classes which were observed by inspectors were of a good standard and one was outstanding. Assessments in this area are thorough. They are effectively planned and recorded. Trainees are able to select projects which they can use to demonstrate their competence. There is a system by which trainees are able to assess they own ability against the NVQ standards using the projects they are working on. Trainees are told regularly about their progress and how they can improve their performance. Data on assessment are well recorded and accessible to both staff and trainees. Trainees are highly motivated. The workshop has modern equipment, which enables trainees to be trained and assessed to appropriate industrial standards. Good links have been established with local and national employers, which are used to provide work placements or other help with training. Considerable emphasis is placed on health and safety. Good teaching and learning are not consistent across the whole occupational area of construction.

14. Good use is made of work-based evidence in building services. Assessors visit trainees regularly, and trainees are also encouraged to use evidence from the workplace. Assessment in the workplace has only recently been introduced in the building services area and is not used at all in building crafts, joinery, wood machining, painting and decorating. In the area of heating and ventilation, another member of the consortium is responsible for training and assessing trainees in their workplaces. These trainees collect a range of evidence from the workplace and this is used to support their off-the-job assessments. In heating and ventilation, the trainees' portfolios contain a wide range of evidence including relevant colour photographs, witness testimonies, site specifications and plans. All trainees are told how to collect evidence from the workplace and given a logbook to use for this purpose. In gas fitting and plumbing, good progress has been made to encourage trainees to present evidence from the workplace for assessment. Many gas-fitting trainees are assessed by observation of their activities at work, and trainees in plumbing produce evidence from the workplace, using photographs and witness testimonies, to assist in proving their competence. However, other trainees seldom use their logbooks. The evidence which is collected is used to enhance the appearance of the trainees' portfolios rather than being assessed individually. In

electrical installation, NSTC employs a national electrical training organisation to carry out on-site assessment and to help trainees to gather evidence. An occupationally competent assessor is conducting initial assessments in this area to establish trainees' current occupational competence. This information is used to develop trainees' targets for achievement. The assessor from the national electrical training organisation has been visiting trainees in the workplace for the past six months, and there are plans for trainees to receive two visits each year.

15. The college's work-placement officers are responsible for conducting trainees' progress reviews and monitoring work placements. Monitoring visits include checking the health and safety practices of work-placement providers. However, many trainees who work on different sites have not been visited in their workplaces for several months and, in some cases, have never had a visit since starting over 18 months ago. All of the sites visited by inspectors were found to have adequate health and safety practices. Considerable emphasis has been given to training trainees in good health and safety practice and working safely while they are in the college. However, without the use of regular visits to the areas where trainees are working, NSTC is unable to ensure the safety of the working environment or that the general policies and practices of the employer meet current legal and contractual requirements.

16. Work-placement officers in construction, with the exception of those in electrical installation, are not occupationally qualified. They are not able to become registered assessors without gaining construction qualifications and on-site experience. This means that work-placement officers are unable to take advantage of assessment opportunities which present themselves when they visit trainees, or make links between on- and off-the-job training. NSTC is trying to address this weakness. It has made plans either to use visiting assessors from agencies or to employ occupationally qualified staff directly.

17. Some employers provide only a narrow range of off-the-job learning opportunities. Many employers provide an excellent range of job tasks to provide opportunities for assessment, but few provide the full range required for trainees to complete NVQs by the various construction national training organisations. NSTC does audit work placements to find out if they meet the requirements for opportunities to learn skills or to find out how trainees' job roles can be supplemented by training elsewhere to fulfil the requirements. One trainee in plumbing spent over two years with a company which only installed bathrooms. The activities undertaken by the trainee were largely routine and met only part of the range required by the NVQ framework. The trainee has now found another company, providing more varied work opportunities but, as a result of the previous work placement, will find it very difficult to complete his qualification on schedule. No arrangements have been made with other employers to supplement the range of workplace learning opportunities for trainees and clients. Many recently updated NVQ frameworks for construction require work-based evidence to prove competence, and simulated evidence has become unacceptable. This means that trainees who are not able to demonstrate their competence in a workplace will not be able to complete their NVQs.

## Engineering

## Grade 4

18. There are 164 trainees working towards NVQs in electronics, mechanical engineering, and motor vehicle engineering. Mechanical engineering includes machining, fabrication and welding, and mechanical and electrical maintenance NVQs. Motor vehicle engineering includes light and heavy vehicle mechanics, body repair and vehicle refinishing NVQs. In addition, there are three New Deal clients on a full-time education and training option in light vehicle mechanics engineering. Trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. The numbers of trainees in each group are shown in the following table.

Number of trainees taking NVQs in engineering

Engineering NVQs		Advanced modern apprentices	Foundation modern apprentices	Other work-based training for young people	Total
Electronics	Level 2			7	7
	Level 3	2		1	3
Mechanical engineering	Level 2	38	19	13	70
	Level 3	34			34
Motor vehicle engineering	Level 1			1	1
	Level 2	7	4	13	24
	Level 3	7	2	16	25
Total		88	25	51	164

19. Trainees are recruited onto engineering programmes directly through the local careers service, or through career conventions at schools organised by the college or local careers offices. Some trainees are already employed before beginning programmes with NSTC. Other trainees are recruited from the college's full-time engineering programmes. Prospective trainees are invited for an interview and an initial assessment of their current level of skills. The test results guide applicants towards one of three training frameworks: advanced modern apprenticeships, foundation modern apprenticeships, or other work-based learning programmes for young people. For those trainees who are not employed, NSTC arranges interviews with prospective employers and work-placement providers. Trainees generally start training towards their NVQs at the beginning of the college's academic year. Trainees attend the college for one day a week, to develop their skills and learn the theory related to their engineering discipline. Some trainees also work towards achieving an additional NVQ at college. Trainees spend the other four days at their place of work and receive on-the-job training and work experience and have the opportunity to gather work-based evidence towards their NVQs.

20. Trainees are placed or employed in small to medium-sized engineering companies. Motor vehicle trainees are placed or employed in any of 40 companies, including main vehicle dealerships, national and local companies and sole traders providing work experience for trainees. Thirty-nine of the 50 motor vehicle trainees are employed. In mechanical engineering, there are 51 small to medium-sized machine, fabrication and maintenance companies providing work experience for trainees. In electronics, seven companies employ the 10 trainees. Trainees receive on-the-job training by working with an experienced and qualified engineer.

All trainees in electronics and mechanical engineering are employed. Motor vehicle trainees taking NVQs at level 2 are mainly assessed in the college. Trainees taking NVQs at level 3 are assessed both at college and in the workplace. Seventeen trainees are registered on the new motor vehicle NVQ programmes introduced in September 2000. These require much assessment by observation in the workplace. In mechanical engineering, trainees taking NVQs at level 2 are assessed in the college but all of the trainees taking level 3 NVQs are assessed in the workplace. The electronics trainees taking electronic engineering NVQs at foundation level are working towards a vocational award equivalent to an NVQ at level 2 rather than an NVQ at level 2. The electronics trainees taking NVQs at level 3 are mainly assessed in the college, although they have some work-based assessment. The college has various staff who carry out work-based assessments in specific engineering disciplines. There are four work-placement officers employed by the college who carry out initial monitoring of employers' premises and assess their suitability to provide work-based training and to meet the required standard of health and safety working practices. All work-placement officers are occupationally qualified. Work-placement officers have responsibility for monitoring the welfare of up to 80 trainees each in their specific engineering sector. They also monitor and review trainees' progress by visiting them every 13 weeks. During the first three months of their programmes, trainees are scheduled to receive three workplace visits by their work-placement officer. The work-placement officers also meet with the college's trainers on a monthly basis, to monitor trainees' progress in off-the-job learning and assessment. If trainees require extra learning support, the relevant records are passed to the work-placement officer to review progress on this with the trainee and the college's trainers. Some trainees receive support for an hour a week from a basic skills trainer. Other trainees receive extra support from their engineering trainers.

21. NSTC provided separate grades for the electronics, mechanical engineering and motor vehicle engineering in its self-assessment report. For the inspection, these grades were combined to give a single grade covering all engineering disciplines. NSTC adopted the structure of the self-assessment report used during the pilot phase of the TSC's inspections. Of the 26 strengths and 14 weaknesses identified by NSTC, inspectors regarded most of the strengths as no more than normal practice. Some weaknesses were more relevant to the generic aspects of the report. Some weaknesses were found to be part of the same underlying problem. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good opportunities for work-based learning
- ◆ excellent range and level of off-the-job resources

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ little understanding by trainees of their NVQ programmes
- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates in some areas

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*As the motor vehicle NVQs were totally revised in September 2000, the college organised a breakfast meeting to inform current and prospective employers of the implications of the changes. Twelve employers attended the meeting and were given up-to-date information. The importance of the role of employers was also reinforced and four companies subsequently expressed an interest in developing their own work-based assessors.*

22. Inspectors visited 13 engineering companies and in all of them they found that trainees were provided with a good range of learning opportunities for their NVQs. Several engineering companies have modern facilities, equipment and systems for trainees to use. In motor vehicle engineering, all companies visited had a designated mentor for each trainee, who is responsible for the trainees' on-the-job learning. Some trainees are scheduled to spend time working with different vehicle technicians to enable a greater range of on-the-job training. However, it is left to individual trainees to seek specific tasks from their employers to provide evidence for their NVQs. One main dealership has computerised vehicle manual systems, which the trainees are able to log onto to receive instructions on how to perform a particular task involved in servicing or repairing a fault. Trainees employed in main car dealerships have the opportunity to attend manufacturers' training courses about their products. One vehicle company has a registered ISO 9000 quality assurance system and issued its trainee with controlled health and safety documents as part of the induction programme. Employers involved with electronic engineering offer trainees a wide range of activities which embrace different skills and techniques. Many of the work placements are involved in the repair, maintenance or manufacture of modern electronic equipment, and they provide trainees with good learning opportunities

23. In one mechanical engineering company, the quality assurance manager has responsibility for training trainees. The first two years of training cover a range of conventional machinery, including milling, turning, vertical and horizontal boring, inspection, painting and processing. After two years, trainees progress to using small computer numerically controlled machines and then progress to very large computer numerically controlled machining operations. All trainees work with occupationally qualified staff. The quality assurance manager reviews trainees' progress on a regular basis and monitors the achievements of each trainee. There is a well-structured learning programme. Thorough training records are maintained, which are shared with NSTC's work-placement officer. Trainees are trusted to work on complex components with a very high financial value.

24. In fabrication and welding, the employing companies are mainly small to medium-sized engineering companies. All trainees in this sector are employed. The general manufacturing companies install equipment for larger, nationally known concerns. Work is carried out to demanding standards. There are good standards of equipment in companies and trainees receive training in all aspects of the business. In engineering maintenance, nearly all trainees work for one employer and are employed in maintaining modern equipment used in manufacturing electronic circuit boards.

25. All off-the-job engineering training is carried out on one site of the college. All the engineering training facilities are either good or outstanding. For motor vehicle training, there is a designated room, which houses a computer suite, a range of diagnostic and simulator test rigs, and seating for at least 20 trainees. In addition, the computers and test rigs are linked by an automotive electronic

software package, which enables trainees to learn auto-electronic theory and then diagnose and solve vehicle faults on a wide range of systems. In the vehicle body workshop, the college has developed a partnership with a paint manufacturer, which supplies paint and technical support in return for using the college's resources for its own product training. All staff are well qualified and experienced. There is a programme for the professional development of motor vehicle staff, who also attend vehicle manufacturers product training courses on their products.

26. NSTC provides excellent training and development facilities for electronics trainees. Laboratory and practical workshop equipment is of a very high standard and trainees have access to extensive learning materials. In fabrication and welding, there are extensive workshops containing a wide range of machinery and equipment. Physical resources are more than adequate for the remit of the NVQ. Staff are well qualified and have extensive practical experience. Most staff are accredited assessors or are working towards accreditation. The machine workshop is well equipped with traditional machines, and in addition there is a small range of dedicated computer numerically controlled machines.

27. There is no systematic approach to work-based assessment in engineering. In motor vehicle, there is an over-reliance on using job cards and witness testimonies as evidence. Some of the technical records on the trainees' job cards are too sparse to confirm trainees' competence. This does not conform with the new standards for assessing motor vehicle NVQs. There is little variety in the types of evidence which trainees use to demonstrate their competence. Insufficient work-based assessment is carried out. Assessment records do not clearly show assessment decisions, appeals procedures or the trainees' responses to assessors' verbal questions to test their knowledge of theory. Some trainees do not have their portfolios assessed until they have almost completed their qualifications. The college is, however, taking measures to address these issues and a motor vehicle technician was appointed last September with responsibility for undertaking some work-based assessments. Trainees in electronics have not yet been assessed in the workplace. All assessments have been conducted at college. Assessment planning is not recorded and trainees' understanding of their NVQs and how their competence is assessed is poor.

28. Mechanical engineering trainees follow the electrical option of the engineering foundation programme for the NVQ at level 2. The trainees' evidence is assessed by the use of a marking scheme which is not appropriate for an NVQ. The external verifier from the awarding body has recorded this situation during his past three visits over the previous 15 months, but no action has been taken to address it. However, there are good examples of assessment practice in the area of production engineering for the NVQ at level 3, where all evidence is derived from the workplace.

29. While undertaking their NVQs in engineering foundation at level 2, trainees complete set practical exercises and record the tasks in a logbook as additional sources of evidence. Many trainees, however, do not know if they are taking an NVQ at level 2 or level 3. At both levels, trainees do not keep their NVQ

portfolios, in case they lose them. Portfolios, with the NVQ standards in them, are kept at the college, and so trainees do not have easy access to them. The college's assessors collate the trainees' evidence in their portfolios for them, when it is deemed that sufficient evidence has been collected for them to demonstrate relevant competencies. Trainees are detached from the process and have little understanding of their NVQs and the process of collecting evidence to demonstrate their competence.

30. Trainees taking NVQs in electronics are unable to provide accurate descriptions or definitions of the programmes they are following. Neither can they define the component parts of the frameworks or qualifications to which they aspire. Most trainees consider the theoretical component of their framework to be the dominant qualification and recognise the NVQ only as an additional outcome of this learning process.

31. Trainees do not understand the relevance of key skills to their modern apprenticeship programmes. Most key skills are assessed using assignments undertaken at college, with insufficient evidence coming from the workplace. Trainees do not understand that workplace activities also provide evidence of competence in key skills. Many trainees are not sure about their right to appeal against assessment decisions. However, trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people are being given the opportunity to achieve key skills units, even though these are not required by their programmes' framework, which provides them with a broader learning experience.

32. Achievement rates across all engineering NVQs are low. Of the 369 trainees starting their programmes between 1996 and 2000, only 18 per cent, have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans. During the same period, 44 per cent of trainees left their programmes early. No electronics trainees have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans at this time. Out of the 42 trainees starting this programme, 20 achieved the equivalent of an NVQ at level 2 and two achieved an NVQ at level 3, while 29 per cent left early. Out of 167 trainees beginning mechanical engineering, 72 achieved NVQs at level 2, 26 achieved NVQs at level 3, 12 per cent achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans and 43 per cent left early. In motor vehicle engineering, 160 began training, one gained an NVQ at level 1, 37 gained NVQs at level 2, and 35 achieved NVQs at level 3. Individual learning plans were completed by 28 per cent of clients while 51 per cent left early. There are some signs that trainees' retention rates have begun to improve for advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships. The proportion of foundation and advanced modern apprentices leaving early has declined from 51 per cent for those starting in 1996 to 1998 to 31 per cent for those who started during or after 1999.

33. The retention rate for trainees who start fabrication and welding programmes is poor. Of the 89 trainees who began training between 1996 and 1999, 38 left their programmes early. However, 15 of these early leavers did achieve a qualification. Overall, 44 achieved an NVQ at level 2.

## **Business administration**

## **Grade 4**

34. There are 29 young people and adults training in business administration. All trainees and clients undertake their off-the-job learning and assessment with the college. There are 21 trainees taking foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships. Of these, 15 trainees are undertaking NVQs at level 2 and 3 in administration, three trainees are working towards accounting NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and three trainees are pursuing NVQs in information technology. There are eight New Deal clients following the full-time education and training option, in a range of occupational areas and working towards qualifications in administration, accounting and information technology. Nineteen trainees are employed locally, both in the college and in a range of businesses, including accountants, wholesalers and small manufacturing companies. Two trainees are in appropriate work placements. The eight New Deal clients are integrated into the college's full-time courses and do not currently have work placements. Most trainees on programmes for young people attend college for six hours each week during the college's term for instruction and portfolio development. One full-time work-placement officer is responsible for recruitment, initial assessment and providing support to trainees through quarterly workplace visits. Additional members of the college's staff provide weekly learning sessions and visit trainees in the workplace to carry out assessment. The self-assessment report presented a fair overview of the occupational area. It identified 10 strengths and six weaknesses. Several of the strengths were found by inspectors to be more appropriate to generic areas and inspectors regarded others to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good understanding of on-the-job training requirements by employers
- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications taken by trainees
- ◆ good physical resources at college

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ narrow range of training in administration
- ◆ insufficient use of work-based assessment
- ◆ little involvement of trainees in assessment planning
- ◆ low retention and achievement rates

35. Through the self-assessment process carried out in the summer of 2000, NSTC identified a need to develop employers' awareness of the NVQ requirements more thoroughly. Considerable work has been done since then to achieve this objective. The college has developed and further improved a comprehensive guidebook for employers, which clearly outlines both the employers' and the training provider's

responsibilities. The college's work-placement officer makes regular visits to employers to keep them informed of developments and employers now have a good understanding of their role in providing training and their responsibilities to trainees. Several workplace supervisors are qualified assessors. They are not being used, however, to carry out work-based assessments.

36. Trainees undertake and achieve additional qualifications during their training programmes. These include courses related to business administration, such as in computing, the use of various software programmes, and word and text processing, as well as first aid and basic health and safety certificates. The college encourages trainees to undertake additional part-time study, and several trainees return to the college during the evening to pursue other courses.

37. The college has made a significant investment in resources during recent years. Classrooms are light, spacious and well equipped, with good training resources and computers. The college has created an office where both administration and information-technology trainees can develop their skills under supervision in a real work environment. Trainees have access to extensive information-technology equipment. E-mail facilities and Internet access are available in most classrooms. There is a well-equipped library containing a wide range of books and publications relevant to this occupational area. Trainees are encouraged to use the library, but staff do not provide suitable reading lists to direct trainees towards appropriate texts. The college has recently opened a key skills resource centre. Several members of the college's staff have been trained to provide support in this area and are effective in supporting trainees generally. Feedback from a recent survey of trainees shows that 63 per cent think that their working relationships with staff are good if not outstanding.

38. Trainees have a poor understanding of their NVQs. Trainees attend learning sessions in the college for one day each week during term time and are given individual support and instruction by experienced teaching staff. The guidance and instruction, however, focus on collecting evidence to meet the requirements of trainees' NVQs. The sessions do not provide the trainees with the level of knowledge and understanding necessary for them to support and develop their competence in work-based activities. Few trainees are provided with learning materials to broaden their knowledge.

39. Assessment of trainees takes place mainly at college, with few observations of trainees' performance in the workplace. During assessment planning, assessors provide trainees with a list of evidence which they are required to collect from the workplace. This results in an over-reliance on paper-based evidence of competence and portfolios become weighty with this. It also results in trainees having little involvement in choosing what they should be assessed upon, since they are led in this by their assessors. The assessment of trainees is based on a narrow range of methods. Trainees' portfolios have, however, been identified by outside agencies as examples of good practice. Even so, trainees are largely unaware of how their evidence demonstrates their competence. Different assessors are responsible for different units within the NVQs. A further specialist assessor is also responsible

for key skills assessments. Although trainees benefit from the individual assessors' expertise, assessors take few opportunities to cross-reference evidence to different units of NVQs or to integrate key skills evidence with that for the NVQ. Trainees have a poor understanding of key skills, which they are not assessed on until late in their programmes.

40. There is little management or co-ordination of the training which occurs in the workplace. Employers understand the information on NVQs given to them in the guide. However, employers are not given any guidance as to what to include during periods of on-the-job training, and have little or no awareness of the theoretical knowledge trainees need to gain to progress with their NVQs or key skills units. Workplace supervisors are not given a copy of the NVQ standards or the college's scheme of work and are not involved in assessments.

41. Retention and achievement rates are low. In administration, 51 young people have started learning programmes during the past three years. Thirty-eight per cent of trainees left their programmes early without achieving any qualifications. Only 15, or 32 per cent, have completed their apprenticeship frameworks. Fourteen trainees, or 30 per cent, achieved an NVQ but left the programme early without completing their key skills requirements. Retention and achievement rates in information technology are slightly higher. During the past three years, 24 young people have begun apprenticeships. Of these, 10, or 48 per cent, have completed their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Only three of the trainees remain in training.

### **Hospitality**

### **Grade 3**

42. There are 16 trainees in hospitality. Three are advanced modern apprentices learning to be chefs and taking NVQs at level 3, seven are foundation modern apprentices also learning to be chefs, two are foundation modern apprentices in restaurant supervision and four are on other work-based learning programmes taking NVQs at level 2 in food preparation and cooking. During their programmes, the apprentices are expected to achieve basic food hygiene and basic health and safety certificates as part of their framework. Trainees on other work-based learning programmes are also able to take these qualifications, which are offered by the college. Most trainees start their programmes at the beginning of the academic year. They have their induction to the programme on their first day at college. Trainees who start after this date receive a shortened version of the induction on the first day they attend college. Trainees receive a separate induction to the workplace when they start their work placement or employment. Most trainees are employed. They work in a variety of establishments, including hotels run by national chains, smaller, independently owned hotels, public houses, restaurants and a local university's catering operation. All trainees attend the college for one day each week for learning and assessment. Five of the college's staff are involved in providing off-the-job learning and in assessing trainees. A programme manager has overall responsibility for this team of staff. On the college's main site, there are practice kitchens and a production kitchen for a small

restaurant, which are open during the day for coffee and lunches. The college also leases kitchen facilities and a restaurant on the nearby university's site. Most assessment occurs at college, in the college's kitchens and restaurants, which have been approved as realistic working environments by the awarding body. The college's staff have recently undertaken some assessments in the workplace. All those involved in assessment and internal verification are occupationally qualified and qualified as assessors and internal verifiers. A work-placement officer from the college liaises with trainees, workplace supervisors and training staff. She also has responsibility for conducting trainees' progress reviews every 12 weeks. Before 1999, there were very low numbers of trainees in catering and so an accurate picture of achievement rates over the years cannot be presented. In the past two years, retention rates across all hospitality programmes have improved. The retention rate is currently 58 per cent. The self-assessment report identifies 11 strengths. Inspectors agreed with two of these and identified a further strength. The remainder were regarded as being no more than normal practice or more relevant to generic aspects of the training. Of the four identified weaknesses, one had been rectified by the time of the inspection and the other three were regarded as being more appropriate to generic aspects. Inspectors identified two additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ comprehensive range of learning material

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little planned on-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient use of assessment by observation in the workplace
- ◆ slow progress by foundation and advanced modern apprentices

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Overseas work experience is organised by the college for three weeks each year. This is made available to all students and trainees. Trainees take up this opportunity with the support of their employers. This gives trainees the opportunity to gain an insight into practices in hospitality and catering in another country and the experience of travelling abroad.*

43. Trainees are sensitively matched to work placements which suit their career aspirations and meet their individual learning needs. While most trainees are already employed when they join the programme, there are occasions when a change of work placement becomes necessary. This may occur because of a change in a trainee's personal circumstances or because a current work placement is no longer able to offer the necessary experience for continued development. The college has good links with a wide variety of employers throughout the local area. These links are used to ensure that trainees are in the most appropriate work environment for them. Those trainees joining the programme directly from school are given assistance in finding a suitable work placement. The work-placement providers offer varied menus and most have a good range of equipment, which

assists trainees' development. Trainees are working alongside professionals experienced in the industry who take a keen interest in their training. Some work placements buy in special foods specifically for the trainees to gain experience in working with them. When setting up a new work placement, a member of the catering training staff accompanies the college's work-placement officer on the initial visit to the work placement. This helps to develop links between the college's trainers and work-placement providers. A member of the college's training staff also supports the work-placement officer, who is not qualified or experienced in hospitality.

44. The college has a good range of facilities for off-the-job learning. There are spacious practice kitchens which are equipped to a commercial standard. There has been some recent refurbishment of one of the restaurants to incorporate a coffee shop, which is proving popular with customers. This gives trainees experience of this type of operation. The practical and theory classes are organised to allow good opportunities for trainees to receive one-to-one coaching when necessary. Training staff are supportive of the trainees. They understand their learning needs and work well with them to motivate them to succeed. Trainees recognise and value this support. The catering staff work in the hospitality industry on a regular basis in order to maintain their level of expertise and knowledge. The trainees develop good practical skills during their training at college and in the workplace.

45. To support the development of the trainees' theoretical knowledge, the college uses workbooks designed specifically for NVQs. These are used well to enhance and support the sessions in theory. Trainees also have access to an extensive section on catering in the college's library. There are a range of different textbooks, many of which are also specific to NVQs. Other books within the library assist the trainees in broadening their knowledge of particular aspects of their programmes. There are several copies of each book. A wide range of trade magazines and journals is also available in the library. In order to support the achievement of key skills, the college's staff have produced some hospitality-based assignments.

46. Although the trainees are developing good practical skills, the training in the workplace is not sufficiently planned. Trainees do not have written plans identifying the training they will undergo in the workplace. In many cases, on-the-job training consists of trainees being coached in a skill by a colleague as the need arises. On-the-job training is not specifically linked to the NVQ the trainee is working towards. Most employers do not receive a copy of the college's scheme of work. Trainees are expected to inform their workplace supervisors what they have covered at college. However, in some cases, trainees also have no copy of the scheme of work and find out what is going to be covered only one week ahead. This makes it difficult for employers to do preparatory work with trainees before they attend college. The trainees' individual learning plans are kept in the work-placement officer's files. Trainees do not have a copy. Trainees are unclear exactly how their learning programme will develop. They are not easily able to establish a link between the training at college and the training at work.

47. Most trainees are assessed by observation in the college's kitchens and restaurants. Insufficient use is made of naturally occurring evidence from the workplace. Workplace supervisors who are qualified as assessors are not routinely used to assess their trainees and do not often produce witness testimonies to confirm trainees' competence, even when trainees have met a required NVQ standard. For most trainees, assessment occurs in line with a plan based on the college's academic year. This fails to take into account their opportunities to gather evidence in the workplace. The college's training staff have recently begun to visit work placements in order to undertake assessments of trainees. These assessment visits are, however, infrequent. The practical skills of one small group of trainees are assessed in an area at college which cannot be classified as a normal work environment. Time constraints and the amount of work expected of these trainees are insufficient to reflect standard commercial practice.

48. Overall, retention rates in this area have improved. For those starting programmes in 1997 and 1998, the retention rate was 30 per cent. In the past two years, this has improved to 58 per cent, which is satisfactory in an industry which is subject to a rapid turnover in staff. However, it is difficult to assess the rate of achievement as there were low numbers of trainees on catering programmes before 1999. The progress of advanced and foundation modern apprentices towards achieving both their qualifications and frameworks is slow. The college's staff consider that a programme for an NVQ at level 2 should last two years. Little progress is made during the first year towards achieving NVQ units. Trainees who are able to progress more quickly are not set targets to encourage them to do so. They are often unaware of the target dates for achieving NVQ units in their individual learning plans. These are rarely referred to during progress reviews and are not considered by training staff. Some trainees are unaware of exactly what they have achieved and what they have left to achieve in their NVQs. Planned actions arising from progress reviews are often not achieved. Trainees on other work-based learning programmes are encouraged to convert to apprenticeships when this is appropriate. However, these trainees often need some further development of their basic skills or help with settling into a different working environment in order to progress successfully. Trainees are not given advice in advance of this transition and are not given additional basic skills support while they are converting their programmes into apprenticeships. The college's staff are currently undertaking a study to investigate ways in which retention and achievement rates for work-based learning programmes can be improved.

### **Hair & beauty**

### **Grade 4**

49. Three partners in the consortium provide hairdressing training in addition to the college. Altogether, there are 106 trainees and one client working towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. At the college, there are 16 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3 and key skills. There are 12 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2 and key skills. There are 47 trainees on other work-based learning programmes, who, together with one New Deal client, are working towards NVQs at level 2. There are 31

foundation modern apprentices with the consortium's other three members. Three of the 106 trainees and the one New Deal client are men. The college recruits trainees directly from schools and through employers. Each of NSTC's partners offering this training recruits its own trainees. All trainees are given an induction. Progress reviews are carried out every 12 weeks. Trainees work in 70 salons throughout central and north Staffordshire. All except 13 of the trainees are employed. Trainees are employed or have work placements with a wide range of companies, ranging from sole traders to large town-centre establishments. The salons offer a range of hairdressing services to meet the needs of local communities. Three salons offer Afro-Caribbean hairdressing. Four work placements offer traditional gentlemen's barbering and shaving services. There are 12 assessors and four internal verifiers at the college. All employers offer training at work. Seven employers with trainees from the college have staff who are qualified as assessors, but they are not used in this capacity. The college's staff internally verify the assessments undertaken by two of the other members' assessors. The other member has its own assessors and internal verifiers. The self-assessment report listed 43 strengths and 15 weaknesses, many of which were repeated. Some strengths were found to be no more than normal practice. Some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were more appropriate to generic areas. Inspectors agreed with three of the strengths and with two of the weaknesses. Additional weaknesses and a further strength were identified. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effectively planned off-the-job learning
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ frequent uptake of additional qualifications and training by trainees
- ◆ effective strategy by college to work with employers

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient use of work-based assessments for college trainees
- ◆ inappropriate qualifications taken by some trainees
- ◆ poor monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ low achievement rates

50. Trainers at the college have comprehensive individual learning plans and effective schemes of work to support the training they provide. These help to ensure a good standard of work-based learning in the college for NVQs at levels 2 and 3 across five training groups with 12 trainers. Every member of the training team is involved in reviewing and updating these plans. This approach enables the team to share good practice in developing effective teaching and learning strategies and to apply these consistently. Two of the college's five salons have recently been refurbished to a high standard.

51. All employers provide on-the-job training for trainees. In their salons, staff display a high standard of customer service and have good technical skills. Trainees have good opportunities to develop technical and work skills in their employers' salons. Some employers provide financial support for trainees to take external courses, including courses with national training providers on technical skills. Additional product training is offered at the college and by employers. Trainees are able to experience a wide range of hairdressing skills at work, making full use of the diverse range of salons they work in, some offering specialist services, ranging from those belonging to owner managers to large town-centre establishments with multiple premises. There are good commercial resources in all the salons. Most salons provide an opportunity for trainees to sell an extensive range of professional products. A good standard of health and safety is observed in all salons.

52. The college's trainees have the opportunity to access a wide range of additional qualifications, irrespective of their learning programmes. These include additional NVQ units, such as in barbering, nail care, and beauty therapy, and units towards the NVQ in customer service at level 2. Some of these qualifications are offered in response to employers and trainees' needs. Two trainees have completed NVQs in beauty therapy. This enables them to use these skills in their employer's beauty salon. It has broadened their employment prospects within the industry. Some trainees take part in in-house, regional and national competitions. They have the opportunity to attend national exhibitions of hairdressing skills across the country. This enables trainees to explore current developments in the industry. Some trainees took part in a four-day educational visit to Paris, which was subsidised by the college.

53. The college's staff have worked effectively with employers and work-placement providers to set up a forum to share expertise and to promote training for all staff. The forum now has 12 members. The partners arrange guest demonstrators and share the cost. This enables employers, trainees and NSTC's other members to access additional, good training by high-profile specialists in the industry. The college provides accommodation for these events. New part-time staff have been recruited by the college directly from the employers to provide specialist off-the-job training. This has led to specific training being offered to many trainees in skills such as barbering. This helps to ensure that the trainees have a varied training which is up to date and directly relevant to the industry. Employers find the communication and support from the college to be effective. Employers are informed immediately if any of their trainees are absent from the college.

54. Although the other members of the NSTC which provide hairdressing training make extensive use of work-based assessment, the college makes insufficient use of it. The college has worked with employers to train and accredit 12 of their staff as work-based assessors. However, these assessors are not currently used to assess trainees in the workplace. Most of the college's trainees do not have the opportunity to use evidence generated in the workplace for their portfolios. There is little use of witness testimonies completed by workplace supervisors. Trainees

taking NVQs at level 2 have been assessed only once at work. Three trainees have had no work-based assessment. Trainees taking NVQs at level 3 are assessed entirely at college. Some of these trainees are technically proficient and work independently in their salons. The lack of work-based assessment impedes trainees' progress towards achieving their NVQs. In college, the variety of hairdressing clients is sometimes insufficient and often inappropriate to meet the required range of assessments. Most trainees in their first year of training work on reception in their workplace, yet many have not been assessed for the NVQ unit applicable to this. Employers are not involved in the assessment process and are not aware of the qualifications which their trainees are working towards.

55. There is a restricted choice of optional NVQ units for the college's trainees to select and a lack of flexibility in setting the level at which they start their training. Most of trainees take an NVQ at level 1 in hairdressing at the start of their training programme. Most trainees have already accumulated sufficient skills to start at a higher level than this, and so the achievement of their target qualification is delayed. One trainee completed an NVQ at level 1 while she was at school, but was still required to work with other trainees taking NVQs at level 1 during her first year's off-the-job learning. One New Deal client with only a year to complete her NVQ at level 2 was required to achieve an NVQ at level 1 first. Trainees with three salons offering Afro-Caribbean hairdressing, do not have the opportunity to work towards the optional unit of the NVQ at level 2 for this because the college lacks the necessary training resources. Trainees with two of NSTC's other members have no opportunity to work towards an NVQ at level 3. The college's trainees do not have a choice of optional units for the level 3 NVQ. Their roles at work are not considered when selecting the optional units.

56. There is no systematic monitoring of trainees' progress at the college. Some trainees have no knowledge of the record of their assessments within their portfolios. This is completed for them. Other trainees have no cumulative assessment records in their portfolios at all. The college's staff have made some attempt to show trainees how they are progressing by giving them a list of assessments they must achieve, but trainees are still unclear as to what they have already achieved. The college's assessors keep records of trainees' progress towards meeting the knowledge requirements of the NVQ. Employers, however, have little or no knowledge of their trainees' progress. Trainees are also unsure of their progress towards achieving key skills qualifications. Some trainees think they have achieved key skills units when they have not. This leads to poor assessment planning, which slows trainees' progress.

57. Trainees' achievement rates for the past three years have been low. Over this period, 55 per cent of trainees have left their programmes early without achieving any qualifications. Only 31 per cent of trainees have achieved their target qualifications. Retention rates are better and are improving. The number of trainees who stay in training has increased over 3 years from 30 per cent in 1997 to 59 per cent in 1999. Key skills achievement is accredited at the end of trainees' programmes. However the college's trainees who started training in 2000 have begun to work on key skills earlier and receive specialist support for this. Although

trainees with other members of NSTC make extensive use of evidence from the workplace, the college's trainees make little use of work-based evidence for their key skills units.

### **Health, care & public services**

### **Grade 4**

58. Care and childcare trainees are recruited to NSTC through the careers service, employers or the college's marketing. Most applicants are interviewed and undertake assessments of their basic and key skills to determine how much learning support they will require. There are 32 trainees and one New Deal client on childcare programmes. There are 19 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs in early years care and education at levels 2 and 3. There are 10 foundation modern apprentices and three trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people. The New Deal client is taking an NVQ at level 2 in early years care and education. Training is provided through a weekly day-release class at the college as part of a programme which starts every September. The learning sessions include theoretical learning, portfolio-building and key skills development to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship frameworks. Employers provide trainees with practical training at work. Visiting assessors from the college assess trainees at their workplaces. All childcare trainees are allocated a personal trainer. In the college, there are five course team leaders, 11 full-time and 11 part-time trainers, and seven assessors, of whom three are part time, for childcare studies. There is one work-placement officer who visits the college's trainees on childcare and elderly care programmes. Other members of NSTC have their own staff who carry out these functions.

59. There are 64 trainees on care programmes. Of these, 17 are based at the college. They are made up of 10 advanced modern apprentices taking NVQs in care at levels 2 and 3, six foundation modern apprentices taking NVQs in care at level 2 and one trainee on other work-based learning for young people taking an NVQ in care at level 2. Some attend the college for one day each week during term time for two years. Others are trained for a half or full day in their workplace by the college's trainers. Some trainees in care have access to work-based assessors while other trainees are allocated an assessor from the college to assess them in the workplace. There are 14 advanced modern apprentices working towards care NVQs at levels 2 and 3 with other members of NSTC which use the college for training and assessment purposes. Another member of NSTC is responsible for training and assessing 33 advanced modern apprentices taking NVQs in care at levels 2 and 3. There are regular meetings for the work-based assessors in care. All staff working with care trainees are qualified as trainers and assessors and there are two internal verifiers. NSTC has a database of 35 employers and work-placements providers for childcare. At present, there are trainees placed with or employed with 19 of these. All advanced modern apprentices in childcare are employed in nurseries or schools. Most foundation modern apprentices taking childcare are in work placements. Care trainees are employed or on work placements in nursing and residential care homes.

60. The self-assessment report has four separate sections relating to health, care and public services, and lists 36 strengths and 12 weaknesses. Many of these strengths and weaknesses were repeated elsewhere and many strengths were found to represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ highly effective teaching staff at college
- ◆ well-structured and flexible off-the-job learning
- ◆ well-managed on-the-job learning for childcare trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient use of work-based assessment
- ◆ over-reliance on written evidence of competence
- ◆ little involvement by employers in care training
- ◆ slow progress in achieving NVQs
- ◆ low achievement rates

61. Training staff at the college have extensive occupational knowledge and experience, which they use to encourage trainees to aspire to progress. Both childcare and care staff are well qualified, with relevant degrees and professional post-graduate qualifications, and qualifications in training and assessment. The staff team makes good use of the variety of experience within the team. Staff come from relevant vocational backgrounds and have worked, for example, as general and mental health nurses, hospital play specialists, midwives, childminders, health visitors, nursery nurses, infant and nursery teachers and psychologists. There are staff with qualifications in aromatherapy, reflexology and counselling. The college encourages staff to update their occupational knowledge in local nurseries, schools, and care and hospital settings. Care and childcare trainers work well as a team and use their varied backgrounds and practical experience to increase the trainees' knowledge. Some staff have good computing skills and encourage trainees to learn these, for example by encouraging them to download relevant information from the Internet and use it to produce their own good-practice guides.

62. There are well-planned programmes for off-the-job learning in childcare and care. The learning sessions are effectively structured, with clear learning objectives and with opportunities for trainees to contribute their own experience from their work placements. Trainees are given copies of learning schedules, giving details of when they will cover various theory topics and have portfolio-building sessions. Trainers have detailed lesson plans for each session, and these

include a wide variety of activities. There are written assignments for each unit of the NVQs and designated workshops with relevant resources to help trainees acquire the knowledge they need. In childcare, assessors take the opportunity at the workshops to plan assessments. In care, there are learning-support packages for each unit of the NVQs, which help trainees to develop their knowledge and produce supplementary evidence. Additionally, there is a guide to portfolio-building. However, in most residential settings, there are insufficient resources to support trainees who need to learn and develop their understanding of important issues in the workplace.

63. In care, there are flexible programmes which meet the requirements of employers. These vary according to what suits the trainees. For example, some trainees learn all their theory at college and are assessed by a visiting assessor in the workplace. Others have all their theory taught at their employers' premises and are assessed by their employers' staff. In other cases, a subcontractor provides training in theory and organises assessments for individual trainees. These flexible approaches enable more trainees to access training while being responsive to employers' needs. One employer provides a training room where learning resources are kept and where sessions in theory are provided, but this level of support by an employer is unusual.

64. In care, there is good support for assessors. Meetings for assessors are held three times each year in each of the college's training centres, which enables work-based assessors to stay up to date and obtain advice from internal verifiers and the college's trainers. In addition, there are workshops to support those training to be assessors, which are held at the college every week.

65. Childcare trainees receive a thorough and well-structured learning programme at work, which takes them through the nursery practice and procedures. They spend time in different settings working with babies, toddlers, and different ages of children, including those who attend after-school care, giving them good experience across the age range. They shadow qualified staff and are coached and closely supervised to give them the confidence to take on more responsibility and demonstrate initiative. Some nurseries observe trainees' work practice and record it as part of their staff-appraisal systems. Other nurseries issue a handbook to trainees, which clearly specifies workplace procedures and what is expected of them. There are structured task sheets and observation records. Room supervisors complete these when trainees demonstrate that they have carried out their duties satisfactorily. Trainees join qualified staff in planning the curriculum, and at meetings on managing difficult behaviour and other sessions related to staff development. They benefit enormously from this.

66. Some trainees have experienced lengthy delays before being assessed in the workplace. Three care trainees who began training four months before the inspection had not been assessed and did not have any assessments planned. One care trainee who started during the autumn term does not know who her assessor will be. Opportunities are missed for trainees who have a college-based assessor to demonstrate their skills. In care, assessment planning is inconsistent. Most trainees

do not have an adequate grasp of the assessment process and are not sufficiently involved in assessment planning, taking insufficient responsibility for their own progress. In some cases, assessment planning amounts to a verbal discussion and there is no detailed written plan produced for the trainee to use. Most trainees depend on their assessor to lead the assessment process and many do not use sufficient initiative in the development of supplementary evidence, instead relying on projects and exercises provided by the college's trainers. In childcare, assessment planning is good, as it is in care at one of NSTC's members. Some trainees on the childcare programme, who started in September 2000, have not yet had their first assessment. There is little assessment of practical skills in the first year of the programme. Several trainees in childcare who have spent 16 months on their programmes have been observed only twice in the workplace by assessors.

67. Employers do not recognise their responsibility for providing training for care trainees in the workplace. There are few resources in the workplace to enable the trainees to develop knowledge linked to their NVQs. Although trainees receive the mandatory training in care practice, there is little practical support for their NVQs. Trainees learn by shadowing their colleagues, but there is no mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of this learning. In some care homes, trainees are closely monitored for a short period at the beginning of their employment or work placement. However, once they have developed basic skills in care, they are left to work without sufficient supervision and guidance.

68. At levels 2 and 3 of the NVQs, great emphasis is placed on the completion of written work to support the knowledge requirements for each unit. There is an emphasis on completing written work before assessment starts. Early years care and education trainees taking NVQs at level 2 are overwhelmed with the amount of written work they have to do. They find it hard to fit in their assignments with their workplace duties, and are rarely given time in the nursery to work on their portfolios. Many trainees work long hours in the nursery and often spend a significant time travelling to and from work. Care trainees also find the amount of written work they are expected to do burdensome. One trainee in care has a weighty portfolio and has completed written assessments for all the NVQ units before being assessed on any practical skills. The assignments are not individualised and all trainees work on the same assignments, whatever their previous experience. In childcare, there has been an attempt to simplify assignments since September 2000, but few trainees are working on the new assignments and the new approach has not been evaluated.

69. Trainees make slow progress on all programmes and take at least two years to achieve their NVQs at level 2 and a further two years to gain their NVQs at level 3. There is little attempt to individualise programmes and trainees with previous experience who are ready for assessment have to complete the same work as those with no previous experience. Trainees have often completed written assignments towards their NVQs but have not been assessed at work undertaking practical activities. There is little use of accreditation of units. Trainees are not clear what they have achieved or what they need to do to complete individual units.

70. No trainees have gained a foundation modern apprenticeship and the achievement rates for care and childcare trainees on advanced modern apprenticeships and other work-based learning are low. None of the trainees who started their advanced modern apprenticeship programme in 1999 or 2000 have achieved an NVQ. Out of the 88 childcare trainees on other work-based learning programmes who have started since 1996, only 25, or 28 per cent, have achieved their qualifications. Of the trainees who started their advanced modern apprenticeships in 1996-97, only 40 per cent have achieved their full frameworks. There has, however, been an improvement in the achievement rate of those advanced modern apprentices who started their programmes in 1998. Of the 15 childcare trainees, seven, or 47 per cent, gained an NVQ at level 3 and completed the whole of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework, including key skills units. Of the 29 foundation modern apprentices on the programme since 1998, only two trainees have achieved their NVQs at level 2. On the advanced modern apprenticeship in care, 34 trainees started the programme in 1999. Of these, only 21 per cent achieved NVQs at level 2 and 16 per cent gained NVQs at level 3. However, none of these trainees has yet completed their key skill units or their full apprenticeship frameworks.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 4

71. Each member deals with equal opportunities on an individual basis. The college of further education which is the largest member of NTSC has a mission statement which refers to working with people in local communities where there is high unemployment and social deprivation. The college's human resources directorate and equal opportunities committee are responsible for equal opportunities. The committee is made up of staff, students and representatives of the college's trade unions. The director of human resources chairs the committee and communicates directly with the senior management team. The committee meets every month to discuss current issues, make decisions and plan activities. It produces an annual report. An equal opportunities working party has recently updated the equal opportunities policy. The policy includes references to harassment, grievance and complaints procedures. All staff receive a copy of the policy and the names of the equal opportunities committee members. All trainees receive a copy of the students' handbook, which includes information about the college's equal opportunities policies. The college works in partnership with other organisations to help under-represented and disaffected groups and individuals to access education and training. Building work is in progress to improve access to the college's facilities for staff, students and trainees with mobility problems. Within the college, there are a range of facilities to assist trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities. The college has two designated members of staff whom trainees and staff can contact in cases of harassment and with grievances. There is a team which is directly responsible for managing and monitoring complaints. There are counselling and support services for staff and trainees. The

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*All managers have the promotion of equal opportunities as part of their job descriptions.*

college has an open-access policy, to provide objective advice and guidance for, and to accommodate, people who are referred for training by the Employment Service or the careers service, as well as anyone else who shows an interest in training and employment. All prospective trainees are interviewed. Staff and trainees receive an induction which includes an introduction to the college's equal opportunities policies. The college routinely collects equal opportunities data. Of the 1,301 staff at the college, 59 per cent are women and 4.2 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Among trainees, 67 per cent are men and 4 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is the same as that for the local population. The self-assessment report included separate sections for each of NSTC's members and this made it difficult to view NSTC's work as a whole. Inspectors agreed with two strengths in the report and another one was considered more appropriate to the area of trainee support. Further strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors, who awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ effective initiatives to widen participation in training
- ◆ good arrangements for making complaints at college
- ◆ supportive employment practices at college

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ little awareness of equal opportunities by trainees and employers
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no equal opportunities strategy for NSTC as a whole

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*When the college's staff are observed as part of their annual appraisal and assessment, the criteria include the extent to which they demonstrate a positive attitude to equal opportunities and inclusive learning. Trainers are provided with a self-assessment check list designed to raise their awareness of expected practice when working with trainees and students in the classroom.*

72. The college demonstrates a good understanding of, and action to increase participation in training and learning by, under-represented groups. It is involved in creative work in partnerships receiving SRB funding, to provide training opportunities to a wide range of people who would not normally be able to access them. This is part of a long-term strategy to work with people in local communities. Projects which use SRB funding have specific targets to engage under-represented, socially excluded and disaffected people in training and these targets are being met. These projects have included, for example, a bridging project, which helps young people aged between 14 and 16 who have left school early, with the aim of helping them to stay in education and engage in activities which prepare them for work and responsibility. The college has a comprehensive inclusive-learning action plan with specific targets and actions. The plan shows how the college will develop a framework which is capable of supporting an increase in the numbers of under-represented groups, such as ex-offenders. The projects aim to provide opportunities for employment and training within the local community. One example is the setting up of community colleges to help members of local communities to access a wide range of learning opportunities without travelling to the college's site in the city. These are especially helpful for people who are unemployed or who lack confidence. Four community colleges have been

set up with four employers in Stoke on Trent, to provide work-based and other learning. These initiatives are coupled with support tailored to the specific needs of individuals who wish to access learning. For example, a signer and note taker has been employed to help a person with impaired hearing.

73. The college's complaints procedure is easy to understand and use. A dedicated team deals with complaints related to the college. It responds promptly to all complaints and has a target of 10 days to resolve them. The team promotes the service positively and is actively involved in the college's promotional activity. The college views complaints as a mechanism to improve services for trainees, students and staff. One complaint, about students' behaviour in a particular area of the college, resulted in a scheme to encourage students to behave more responsibly through the use of a credit scheme administered by the security staff. A recent development enables staff and students to lodge a complaint through the college's intranet. Formal complaints are effectively monitored and a monthly summary provides useful information about the type of complaints emerging and the status of the response. Quarterly and annual reports identify trends and issues. These, together with the solutions, are reported to the senior management team. All heads of faculty have access to information about their departments and the college as a whole. There is a scheme allowing staff and students to submit suggestions. This provides individuals with an opportunity to raise issues and to improve situations.

74. The human resources directorate works hard to develop a positive and helpful environment for staff and students. Job descriptions are being developed which include an expectation that staff will demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities and to valuing diversity in a practical way. This is included in current job descriptions for senior managers, and will be included in all job descriptions as the scheme develops. Recruitment and selection practices include assessment of applicants' understanding of and commitment to equal opportunities.

75. Employment contracts for staff at the college have been developed to create flexibility without making staff vulnerable. Staff who are returning to work after long periods of absence are offered the chance to return to work gradually. The college provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for staff to train in equal opportunities issues, such as dyslexia and awareness of equal opportunities. However, although a significant amount of the training budget is spent on equal opportunities training, attendance is not compulsory and some senior members of staff have not attended. However, all the staff in the community and commercial development directorate who are directly involved in work-based learning have done so.

76. Although equal opportunities is included in induction and reinforced during training programmes and posters, handbooks and the college's charter contain copies of the equal opportunities policy, trainees have little recall of the issues. Trainees' knowledge of complaints, grievances and their rights relating to employment and assessment is poor. A survey by the college in 1999-2000 showed that 32 per cent of trainees were unaware of the college's complaints procedure.

Trainees with other members of NSTC were not included in the survey. Trainees are not aware of the support which the college can offer if they experience difficulties at work.

77. There is inadequate initial assessment and ongoing monitoring of NSTC's members and employers' commitment to equal opportunities. There is insufficient guidance for work-placement officers when they are selecting new work placements and monitoring existing employers and NSTC's members. Work-placement officers are inadequately prepared for this important aspect of their role and there is no mention of equal opportunities monitoring in their description of duties. The college does not require employers or NSTC's members to supply copies of their equal opportunities policies or regularly review them. There is no reliable method of ensuring that trainees' rights are being protected when they are at work. Progress reviews do not adequately assess trainees' understanding of employers' commitment to equal opportunities. During the selection and monitoring of work placements, equal opportunities is only superficially considered and there are no records of the discussions between the college's staff and employers. One trainer was reluctant to challenge an employer which had material which some people find offensive displayed at its premises. Equal opportunities monitoring data are collected but these are not routinely considered when making management decisions. There is insufficient analysis of data and the results of analysis are not used to set targets.

78. There is no overall approach to promoting and developing equal opportunities and celebrating diversity across NSTC. Standards, practices and plans are not shared between members and there is no common agreement among them. Insufficient attention is given to promoting equal opportunities or showing positive images of diversity. There is insufficient work to challenge gender stereotypes. There are no women training in gas fitting, plumbing or engineering, and very few men in care and childcare. The positive role models among the staff are not used to encourage trainees or prospective trainees in these occupations. Interpreters are available for people for whom English is not their first language, and there are some marketing materials in languages other than English. There is not, however, a systematic approach to promoting equal opportunities.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 4**

79. NSTC's members each approach trainee support on an individual basis. However, 75 per cent of trainees are with the college. Trainees are recruited onto programmes at the college by being referred from the careers service or schools or by direct referral from their employers. Some trainees join training programmes from the link programmes provided by the college for year-11 pupils from local schools. Other local training providers refer trainees to the college when they cannot provide suitable programmes. New Deal clients are referred from the Employment Service. Other members of NSTC have their own recruitment strategies. The college holds an award for good practice in basic skills training.

Once trainees have applied to the college, they are invited in to attend an interview. All trainees take basic skills tests sometimes coinciding with their interviews. Work-placement officers carry out the interview. In other curriculum areas, the trainees have basic skills tests when they begin training. The college has recently introduced a new form of testing in some curriculum areas, which it is hoped will provide a better picture of trainees' suitability for specific programmes. Basic skills trainers mark the tests. The trainers in care mark their own trainees' tests. Where appropriate, trainees are given basic skills support. In September 2000, a new faculty, covering learning and skills development, was established in the college with responsibility for basic and key skills training, and for providing students and trainees with support. When trainees attend the college, they undergo a brief induction and are given a copy of the students' handbook. A work-placement officer also visits trainees within their first week in the workplace and a check list is completed to ensure all areas of induction and health and safety are covered. The work-placement officer is also responsible for vetting the workplaces for health and safety practices. Work-placement officers carry out progress reviews with the trainees in the workplace every three months. The college employs two careers advisors, who provide trainees with advice and guidance. Careers officers from the careers service also visit college through a partnership agreement with the careers service. The self-assessment report identified four strengths and one weakness. The three strengths related to the wide variety of additional support and counselling available at the college and inspectors agreed with these strengths. Inspectors did not agree with one strength, which related to initial assessments. The one weakness, relating to key skills, was regarded as being more appropriate to the management of training. Inspectors found one additional strength and additional weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ highly successful schools-link programmes
- ◆ wide range of support services at college
- ◆ strong networks providing individual support for trainees
- ◆ good celebration of trainees' successes

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment in most areas
- ◆ weak induction at college
- ◆ little co-ordination of support for trainees
- ◆ poor progress-review practices
- ◆ little support for trainees with some consortium members

80. The college works with 28 secondary schools to provide prevocational training

for 820 pupils. This training is offered in motor vehicle engineering, hair and beauty, construction, health and care, catering, mechanical engineering and horticulture. Many pupils have progressed from this scheme to become work-based trainees. The scheme allows them to make informed decisions about their employment and future careers. Some school pupils are offered the opportunity to take NVQs at level 1.

81. The college provides an extensive range of support services. There is a well-equipped learning-resource centre with computers. There is an extensively stocked library with literature to support the trainees' programmes. There are nurseries at the college's sites and creches for children of trainees in the community. There are subsidised meals, and the college buys bus passes, which trainees can purchase at a lower cost than normal. There is financial assistance with clothing for work and in the hairdressing department trainees can go on subsidised trips to national events and competitions. There are extensive counselling services with well-qualified staff which the trainees can access directly or through being referred.

82. Once trainees' additional learning support needs have been identified, staff ensure that they receive the help, guidance and training to meet their needs. Staff from the cross-college directorate for learning support work with those from trainees' curriculum areas to ensure that, as far as possible, additional support is integrated within the training being provided in the occupational area. The team of work-placement officers holds a critical role in supporting trainees. This team sits outside the curriculum areas and focuses primarily on the welfare of trainees. The trainees value this support and the work-placement officers work hard to build strong links with trainees and employers. If necessary, the trainees will be referred to external agencies with which the college has forged strong links. Trainees with hearing or visual impairments are offered the facilities and support they need to complete their programmes.

83. If trainees leave their work placement or employment, the work-placement officers work hard to find them a new work placement. Trainees who do not achieve all the targets on their individual learning plans within the prescribed time are able to carry on with their qualifications without having to pay extra fees. Trainees who have difficulty accessing employment after completing their programmes are offered places on full-time courses at the college to enhance their skills and to increase their employability. Trainees are offered job-search skills and help in preparing curricula vitae and letters of application.

84. The college holds annual events where trainees' successes are celebrated. Nominations for special awards are invited from people involved in trainees' development. When nominating trainees, employers and the college's staff are asked to provide background information as to why they feel the particular trainee should be put forward for an award. Trainees, parents and employers are invited to attend the award ceremonies and all nominations are read out, together with the supporting information. Individual curriculum areas also have their own celebrations of trainees' successes.

85. The results of initial assessment are not considered when devising trainees' individual learning plans. All trainees, regardless of their abilities, undergo basic skills tests at the beginning of their programmes. Staff use the results of these tests to offer additional support. However, the information from these tests is very narrow and the support offered is not always appropriate. Additional learning support is provided for groups of trainees rather than for individuals. One trainee in hospitality is being given help with punctuation, when the real learning need relates to verbal communication. Further than this, there is little diagnosis of trainees' abilities and experience, to find out relevant information to create realistic learning plans. Some trainees have their ability to cope with key skills training assessed, but this is largely based on their skills in communication and application of number, with no emphasis given to other aspects of the key skills requirements, such as information technology and working with others. No results of initial assessments of key skills are recorded on individual learning plans. Trainees rarely have their prior achievements accredited and most trainees who have prior occupational experience are not offered the opportunity to be assessed more quickly. Some staff do not know that trainees can be exempted from taking key skills units for holding relevant qualifications. Individual learning plans are not negotiated with employers to ascertain opportunities available to the trainees in their job roles in order to create realistic targets for trainees. There are no negotiations with the trainees and employers regarding optional and additional NVQ units which would be beneficial for the trainee and their employer. All trainees on the same programme are directed towards taking the same NVQ units. Trainees' individual learning plans lack clear objectives by which achievement can be measured. Most individual learning plans for trainees in the same programme area contain the same details. Target dates for achievement often relate to the full qualification rather than individual units. In some occupational areas, only work-placement officers have access to the individual learning plans in trainees' files.

86. Most of the college's trainees start their programmes at the traditional entry time in September. They receive a standard induction, which usually lasts one day. The induction is based mainly on completing forms, and trainees can remember little more than this activity. There is inadequate coverage of trainees' rights and responsibilities. Trainees who join their programmes after the start of the college's academic year receive an even shorter induction.

There is no standard approach to trainee support across NSTC's members and between the college's curriculum areas. Some workplace supervisors and employers are not involved in progress reviews with trainees. In some cases, progress reviews are conducted entirely at the college by trainers who have little or no knowledge about the trainee's workplace. There is often weak target-setting, with general references to progress and what should be achieved over the next quarter instead of specific goals. Although trainees who attend the college for off-the-job learning receive good support, some of NSTC's other members do not have mechanisms to ensure that their trainees receive help, guidance and support to meet their basic skills needs.

## Management of training

## Grade 4

87. The college which is the lead member of NSTC holds contracts with the TEC for a range of work-based learning programmes for young people and adults, including apprenticeships and other occupational training. NSTC has 10 members. All except for the college are subcontractors, mostly national training providers or local employers. The college's directorate of community and commercial development is responsible for the management of training within the consortium. Approximately 75 per cent of trainees are registered on work-based learning programmes for young people with the college. A senior work-placement officer, who is responsible for a team of nine work-placement officers and three administrative support staff, is responsible for these trainees' programmes. This team has the support of four cross-college directorates and works closely with five curriculum areas. One of the members of NSTC is a wholly owned subsidiary of the college, and reports directly to the director of community and commercial development. It is a subcontractor for training in the manufacturing sector. The company also provides an administrative and management-information facility for the consortium as a whole. Its operations manager is responsible for links with the subcontractors in NSTC. The company holds the contract for, and supports those joining, work-based learning programmes for adults and is responsible for young people on New Deal options. It also administers the New Deal for a consortium of Staffordshire colleges.

88. The college was re-accredited with the Investors in People Standard in 1999, having first achieved this in 1996. The college has other awards for contributions to sustainable community development. It is also highly commended for meeting specific employers' needs. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and the weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report and identified additional weaknesses. The grade awarded was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong and extensive involvement in local partnerships
- ◆ responsiveness to employers' needs
- ◆ well-managed staffing arrangements at the college

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor management of consortium members
- ◆ little use of management information in decision-making
- ◆ little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ slow implementation of key skills training

89. The college has a strategic commitment to working collaboratively and in partnerships to enhance the learning opportunities of people in the local area. To this end, the college has established significant partnership arrangements and, in

many instances, is a senior partner in high-profile initiatives for the Stoke on Trent area. It is a lead partner in SRB projects focusing on the needs of young people. The college is working with a range of local groups and agencies, including local schools, the local learning partnership, a sixth-form college, the local education authority, the TEC, the Employment Service, voluntary sector organisations and a new government initiative to provide learning targeted at helping individuals and businesses. It has prepared several successful bids for SRB funding with the local unitary authority to work with employers to enhance the skills of the local workforce. The college is working collaboratively with other partners and agencies to develop the workforce in the north Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent areas. The directorate of community and commercial development has been pivotal in managing the development and activity of these partnerships. This has resulted in significant advantages to NSTC, particularly in increasing employers' awareness of and investment in training, and in increasing the market for work-based learning.

90. The college's business development unit is increasing contact with employers and encouraging them to develop the skills of their workforce according to their needs. The unit has a successful record with a range of employers in the identification of training needs and the design of training. Opportunities for supporting training through funding are identified and a support package for the implementation of training is offered. This integrated model for workforce development for employers is much valued owing to the financial incentives and its relevance. There has been a significant growth in the take-up of work-based learning in the area, which has benefited NSTC and the college directly. The business development unit has developed its own system for monitoring trainees and has taken on extra staff to monitor trainees when other members of NSTC do not have the resources to do this. Some employers have also benefited from the setting up of learning-resource centres on their premises and some have gained status as centres able to give direct access to qualifications.

91. The college's mission statement is well understood and supported by staff. The recruitment and selection process for staff is effectively managed. It is comprehensive in its scope, from identifying and advertising vacancies through to selection and appointment. Its high level of objectivity and careful equal opportunities screening have been recognised as best practice by external observers. All new staff have a thorough individual induction to the college. It consists of a general component, making good use of a welcome pack, followed by an induction specific to the job by line managers. The training needs of new staff are also identified in advance of the staff-appraisal process. Formal, cross-college induction training is offered to groups of new staff and deals effectively with strategic and generic issues. There is an annual cycle of appraisal and development reviews for staff. Staff reviews clearly consider objectives and performance, and identify staff's training needs, which are incorporated into plans for appropriate staff development. A well-structured training and development plan gives details of the policy, practice, procedures and devolved budgets of the college's faculties and directorates. Staff are allocated 10 days each year for their development and five of these are offered as a cross-college professional development week offering

more than 50 training opportunities. All staff may bring their development needs to the attention of line managers in response to emerging operational requirements. Additionally, they can take up study on college courses or courses offered by a local university, free of fees and with time off for study, to further their personal or career development. A good programme of continuous professional development to improve training, learning and associated activity is in its second year of operation, and components of this training can contribute to qualifications accredited by a nearby university.

92. There is no overall strategy for the coherent management of NSTC as a whole. The management has focused on contractual arrangements. At an operational level, NSTC's members have contracts with the college, but these simply follow the requirements of the TEC contract. Additionally, the members' operations handbook is no more than a copy of the TEC's operational requirements. Arrangements for the management of members' activities are deficient. This particularly affects members which are national training providers, which are more remote from the college than the members which are local employers. Members do not have service level agreements with the college or its curriculum areas providing specific training services. The monitoring of trainees' progress by members is weak, and tends to relate to key achievements and outcomes rather than trainees' individual targets, which would give operational staff a better insight into their progress. The procedures used do not give managers a clear picture of trainees' experience across the consortium.

93. There is little exchange of management information between NSTC's members. The level and detail of information about members and trainees which is currently generated is insufficient to reflect on all aspects of training. This causes difficulties in establishing trends and influences on training and creating appropriate action plans to generate improvements. Management information is inadequate for guiding decisions about individual members or NSTC as a whole. There are few opportunities for NSTC's members to share good practice or discuss issues of common concern.

94. There is poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job learning. Most employers which use the college's facilities for off-the-job training lack knowledge of their trainees' programmes and learning schedules. Employers are therefore unable to plan training opportunities at work to fit in with off-the-job training. Work-placement officers have little influence over developments to improve these links with employers. Some trainees are disadvantaged by having to repeat tasks during on- and off-the-job learning. There is also inflexibility in the college's off-the-job learning, which in most curriculum areas is constrained by a timetable based on the academic year.

95. Key skills training and assessment in most occupational areas makes little use of naturally occurring workplace evidence or the evidence collected by trainees for their NVQs. Trainees in the second and third years of their training have a poor understanding of key skills and are making unsatisfactory progress towards achieving them. September 2000 saw the introduction of a new faculty of learning

and skills development with responsibility for key skills, and the implementation of new key skills standards developed for 2000. There has been a well-managed process of change across the curriculum areas, and there have been some improvements in learning programmes for trainees just beginning their training. However, it is too early to assess the impact of these new arrangements. There is still little awareness of key skills among trainees, and some staff are not aware of their responsibilities regarding this training. The use of assignments for trainees to produce evidence to meet key skills requirements means that they do not use their workplaces as sources of naturally occurring evidence. Some of NSTC's members which provide their own key skills training are insufficiently aware of the new key skills standards and are inadequately prepared to amend their training and assessment practices for new trainees.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 4**

96. Responsibility for quality assurance is divided into two elements within NSTC. The operations manager within the college's subsidiary company, which is part of the community and commercial development directorate, has responsibility for quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors and their trainees and for work-based training. The college's trainees are covered by the college's own quality assurance arrangements. The college's principal and senior management committee regularly review the college's quality assurance policy to ensure its suitability and effectiveness. The curriculum director with responsibility for quality assurance reports directly to the principal on the operation of the quality assurance and self-assessment policies across the college. The director is responsible for establishing, implementing and maintaining the quality assurance system in line with the college's policies. The quality assurance manager is responsible for maintaining the quality assurance system and reports to the curriculum director. The quality assurance arrangements operating within the college are clearly written in the college's quality assurance manual and the system meets the requirements of the ISO 9001 quality standard. A copy of the manual is issued to all curriculum areas. The college meets the requirements of the TEC and financial audits by the TEC have been favourable. An important aspect of the quality assurance system is self-assessment, which is carried out following the guidelines set by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the TSC. A survey of students, including work-based trainees, is carried out twice each year to evaluate their views on training. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report referred to the college's practices and have little impact on work-based training. Inspectors identified significant weaknesses which were not identified by the self-assessment process and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ systematic observation and evaluation of training at college
- ◆ rigorous reviews of college's courses

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient quality assurance arrangements for work-based learning
- ◆ no application of college's quality assurance arrangements to other members of NSTC
- ◆ no overall quality assurance strategy for NSTC
- ◆ poor internal verification in some areas

97. The college has a thorough and effective programme for observing and evaluating training. The main element is the observation of learning sessions by trained observers, who use well-designed forms to record their observations and judgements. This process is supported by all the college's training staff. They recognise how it helps their development. Most trainers are observed twice each year. A report on the effectiveness of training is issued to all staff annually. This sets out the strengths and weaknesses of the training across all curriculum areas and a proposed action plan for each faculty. This gives all staff the opportunity to share good practice. Grades are contained in the report, with comparisons against the national average for colleges of further education. Targets are set to ensure continuing improvement.

98. Course reviews and target-setting are central to the college's quality assurance system and to continual improvement. The cycle begins in June each year with the collation of data from the previous year. During June and July, course team leaders, course teams and work-placement officers complete their course-review forms, set provisional targets for retention and achievement and agree on enrolment targets. Effective computer software helps to generate accurate data which enable effective planning. Provisional targets are set for the following year and targets for the current year are examined. Reviews of individual programmes are thorough and are fully recorded. Course reviews form the basis for programme areas' self-assessment reports. They feed into the faculties' operational plans and the college's self-assessment process. The college is currently carrying out a joint project with a development agency to further improve its course-review and target-setting processes.

99. The college has a well-developed internal auditing procedure. A large team of trained internal auditors implements this. However, in the past two years the activities of the community and commercial development department, including those associated with work-based training, have not been part of this audit process. Key aspects of work-based learning are not covered by effective written procedures. One example is the important role of the work-placement officers. They are issued with a work-placement officers' handbook. It does not give details of standards of practice or other requirements. The handbook gives good guidance on setting up a work placement, but it does not refer to the need for ongoing monitoring of work placements. The result of this omission is that there is little monitoring of health and safety in the workplace. Other critical areas which lack formal procedures are assessment and internal verification. The observation and evaluation of training in the college is not extended to work-based training. Work-

placement officers are not observed carrying out progress-reviews or any of their other responsibilities, and therefore receive no constructive feedback on their performance. The questionnaire issued to students twice each academic year is also issued to trainees. Feedback from employers is not sought in a systematic manner, although a questionnaire to achieve this is currently being designed. Informal feedback from employers is sought during trainees' progress reviews and when the college's staff visit. However, this is not planned or recorded.

100. The college's quality assurance arrangements are not applied to NSTC's other members. The monitoring of consortium members' performance is mainly conducted using the TEC's operations handbook, which is issued to all members. Staff from curriculum departments visit small private training providers, the subsidiary company's operations manager and the college's programme manager. There is some informal monitoring of training but observations are not recorded and action plans are not devised. Apart from in hairdressing, training activities carried out by NSTC's members are not observed. All members, as part of a current quality assurance initiative, are asked to carry out a self-assessment of their activities and produce a self-assessment report. This has too narrow a scope to be effective. National training organisations which have been inspected by the TSC do not undergo any further monitoring by NSTC following their inspections. Their action plans are not followed up to ensure that they are satisfactorily implemented. The smaller training organisations are currently in the process of preparing self-assessment reports but no formal decisions have been made to plan and implement follow-up monitoring.

101. Quality assurance planning has not resulted in the formulation of an effective quality assurance strategy covering the activities of NSTC's members as a whole. Currently, the only activity is the development of the self-assessment report. The associated guidance document refers to an audit of NSTC to be carried out during the following year, but no further details are given.

102. There is a guidance document to standardise internal verification. This document is not an instructional procedure and does not reflect current good practice. Internal verification practice varies across the different programmes and departments. In hospitality, internal verification is satisfactory. There have been problems in the past, but the department has responded to action points raised by the awarding body's external verifier. The internal verification process has been restructured and is now planned and effective. In other departments, internal verification focuses on completed portfolios. Internal verifiers have little contact with trainees and make very few observations of assessments in the workplace. Some areas have developed their own procedures for internal verification. One such document in care contains misleading information, and describes the need to internally verify two units each year. The document does not refer to planning the sample of work to be internally verified across the current group of trainees. In one area of engineering, the external verifier has been raising action points with the internal verifier over a period of two years, but some are still outstanding. In motor vehicle engineering, during 2000, 34 planned internal verification activities were missed. In total, there were four in the college and two in the workplace for this

area. Across the programme areas, there is little planning of internal verification. Poor assessment practice has gone unnoticed in many occupational areas. In some areas, members of staff are allocated insufficient time for internal verification.

103. The self-assessment report was confusing and contained separate self-assessment reports from each of NSTC's members. Many occupational areas had more than one grade. For example, in engineering separate grades had been given for both electronics and motor vehicle engineering, and construction had been given separate grades for building engineering services and construction. Many of the strengths identified in occupational areas were appropriate to generic aspects. Some strengths contained in the self-assessment report were based on the college's work with both full-time students and work-based trainees. There were some inaccurate statements. For example, the report referred to high rates of achievement when achievement rates for work-based trainees have been low. A further example of an inaccurately identified strength was in construction, and referred to good work by work-placement officers, when inspectors found this to apply only to their work with trainees in the college. Some employers are visited infrequently by work-placement officers and progress reviews lack rigour. Inspectors identified many strengths in the self-assessment report as being no more than normal practice. In the generic areas, the self-assessment report failed to identify key weaknesses affecting work-based trainees. In all areas, the grades given in the self-assessment report were higher than those awarded by the inspectors.