



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION JANUARY 2001

Somerset College of Arts and Technology

SUMMARY

Somerset College of Arts and Technology offers good training programmes in hair and beauty and engineering, but these do not involve sufficient work-based assessment. The college's liaison with employers is excellent. At the time of the first inspection, its training in business administration was less than satisfactory, but it was improving. At reinspection, some of the improvements in business administration had only recently taken place and had not yet had time to have an impact on trainees' achievements. Equal opportunities procedures and policies are thorough but do not always extend to the workplace. Trainees with additional learning needs receive very good support. Training programmes are satisfactorily managed. The process of quality assurance had not been sufficiently rigorous to identify weaknesses in the area of one programme at the time of the first inspection. The new arrangements have not yet been fully tested, but there is a new system of internal review by peers, which is already identifying areas for improvement.

As a result of the reinspection of Somerset College of Arts and Technology, the original published report text for business administration and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2
Business administration	4
Hair and beauty	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Business administration	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of individual additional support for trainees
- ◆ open access to training
- ◆ comprehensive induction to occupational training
- ◆ good liaison with employers
- ◆ good communication channels
- ◆ flexibly arranged provision to meet trainees and employers' needs in engineering



- ◆ good staff-development programme
- ◆ well-managed complaints procedure

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of key skills training
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ some unsatisfactory assessment practice
- ◆ no systematic sharing of good practice
- ◆ little formal checking of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices
- ◆ poor use and analysis of performance data



INTRODUCTION

1. Somerset College of Arts and Technology (SCAT) is a large general further education college serving the education and training needs of Taunton, Somerset and much of east Devon. The present college was established in 1974 as a result of the merger of Somerset College of Arts and Taunton Technical College. The main site of the college is in west Taunton, but there are three further sites, and plans for major rebuilding. It has nearly 12,000 students, most of whom are part time. At the time of the first inspection, it had 62 trainees funded through contracts with Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and PROSPER, the TEC for Cornwall and Devon, and 29 New Deal clients, nearly all of whom were on the full-time education and training option. Training for the New Deal clients was funded by a subcontract from the TEC. At reinspection, SCAT had 57 TEC-funded trainees, and seven New Deal clients, this time funded through a subcontract from a consortium of local training providers. At the time of the first inspection, the college had 1,130 full-time and part-time members of staff, of whom 795 were teachers. The managing agency for the training inspected had four members of staff, all of whom held other roles within the college. By the time of the reinspection, the college had 1,100 full-time and part-time members of staff. There was no separate managing agency, although two members of staff were responsible for monitoring the TEC contracts. Teaching staff in the college also train and assess the trainees and New Deal clients.

2. Somerset has a well-established business community, and a diverse but generally robust economy. The district of Taunton Deane, which includes the county town of Taunton, has a population of 100,000. Employment in the district has grown considerably. Between 1984 and 1995, there was a 20 per cent increase in employment, and 7,200 new jobs were created. Employers in the area are mostly small, or very small, businesses. Of the 17,000 businesses large enough to be registered for value added tax, only 84 employed over 200 staff. Half the firms employ one to four staff. The unemployment rate at the time of the first inspection was 2.5 per cent, compared with a national rate of 4 per cent. By December 2000, the local unemployment rate had fallen to 1.8 per cent. The main industrial sectors are engineering, food processing, packaging, printing, publishing, and information technology. However, there are pockets of high unemployment and severe economic deprivation in some more remote rural areas. Agriculture as an industrial sector is facing problems. The proportion of people in the county from minority ethnic groups is less than 1 per cent. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Somerset who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 52.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In November 2000, the proportion locally had risen to 55.3 per cent, compared with the new national average of 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. For the first inspection, carried out jointly with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the college produced separate self-assessment reports for the Training Standards Council (TSC) and the FEFC's inspectors. The TEC provided useful training sessions on self-assessment for all its training providers. The managing agency's contract manager drafted the self-assessment report. All staff were given the opportunity to take part in the writing of the report but few were able to do so as the report was compiled during the college's summer holiday. For the reinspection, the director of business development compiled a short report for the areas being reinspected. Other managers contributed to the reports, which were discussed in team meetings held before the reinspection.

4. For the first joint inspection, four of the TSC's inspectors joined the FEFC's inspection. They spent 20 days at the college in November 1999. TSC and FEFC inspectors carried out a joint inspection of the occupational areas of business administration but each inspectorate visited different groups. TSC inspectors interviewed 29 trainees, 16 workplace supervisors and other employers' staff, and 21 members of SCAT's staff.

5. For the reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of six days at the college, in January 2001. They observed a training session, an assessment, and interviewed 12 trainees and New Deal clients, nine members of the college's staff, and six workplace supervisors and other employers' staff. They examined portfolios, records of meetings, reports, trainees' files, and other relevant documents.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		2				2
Business administration		1	2			3
Hair & beauty		3	1			4
Total	0	6	3	0	0	9

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

6. Five of the college's 16 schools offer engineering programmes at FE and HE levels. Training under the college managing agency, however, is offered only in the school of engineering technology. This school focuses on mainstream engineering provision and offers progression opportunities in mechanical, production and computer-aided engineering as well as

GOOD PRACTICE

A workplace assessor has produced a day book for his level 3 trainees in which the trainees jot down the NVQ skills references and key skills references that are obtained from their day-to-day practical experiences. This has been identified as good practice by the college and the day book is now given to other level 3 trainees.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good use of flexible programme start times. A New Deal client wished to train in psychology. She wanted to begin in April. She could not join then, however, because it was too late in the programme. She then decided to turn to automobile engineering and was taken on immediately to start working towards NVQ level 2, and the first diploma. During the summer period, she obtained work experience in a local garage. She is now continuing her work at level 2 and has begun the first year of the national diploma programme. The client is expected to complete this successfully and is expected in the long term, to move on to level 3. She is very happy that she has found a career and did not have to wait until September to start her training.

electrical/electronics/telecommunications. Specialist facilities are good. Somerset College has 18 trainees following work-based training programmes in this occupational area. Of these, 15 are modern apprentices following the engineering manufacture foundation programme at level 2 which comprises the minimum 11 units, some of which are tailored to employer's needs; three are following New Deal full-time education and training options in automobile engineering. All modern apprentices are employed before entering training, at which point they take Basic Skills Agency tests to identify their learning support needs. In the past year, the college has moved from youth training to providing modern apprenticeship training in response to the needs of local employers. The school also carries out subcontracted training for other TEC training providers. Trainees are in a discrete group for their training at NVQ level 2 and related theory work. Level 2 training is off the job, lasts for 20 weeks, and is carried out in blocks of five to six weeks during year one. Trainees receive theory teaching on a day-release basis. At level 3, trainees receive training on the job and they join students on FEFC-funded programmes for off-the-job theory work. College staff carry out off-the-job assessment of level 2 trainees and they share on-the-job assessment with workplace assessors. College staff carry out the internal verification procedures and visit trainees on a quarterly basis to monitor their progress and cover pastoral issues. The size of companies range from small to medium. Their products are varied and include helicopter and automotive parts, industrial vacuum cleaners and packaging equipment. In the past few years, the manufacturing industry in the Taunton area has reduced considerably and the college has to attract trainees from a wider area. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some of the weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ productive links with industry
- ◆ good learning experience for trainees
- ◆ effective remodelling of curriculum
- ◆ tailoring of programmes to meet trainees' needs
- ◆ trainees' excellent achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification
- ◆ employers' and trainees' poor knowledge of key skills
- ◆ missed opportunities to develop trainees' key skills at level 2

7. The training co-ordinator in the engineering department has set up a training group forum with some of the local employers whose modern apprentices attend

college, to help improve the co-ordination of the training and assessment of trainees at level 3. Meetings of the group are held in the companies. This forum has encouraged the college to train one member of staff to become a fully qualified work-based assessor, and one another member of staff was due to achieve this qualification in the month of inspection. A further member of staff has volunteered for assessor training. The forum has also produced a bank of learning packages to help with specialist training. Each new company has been asked to develop new packages that relate to its own particular area of mechanical engineering. Members can also contact each other when their company cannot provide training in a particular skill required by a trainee, to find out whether another company can provide this. All members are new to level 3 training, and they give each other encouragement. The qualified workplace assessor has, of his own initiative, produced a feedback and action sheet that is completed after a trainee's progress review. The training co-ordinator does not keep a copy of this. The assessor who was completing work for his qualification has produced exceptionally comprehensive assessment plans for the trainees and these focus on the trainees' individual responsibilities for initiating their assessment.

GOOD PRACTICE

After initial testing, a dyslexic trainee was found to need additional support. He turned down having a person in the class to help him. He goes to the support centre each week where he receives help with assignments and homework. He is given a full set of notes after classes. There is an extra time allowance for his exams and he is allowed a reader. In addition, he is to be provided with a computer and appropriate software. He is pleased with the help he receives and is doing very well at work. He is at present on the point of achieving level 2 only a little later than others in the group.

8. Staff in the school use a wide range of teaching and learning strategies. These include presentations by the lecturer, training activities the trainees carry out on their own, learning packages the trainees work through in groups, and assignments. In addition help and support are available to trainees. Workshops are spacious. Though some of it is dated, equipment is good and fit for its purpose. All the trainees interviewed praised their level 2 training.

9. The welding programme has attracted more trainees since it was made more practical. Modern apprentices may now take NVQ units in welding. Both trainees and employers expressed their enthusiasm for, and appreciation of, the welding programme.

10. Training programmes have been tailored to meet the needs of both employers and trainees. For example a trainee from a plastics packaging company has started training at level 3 and is working towards a higher national certificate in polymer technology. There is no NVQ at level 3 which covers injection moulding, but the college has found a suitable alternative qualification trainees can take. A trainee at a railway preservation company was required by his job to acquire gas-cutting skills. His programme was modified so that he could attend college at appropriate times to learn the gas cutting skills, and gain an appropriate qualification. All but one of the trainees on the first year of the production engineering programme were identified as needing extra help in mathematics and science and this has been provided for them.

11. Trainees' achievement rates at NVQ level 2 are excellent so far at 100 per cent. Trainees achieve their qualification within an appropriate timescale. In 1997/98, the retention rate for modern apprentices was 80 per cent. The retention rate in the following year was adversely affected by the closure of a local company providing apprenticeships.

12. The training co-ordinator carries out assessment at NVQ level 3 on employers' premises where no assessor is available. There are plans to provide more assessors in the workplace in order that the training co-ordinator may revert to his main role of internal verifier. Witness testimonies to trainees' competence do not include the name, address and telephone number of the witness, in accordance with awarding body requirements. Reviews of trainees' progress take place regularly. There is insufficient target setting in the reviews.

13. Both employers and trainees have little knowledge of key skills. Key skills training is now being introduced at level 3. A number of trainees are well into their level 3 programme without having received any key skills training. Trainees have received no skills training at level 2.

Business administration

Grade 3

14. At the first inspection, there were 16 trainees in this occupational area. Following inspection, the college decided not to increase the number of trainees until it had improved the standard of training. Currently, there are eight trainees undertaking NVQs in business administration at levels 2 or 3. Five of these are on advanced modern apprenticeships and three are on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes. All trainees are employed, three by local firms, and five by departments of the college. Two of the trainees are men. None are from minority ethnic groups, and none have a disability. Trainees attend SCAT one day each week for off-the-job training, where they are taught as a discrete group. The day is divided into three sessions: one for developing their portfolio of evidence for the NVQ, one for key skills work and one for information-technology training. There is one experienced and qualified trainer/assessor, who has recently been employed part time by the college. The assessor also conducts progress reviews with trainees and their supervisors in the workplace every 12 weeks. Two other trainers carry out key skills training and assessment and information-technology training. Over the past three years, the college has had a retention rate of 50 per cent across both programmes. Of the 20 trainees who have started in this period, 10 have left before completing their programmes.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ failure to make key skills training an integral part of the programme
- ◆ insufficient use of work-based evidence
- ◆ trainees' slow progress in achieving NVQs
- ◆ out-of-date computers
- ◆ insufficient rigour in assessment and verification

14. Only two of these have been satisfactorily addressed: out-of-date computers and insufficient rigour in assessment and verification. After the first inspection, the college reviewed its information-technology resources and provided new

computers for its business administration suite. These have up-to-date software and access to the Internet. The college has reviewed and improved its internal verification and this is now satisfactory. Sampling of portfolios takes place at intervals during the programme and observations are conducted of assessments. The internal verifier meets regularly with assessors and gives good advice and guidance on the quality of assessments, although these meetings are not fully recorded. The internal verifier works closely with the new assessor to give additional support and guidance on assessment. The assessor plans assessments together with trainees and obtains agreement from their supervisors. She clearly records the outcomes of assessment and gives good feedback to trainees.

15. In preparation for reinspection, the college produced a report setting out details of the progress it had made towards implementing its action plan, together with a short self-assessment report for this occupational area. The self-assessment report was accurate in its identification of weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with three of the strengths identified, but thought two others were no more than standard practice. Although some very recent progress has been made, three of the weaknesses identified at the first inspection have not yet been adequately addressed. The college has maintained its strengths from the first inspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ opportunities to work towards a wide range of additional qualifications
- ◆ good involvement of employers in training programmes
- ◆ flexible use of resources for off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little integration of key skills with the NVQ programme
- ◆ insufficient use of work-based evidence
- ◆ slow progress by trainees

16. All trainees undertake useful additional qualifications during the course of their programme. These include certificates in various aspects of information technology, which exceed the requirements of trainees' programmes. In addition, trainees have the opportunity to take up free places on all the other courses which the college offers. This is part of the college's student-development programme.

17. Trainees are well matched to work placements and receive a high level of support from employers. Trainees are visited in their workplace every 12 weeks for formal progress reviews, which are conducted with the full involvement of their supervisor. These are well planned and supervisors make time to attend these meetings, which they consider an essential part of the programme. The assessor works closely with employers to ensure that the tasks trainees carry out in the

workplace enable them to cover all the competencies required for their NVQ. The assessor also ensures that employers understand the scope of the off-the-job training carried out at the college. Supervisors are issued with a useful, but slightly cumbersome, file containing information about the programme. This contains, among other things, the trainee's individual training plan, copies of progress-review records, details of the NVQ programme requirements and guidelines for assessment. Supervisors of trainees working within the college also attended a recent meeting, with their trainees, at which they discussed recent and proposed improvements to the programme.

18. Off-the-job training is provided in the college's business administration suite, which consists of a spacious, multifunctional training room equipped with 15 computers along each side of a central working area. This enables trainees to work flexibly and undertake a variety of individual tasks and group activities under the guidance of the trainer/assessor. Training sessions are well structured and incorporate individual and group training. There is a comprehensive range of textbooks and learning materials. The training office is next to the training room. Here trainees can undertake real work and practise skills which they can then use in their workplaces. In addition to the administration suite, trainees have access to a newly developed learning centre, which houses 40 computers. Here they have the use of various computer-based interactive learning packages and access to the Internet.

19. The head of division is currently reviewing training in key skills within NVQ programmes, and devising systems to improve the integration of these. All trainees have recently undergone an assessment of their current abilities and their training needs for key skills. To facilitate integration of key skills with the NVQ, the head of division has developed a matrix, which points to the relevant NVQ units where evidence which also meets key skills criteria can be found. She has given guidance to the key skills trainer on how to make projects relevant to individual trainees' workplaces. She has also directed trainers to consider trainees' evidence from their NVQ work or their workplace for the purposes of proving competence in key skills, before setting additional project work. In this way, trainees will be able to make use of work already carried out for their NVQ and also be able to relate key skills to the tasks they carry out in the workplace. However, these guidelines have not yet been put into practice with all trainees. The key skills tutor has given guidance to some trainees on the evidence which they can use for key skills from their NVQ. Other trainees are unsure what is required of them and have not yet received guidance. All trainees have recently completed their application of number key skill and submitted it for assessment. The work which trainees undertook for this was based on an assignment which had no relevance to their NVQ programme or workplace. Only one trainee has so far produced key skills work which relates to the NVQ and the workplace. All trainees are undertaking training on information technology which could readily be used for key skills. Only one trainee has been guided to identify this evidence and submit it for key skills accreditation. Some staff have a very poor understanding of key skills and are, therefore, unable to advise trainees on how to cross-reference evidence from their NVQ to the key skills. Nor can they discuss the requirements of key skills

with workplace supervisors, which results in missed opportunities for assessment. All of this inhibits the integration of key skills with the NVQ programme.

20. At the first inspection, trainees were relying heavily on assignments for generating evidence for their NVQ, even though they had many opportunities to gather evidence in the workplace. Trainees' portfolios, produced over the past year, still have little evidence of work products, and contain disproportionate amounts of assignments and exercises completed by trainees during off-the-job training days. Little use is made of witness testimonies from workplace supervisors. The new assessor and the internal verifier have recognised the need to increase the amount of work-based evidence and within the past few weeks have started to guide trainees to identify relevant evidence from tasks undertaken at work. The assessor has also started to conduct regular observational assessments of trainees carrying out tasks in their workplace and time is set aside for the assessor to continue with this. However, the internal verifier does not have a system for monitoring the amount of observational assessments undertaken, to ensure that all trainees are receiving good opportunities for assessment in the workplace. There are no work-based assessors for this occupational area.

21. Trainees are still making slow progress towards their NVQ and key skills. This was identified as a weakness at the first inspection and an action plan was devised to set more demanding targets with trainees. However, this has not been addressed until very recently. The new assessor now agrees demanding short-term targets with each trainee during off-the-job training, typically completion of an identified element or unit within the following two to three weeks. She gives clear advice and guidance on what each trainee needs to do to complete this work. Trainees are now beginning to progress more quickly and all have stretching, but achievable, targets for completion of their NVQ. The college has recently purchased a customised computerised monitoring system, which will record progress of all students at the college, including modern apprentices. This is a sophisticated system, from which course managers will be able to access useful reports of trainees' progress, either individually or as groups. At the time of reinspection, data were being entered to include all current modern apprentices in the system. Achievement rates are low across both programmes. In the past three years, only one trainee has achieved the advanced modern apprenticeship framework. No trainee has achieved the foundation modern apprenticeship framework. Of 20 trainees who have started over the past three years, six have achieved the level 2 NVQ and only one has achieved the level 3 NVQ. Four trainees are still working towards level 2 and four are working towards level 3. Trainees have been taking 18 months to achieve their level 2 NVQ, which is an excessive length of time for this programme. Two trainees have achieved their NVQ within the course of one college year recently. Only one trainee has achieved the key skills qualification in the past three years. Some trainees have been on programme for over 18 months and have not had any of their key skills units assessed yet.

Hair & beauty

Grade 2

22. There are 29 trainees on hairdressing programmes. Twenty-two are working towards NVQs in hairdressing at level 2, and six at level 3. Twelve of them are modern apprentices, 14 are national trainees, and two are on other youth training programmes. There is one New Deal client on the full-time education and training option; all other trainees are employed in hairdressing salons. They attend the college on one day each week for off-the-job training, which consists of both practical and theory training. Assessment takes place mainly during off-the-job training, and very few assessments are carried out in salon placements. The number of trainees has increased steadily over the past three years. Achievement rates are good; 85 per cent of all leavers during 1998/99 obtained their qualifications. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses but considered that some of the latter had been understated. They found weaknesses the college had not identified. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ involvement of programme manager, trainee and employer in workplace induction and progress reviews
- ◆ well-resourced salons for off-the-job training
- ◆ effective integration of key skills training into all programmes
- ◆ trainees' good achievement and retention rates
- ◆ rigorous internal verification system leading to development of good assessment practice

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees keep a log of all practical activities carried out either in the college or in their salons. This ensures that both employers and assessors are aware of training activities undertaken, even when they are not assessed.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ insufficient flexibility to allow some trainees to achieve their qualification sooner

23. Trainees are recruited either through the careers service or by direct referral from employers. An initial interview takes place to ensure that trainees are suitably employed prior to joining the programme. The programme manager, who co-ordinates the programme, visits the trainees in their workplace to carry out an induction which also involves the employer. This is followed by a comprehensive occupational induction into the programme, including an initial assessment of trainees' basic skills. The induction covers employment, attendance, health and safety, tools and equipment, NVQ units and assessment, ground rules and preferred learning styles. It is followed by questionnaires that trainees are asked to answer as a means of strengthening their understanding of induction content. There is no initial assessment of trainees' key skills. Trainees are placed on

programmes that are suitable for them in the light of their previous qualifications, their own aspirations and the requirements of employers. Trainees fully understand the scope of their programmes, NVQ assessment procedures and key skills requirements.

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are involved in their own assessment planning by completing a consultation sheet for each client. This encourages them to identify the NVQ units being covered and the methods of assessment being used.

24. The programme manager teaches trainees at the college. Key skills training is provided by specialist tutors. The college has one large and one smaller hairdressing salon, serviced by a client reception area, and a general teaching room, dispensary and laundry facilities. Although the smaller salon can be cramped on occasions, the accommodation contains equipment to a commercial standard. Additional technician staff assist in the salons. There is an extensive selection of hairdressing materials for trainees' use in practical sessions, and a range of aftercare products for retailing to clients. A receptionist manages an effective appointments system for clients. Trainees assist on reception as required, on a rota basis, and have access to a computerised till and database which provide the opportunity for them to generate evidence of their acquisition of the key skill of information technology. The salons are busy and attract a broad range of clients. The treatment that clients require determines to which trainee they are allocated, in order that trainees acquire the full range of NVQ competencies. There are varied training and assessment activities in the practical sessions and work reaches a good commercial standard of work, especially at level 3. Trainees benefit from occasional seminars and workshops run by manufacturers, but they do not have the opportunity to participate in any competitions.

25. Practical assessment planning takes place prior to trainees working on each client. The assessment plan is combined with a client consultation sheet to form a single pre-assessment process. Trainees receive both verbal and written feedback on their performance in all written and practical assessments. They also receive a workbook designed to log any training activity that they undertake, either in the on- or off-the-job training, even if it is not necessarily assessed. There are rigorous internal verification systems. These include the checking of the quality of all practical and written assessments. Written feedback is provided to each assessor with the aim of ensuring the development of sound and standardised assessment practice. Trainees are regularly consulted about the quality of training and assessment.

26. Theory lessons are stimulating. Trainees respond to well-phrased questions and they engage in relevant discussion. Level 3 trainees benefit from additional tutorial sessions in which the programme manager provides help and support to individuals or small groups. Key skills are well integrated into all programmes. Vocationally relevant assignments are used to enable trainees to produce valid evidence of the acquisition of key skills. Additional materials are also included to enable trainees to provide evidence they cannot obtain in the salons. Separate key skills sessions are included in the off-the-job training which consist of either formal training provided by specialist tutors, or help with assignments and portfolio building by the programme manager. The key skills work packs are relevant to hairdressing activities and have a clear vocational context.

27. Staff from the learning support unit identify trainees' needs for additional help with their learning on the basis of trainees' performance in initial tests, and they advise the programme manager of these. Trainees in need of help are contacted confidentially, and offered support. The type of support varies according to trainees' individual needs and includes help with numeracy, written work and IT skills.

28. On-the-job training is provided in the trainees' workplaces. Some employers, who provide structured on-the-job training in the salons, have expressed concern about the lack of flexibility in arranging off-the-job training. Some trainees are more advanced in their practical skills than others, and the on- and off-the-job training are not effectively co-ordinated to enable trainees, where appropriate, to take the qualifications sooner. Some employers have expressed an interest in carrying out work-based assessment themselves in order to accelerate trainees' progress. The college has not yet entered into any discussion with employers on ways of enabling them to become assessors. The programme manager reports to employers on trainees' progress after visiting the trainees in their salons to carry out the twelve-weekly reviews of their progress. Although the programme manager assesses some trainees' work in their salons, much of the trainees' daily work activity is not assessed.

29. Trainees may join the programme at any time but most are recruited at the start of the college's academic year. Opportunities to assess trainees in the workplace are missed. The training programme is not flexibly arranged to meet the needs of trainees who are capable of progressing at a faster rate. All trainees, irrespective of their aptitude and ability, take almost twenty-four months to achieve an NVQ at level 2. The modern apprentices attend the college for a further twelve months for off-the-job training at NVQ level 3. There is little work-based assessment in either the level 2 or level 3 programmes. Some trainees have worked in salons prior to joining their programmes and, although this is acknowledged, trainees' prior learning or experience is not accredited or taken into account in individual training plans. For example, some trainees have had experience of working in salons on Saturdays when they were at school or of working full-time prior to joining the programme. Such trainees are given the same programme as those without any previous experience.

30. Trainees' retention rates are good. Trainees expressed satisfaction with their programmes and the level of support they receive from the college staff. Eighty per cent of trainees who leave the programme fulfil the terms of their framework. They achieve success in key skills and obtain additional NVQ units such as make up and manicure or men's hairdressing. Most remain in employment with their salons.



GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

31. The college and its staff are committed to upholding and promoting equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity is promoted through the college charter, the student handbook, and the administrative and curriculum structure. A three-year project with a national children's charity is raising awareness of equal opportunities and the importance of widening participation of under-represented groups, among governors, managers and staff.

32. The college encourages the employment of people with disabilities and advertises all vacancies accordingly. Currently, 0.87 per cent of staff have a disability and 1.25 per cent are from a minority ethnic group. Forty-eight per cent of the senior management, 54 per cent of heads of school and 64 per cent of support staff managers are women. Staff receive equal opportunities training and workshops are regularly held on issues such as disability support, managing aggressive behaviour, mental health awareness and sign language.

33. There are no trainees from minority ethnic groups but only 0.05 per cent of the population in the region is from such groups. Fifty-four per cent of trainees are male and 46 per cent are female. In the population of the region, 51.8 per cent of males and 48.2 per cent of females are eligible for youth training. The respective numbers of male and female trainees on programmes are as follows: business administration: three males and 12 females; engineering: 15 males, no females; hairdressing: 28 females. Sixty per cent of the trainees on modern apprenticeship programmes at the college are male, and 40 per cent are female. The proportion of trainees with disabilities is 2.52 per cent. The proportion of persons in the region who have disabilities is 3 per cent.

34. Inspectors agreed with all the strengths and with some of the weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report. Inspectors found a weakness in the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the promotion of equal opportunities, which the college had not identified. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open access for all trainees
- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ effective and clear procedures to protect staff and trainees against discrimination and harassment
- ◆ effective complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no updating of equal opportunities policy since 1994

- ◆ insufficient monitoring or evaluation of the effectiveness of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no formal checking on employers' commitment to equal opportunities

35. The college has a policy of inclusive learning which means that any trainees with additional support needs can join mainstream college courses and receive appropriate support. The college is currently working in partnership with a range of voluntary agencies on a project to help disadvantaged young people who underachieve. Another project supports a student advocate who is able to represent any trainee on a range of issues. All trainees have access to all facilities and support offered by the college and can join the student union. Two youth trainees have received support for hearing impairment and dyslexia in the last few months.

GOOD PRACTICE

Staff awareness of events such as World AIDS Day is raised through the college's email system and screen savers.

36. The culture of equal opportunities permeates the college and all staff subscribe to it. Equal opportunities is promoted at careers events and by the programme managers who recruit and induct the trainees. Awareness raising of such issues as AIDS and mental health issues is promoted by high profile displays in key areas of the college. Marketing, information and guidance materials reflect the college's policy of open access to all trainees with learning difficulties. A disability pack is available at key locations in the college, which includes a leaflet outlining the services available. Information is available for sight-impaired trainees on an audio tape which is supplied in an envelope addressed in Braille. Trainees requiring additional information are directed to a support worker. The college prospectus is illustrated with non-stereotypical images, such as those of a male fashion student and a disabled catering trainee. However, some leaflets are in small print and information about learning support available is not always easy to find within large amounts of text. There is no college leaflet aimed at those who want to become youth trainees. The college has sought to make potential trainees aware of the information, guidance and careers advice available to them, by writing to them individually. This approach has met with a positive response.

GOOD PRACTICE

An employer used the minimum wage requirement as a reason for dismissing a trainee with a disability. The trainee received advice and counselling from the learning centre. The programme manager was able to arrange for the employer to provide the trainee with a special telephone to enable her to carry out her job more effectively. Relations with the employer improved and he agreed to pay the trainee the minimum wage.

37. There are policies and procedures to protect staff and trainees against discrimination and harassment. The procedures clearly explain what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and how to use the complaints and grievance procedures. Trainees receive this information at induction and also in the student handbook. Trainees feel protected and are clear about how to resolve issues at work or in college.

38. The complaints procedure specifies that an acknowledgement of any complaint must be sent within five days. The complaint must be investigated within 10 days and a reply sent to the complainant. Complaints are recorded on computer. Regular analysis is made of types of complaints, including those concerned with equal opportunities. Action plans are drawn up to address issues arising from complaints.

39. The college equal opportunities policy was written in 1994 and has not been updated since then. It makes no reference to current legislation.

40. SCAT has recently given employers a pack which includes the college equal opportunities policy and the modern apprenticeship framework and clearly outlines employers' responsibility for equal opportunity. However, there is no mention of equal opportunities in employers' contracts. There is an implicit understanding that employers will follow the college's good practice in upholding equal opportunities. There are, however, no formal arrangements whereby the college checks that employers promote equality of opportunity and uphold it in the workplace for all trainees.

41. No member of staff has central responsibility for co-ordinating equal opportunities practices and procedures. Last year a cross-college focus group discussed equal opportunities and drew up an action plan. This has yet to be implemented. The focus group has now been disbanded and there is no forum where issues related to equal opportunities can be discussed by representatives across the college, to bring about beneficial change. There is insufficient formal monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy within the various areas of the college and there is no evaluation of its effectiveness. Speedy and unequivocal action is taken, however, when problems arise under disciplinary procedures.

Trainee support

Grade 2

42. All trainees are selected following a recruitment and selection interview. They are referred either by the careers service or by employers. The interview and selection procedure is clearly specified in writing. Trainees are asked to list their relevant qualifications on a trainee application form and college student record. They are encouraged to seek employment in a work placement before signing up for the programme. There is little identification or accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience. Once placed with an employer, trainees receive a college induction that includes an initial assessment of basic skills. Trainees' progress is monitored and reviewed every twelve weeks by an occupational programme manager. The college provides a range of facilities and trainees who need it can receive a high level of additional learning support. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report. They considered some of the strengths, however, to be no more than normal practice and they found one weakness the college had not identified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-recorded individual additional support for trainees
- ◆ comprehensive occupational induction
- ◆ strong links between programme managers and the college's individual learning support unit
- ◆ extensive range of learning support services for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little target setting in some trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ no initial assessment of trainees' key skills or occupational skills
- ◆ little accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience

GOOD PRACTICE

The college is currently working with a national children's charity on a project aimed at widening participation of under-represented groups. Part of the project involved the appointment of a student advocate who represents any student or trainee on issues affecting their training. This has helped to raise equal opportunities awareness among staff, managers and governors. The advocate himself is blind.

43. Trainees receive advice and guidance about career routes and programmes either from the college's student and customer service advisors, or from an occupational subject specialist. On entry, all trainees receive an occupational selection interview with a subject specialist who informs trainees of available programmes and suitable alternatives to them. Trainees are encouraged to seek employment before joining the programme and advice and guidance are provided for those not in employment. Previous qualifications, experience and the trainee's aspirations are discussed in the initial interview. Although the college has procedures for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning, little use is made of these in the work-based training programmes.

44. Once trainees are employed, the occupational programme manager visits them in their workplaces to carry out workplace induction for both the trainee and the employer. This familiarises both the trainee and employer with the programme requirements and helps the trainee to settle into the workplace.

45. On their first day of off-the-job training at the college, trainees undertake an induction to their occupational programme with their programme manager. The induction programme includes information on the occupational area, health and safety requirements, the target NVQ and assessment process, rules and regulations and the programme framework. Trainees also attend a general college induction for students and during this they are informed of college policies and procedures affecting students, including those for equal opportunities, complaints and grievances. They also find out about learning support services and general facilities available to all students.

46. Training in key skills is a requirement of both the national traineeship and modern apprenticeship programmes. There is no initial assessment of trainees' key skills or occupational skills and trainees are recruited to programmes before they have been initially assessed. Trainees are asked about their prior learning and experience. Little account, however, is taken of trainees' prior learning and experience in their individual training plans. The choice of a training programme for individual trainees is determined by their qualification and aspirations and employers' requirements. The Basic Skills Agency test is used to identify trainees' learning support needs and is administered by the learning support unit staff. Programme managers and the trainees are made aware of the test results. Trainees who require it, are offered specialist support and their programme manager is notified accordingly.

47. Trainees receive good help and assistance from the college's learning support unit. Trainees may obtain this support confidentially, if necessary, at any time. The

learning support unit is staffed by a team of trained support workers, including specialists in dyslexia, mental health, visual impairment, hardness of hearing, problems associated with deafness, counselling, disengaged young people, information technology, educational support and specific learning difficulties. The support workers collaborate to provide the most appropriate support to enable trainees to achieve their learning goals. There are large drop-in learning centres conveniently situated on site. All trainees are aware, and many make regular use, of them. They are well equipped with communal study areas, library, private study areas and IT facilities.

48. The unit also provides a key skills teaching service for occupational programmes, and there are good links between the occupational programme managers and the support unit staff. There are many well-recorded examples of trainees in all occupational areas receiving a range of additional support to help them achieve their qualifications. This support is recorded on an individual learning plan, a copy of which is provided for the relevant programme manager. Trainees receive an individual and confidential action plan after each support session.

49. Trainees say they receive a good support from programme managers. The programme managers carry out reviews of trainees' progress every twelve weeks in the trainees' workplaces. Employers are invited to contribute to these. There are inconsistencies in the way trainees' progress towards achieving the NVQ is written up in the records of the reviews. Recently, however, the recording of the reviews has improved. Trainees are now set clear targets during their reviews. Records show that trainees receive good pastoral support as part of the review process.

50. All programmes include tutorials. There are, however, inconsistencies in the extent to which tutorials are implemented across occupational areas and in programmes within the same area. For instance, on hairdressing programmes at level 3, there are planned group weekly tutorial sessions but there is none at level 2. In administration, tutorial sessions are an integral feature of the off-the-job workshops. In general, however, trainees report that they receive good support, individually and as members of groups. Much of this support occurs spontaneously, irrespective of any tutorial system.

51. Trainees can use all the services available to mainstream students. This includes a college bus service from outlying areas, the college library, information technology and learning support drop-in centres, and various social and recreational facilities. Counselling, advocacy, chaplaincy and welfare advisory services are available.

52. There are no standard arrangements for helping trainees in financial difficulties to purchase materials for their college courses but each case is dealt with sympathetically on its merits. There is, however, no procedure for informing New Deal clients of their entitlement to financial help in buying materials. The college's New Deal co-ordinator maintains ensure good liaison between the TEC, the tutors and the New Deal personal advisors at Employment Services. At the

time of inspection, however, Employment Services were undergoing internal re-organisation and the New Deal personal advisors were less available than usual.

Management of training

Grade 3

53. The executive and 25 managers constitute the college management team. Sixteen heads of school have delegated budgets and are responsible for students and trainees, staff and provision in specific curriculum areas. In addition, nine cross-college managers provide professional services covering finance, quality, estates, curriculum and student entitlements, respectively. Significant resources have been invested in management development. In the 1997-1998-contract year, the college set up its own managing agency to manage the contract for TEC-funded provision. The managing agency team consists of the director of business development, the managing agency contract manager, the New Deal co-ordinator and an administrative assistant. The managing agent contract manager liaises with Somerset TEC, disseminates information to staff, and monitors the quality of training on TEC-funded programmes. Heads of schools and training co-ordinators facilitate the dissemination of this information. The agency is responsible for the associated financial claims. Each school can retain the income it generates. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. They found weaknesses in the management of key skills training, however, which the college had failed to identify. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ delegated budgets for managers
- ◆ good communication channels
- ◆ initial training for teaching staff and continuous staff development
- ◆ consistent point of contact for employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of key skills training across occupational areas
- ◆ no overall system for providing instant information on trainees' progress and achievements
- ◆ little use of performance data

54. School managers have delegated budgets. These give the managers total control of movement of income across the programme areas and the ability to finance purchases as required. Additionally, the managers have control of part-time pay, and non-pay expenditure relating to consumables and equipment. They are able to finance training leading to additional qualifications over and above those required for a particular programme.

55. Managers have an open style of management. They are accessible and encourage all staff to become involved in decision making. The management team has been involved in a management development programme on a weekly basis for two years. Staff at school level take part in management and administration through their contributions to group team meetings, quality review boards and the school development plans. Staff clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. There are good lines of communication. Staff are kept up to date with current developments in the college. There is a weekly news sheet called Sc@facts which is published on the college's intranet and in paper-based form. Part-time staff are contacted by post when necessary. Information from senior management meetings is cascaded downwards. Trainees are aware of the lines of communication open to them. The college intranet is widely used as a means of sharing information rapidly.

56. On joining the college, all staff undergo a basic manual handling course and a one-day course on working safely. Managers, however undertake a four-day course on managing safety. Lecturers, whether full-time or part-time, are given initial training by one of three tutors in 'teaching excellence'. New training co-ordinators are given a further half-day health and safety course. Continuous staff development is encouraged. Staff development priorities are determined at programme team meetings and staff meetings, quality review board meetings and ultimately through the school development plan. One per cent of the college payroll is set aside for staff development.

57. A staff appraisal system was introduced across the whole college in September 1999, after having been piloted in five areas for a year. Staff are being appraised in order of seniority. At the time of inspection, all staff down to middle managers had been appraised.

58. Training co-ordinators are occupationally qualified and are full members of the college's teaching staff. They are responsible for recruiting trainees, finding them work placements, negotiating their training plans, carrying out progress reviews, and monitoring compliance with health and safety regulations. Training co-ordinators are also responsible for managing on- and off-the-job training and for ensuring their co-ordination. They serve as a link between employers and trainees and offer help and support when problems arise.

59. The management of key skills training across the college has been weak. In some occupational areas, trainees have received little instruction in key skills. The good practice in one area has not been used as a model for other areas. A significant number of trainees fail to complete their modern apprenticeships successfully because they do not achieve certification in key skills at level 3. The college has a centralised resource to help schools provide key skills training. The college intends to offer instruction in key skills to all students from the beginning of the next academic year. However, some schools have not all taken advantage of this centralised resource, and management has not taken action to ensure that they do.

60. There is no overall monitoring system whereby management can inform itself of the present state of progress of all trainees. Information on trainees' progress, achievements and retention is not easily available on a continuous basis during the year and is not taken into account in planning ways of improving provision. Currently, such information is more readily available at the end of each academic year. The college is purchasing a computer package to facilitate the continuous monitoring of trainees' performance. Two members of the management of training team have received training on how to use this package.

61. The college managing agency has not established clear performance indicators. It has not set targets for trainees' achievement and retention rates. To date, it has proved difficult to arrange meetings of all staff involved in training. Meetings of staff in some schools have taken place. The training team acknowledges this lack of meetings of all training staff as a weakness, and steps are being taken to rectify it.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

62. The college's overall system of quality assurance now covers the TEC-funded trainees' training. It focuses on self-assessment. It incorporates course reviews, and is supplemented by the work of an internal review team. It also relies on graded observations of the quality of training. Part-time trainers are subject to review in the same way as full-time staff. The responsibility for the quality of the training programmes rests with the curriculum divisions of the college. The responsibility for complying with contractual requirements and adhering to administrative procedures rests with the contract manager for the TEC-funded trainees and New Deal clients. There is frequent, but informal, contact between the course teams and the contract manager. The arrangements satisfy the awarding bodies with which the college works. There is a college-wide approach to internal verification. The college meets the requirements of the TEC and of the consortium which awards the contracts for the New Deal clients. The college has carried out a substantial restructuring, and the new structure will make it easier for good practice to be shared across occupational areas, although it is too soon for this to have provided any benefit to trainees.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ unreliable overall quality assurance process
- ◆ ineffective systems for gathering trainees and employers' views
- ◆ some unsatisfactory internal verification practice
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment of training

63. The college has now strengthened and further developed its overall approach to quality assurance, and based it on self-assessment and action-planning. As the first cycle of this new arrangement is not yet complete, it is too soon to comment on its reliability, although the management structure has also been strengthened to

support self-assessment. The college's systems for gathering and using trainees and employers' views are still ineffective. Internal verification practice in the area which was previously inadequate is now satisfactory. The sections of the college's new self-assessment report which were produced in time for the reinspection, are rigorous and self-critical. The rest of the report is still in production. The section of the new self-assessment report on quality assurance identified four strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors considered that the strength of peer observation and review of teaching and learning was no more than normal practice for a college. They agreed with the strength of the internal review of courses, and considered the other two strengths more appropriate to other generic areas. They agreed with the weakness about the use of data, but did not find evidence to support the one about inconsistent monitoring arrangements for assessment and internal verification. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed internal peer review of individual programmes
- ◆ exhaustive quality assurance and auditing of procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few arrangements for feedback on quality of training
- ◆ slow progress in implementing action plans

64. Since the first inspection, the college has received external funding to set up and run internal reviews of its courses. A small team of middle and senior managers known as the raising standards support team, reviews selected programmes in detail, looking at the quality of the course management, support for students, internal verification and assessment processes, and students and employers' views of the course. Key skills are not included in the first cycle of the team's activity. The heads of division for programmes which are reviewed have a chance to comment on the accuracy of the report before it is finalised, and then have to produce an action plan to implement the recommendations. The team which carried out the original review is responsible for monitoring the progress of the action plan, and will conduct follow-up visits. This team was set up in March 2000, but has carried out reviews in only two programme areas so far. The first area was business studies, and one of the programmes selected, was the business administration NVQ programme for the TEC-funded trainees, because of the reinspection being due. It identified serious shortcomings, similar to many of those, which were found by inspectors at both the first inspection and the reinspection. At the time of the reinspection, the action plan was not yet due and the report had not been finalised, but the draft action plan was discussed at a course team meeting. Progress on some of the action points had been made in the period since the production of the draft report in December, including some changes which had taken place in the week before inspection.

65. The college has produced and kept up to date, a quality assurance manual, with detailed procedures for complying with the requirements of the TEC contract. There are regular internal audits to ensure that the procedures are being followed. Audits by the TEC are welcomed. In the short time since the appointment of the new contract manager, there have been three audits by the TEC, including one of quality. This was mainly concerned with procedural issues, but also identified weaknesses in the quality of some of the training programmes. The contract manager has produced an action plan to address the weaknesses, and works with the head of the relevant division to discuss measures to improve quality in the curriculum areas.

66. Feedback from trainees and employers, and data on trainees' achievements, are not used to provide information about the quality of the training programmes. The course-review system, which identifies areas for improvement from trainees' comments at the end of each academic year, is known to have weaknesses in its application to TEC-funded trainees. The team responsible for quality has made the decision to devise its own questionnaires to survey trainees and employers. It is also seeking feedback on the quality of the questionnaires themselves. Some employers and trainees have found the questionnaires hard to understand, and have failed to see the point of them. They do not ask questions about the quality of the training programme, or its relevance to the trainees or employers' needs. The response rate has been poor. Trainees generally do not think that they are asked for their views on their training programmes, although all were enjoying their programmes. In one programme area, the manager personally asks trainees for their views in a group discussion towards the end of each term, using a questionnaire she has devised herself. But even these trainees were not aware of having been asked for their views. There are posters around the college inviting readers to give their views on the college on a website, but any information from this about the views of TEC-funded trainees is not fed back to the relevant managers. Trainees and employers were happy with the face-to-face support they got from the college, but were unclear about the channels within the college for receiving their views on the training programmes. One employer had just been presented with changes to the arrangements for their training programme, which would seriously disadvantage the trainees' overall learning experience. The employer was unhappy with the changes, and with not having been consulted beforehand. The employer was not aware of any mechanism, other than the formal complaints procedure or unofficial discussion with their visiting internal verifier, for getting the issue reviewed or resolved. The arrangements for the employers' forum, which had been so successful at the time of the first inspection, have fallen into disuse since their original purpose of producing relevant training materials was achieved. The data on achievement were found to be unreliable, and had not been analysed or used to show areas of concern or of high achievement.

67. There has been only slow progress on implementing the TSC's and other action plans. The college has undergone substantial reorganisation, which has resulted in the capacity for radical improvements, but this has also meant that most managers are new to their current posts, and not yet fully aware of all the issues in their areas of responsibility. External changes, for example in requirements for the



assessment of key skills, have led to further delays in implementing improvements. The manager originally responsible for the action plan has since left the organisation, and many of the changes which have been taking place are more radical than those originally envisaged. However, 14 months after the first inspection, some of the serious weaknesses which were identified in both the areas which were found to be unsatisfactory, still exist.

68. The college sees the self-assessment process as the linchpin for its approach to quality assurance. All areas of the college are required to carry out a rigorous self-assessment each year. Because of the reorganisation and the changes to external funding arrangements, the college has decided to postpone the production of its current report to the summer. It produced short reports on the areas, which were to be reinspected by the TSC. These reports were self-critical and broadly accurate, although they did not identify all of the weaknesses, which were persisting from the first inspection.