



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 2001

Dudley Metropolitan
Borough Council
Youth Programme

SUMMARY

Trainees in business administration benefit from good work placements and good opportunities to gain employment with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. Off-the-job training is good. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are low and there is little work-based assessment. Training staff and workplace supervisors have a good awareness of equal opportunities, but opportunities are missed to reinforce trainees' understanding. The recruitment and induction of trainees are thorough. Trainees are well prepared for seeking employment. Individual learning plans are not used effectively and reviews of trainees' progress lack clear target-setting. Internal communication is good. However, co-ordination of on- and off-the-job learning is poor. Training agreements are not enforced with some workplace supervisors. The monitoring of quality assurance, both internally and with subcontractors, is inadequate. Self-assessment lacks rigour.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction
- ◆ well-structured and planned off-the-job learning
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good communication within the training team
- ◆ systematic use of surveys to gain feedback from trainees

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices
- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ failure to enforce training agreements with some workplace supervisors
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job learning
- ◆ weak management and monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ lack of rigour in self-assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (Dudley MBC) was established in 1974 to incorporate the former county borough of Dudley and the municipal boroughs of Halesowen and Stourbridge. The council has eight main departments and employs approximately 10,000 staff. The training and development section of the chief executive's department runs the youth training programme. Personnel services are also located within this department. The council has a contract with Dudley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for government-funded training. Training programmes have been offered for many years. All the trainees, except for one, are on work placements within departments of the council. Foundation modern apprentices are not employed at the start of their training. They are encouraged to apply for job vacancies as they occur during their training. All the advanced modern apprentices are employed. Three permanent and one temporary member of staff manage the training programme. Off-the-job training and assessment in administration, information technology and accounting are subcontracted to a local further education college. The council, which is a registered assessment centre, carries out additional training and assessment in customer service. There are 42 trainees on foundation modern apprenticeships and six on advanced modern apprenticeships, in administration, information technology and accounting. Eleven trainees are also following training in customer service leading to a national vocational qualification (NVQ) as an additional qualification. Three trainees are on engineering programmes in heating and ventilation, which are not reported on in this inspection.

2. The population of Dudley Borough is estimated to be 318,000 in 2001. There are approximately 8,500 businesses in the area. Twenty-nine per cent of businesses are involved in wholesaling and retailing, 19 per cent in manufacturing, 15 per cent in banking, finance and insurance, 9 per cent in public administration and health, 8 per cent in each of hotel and catering and other services, 7 per cent in construction and 1 per cent in industry. Eighty-nine per cent of businesses employ fewer than 25 staff. Only two businesses employ more than 200 staff. Manufacturing is still important. Many businesses which supply automotive components are located in the borough and the local crystal-glass industry produces over 50 per cent of the United Kingdom's output. Approximately 5 per cent of the population is from minority ethnic groups. The proportion ranges from over 70 per cent in some wards in Dudley and Stourbridge to less than 5 per cent in most parts of the borough. In November 2000, the unemployment rate was 4.9 per cent. This compares with 3.9 per cent in the West Midlands and 3.4 per cent nationally. In 2000, 48.4 per cent of school leavers achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above. This compares with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 1999, 61 per cent of school leavers entered full-time education, 14 per cent entered employment and 13 per cent entered government-funded training. Nine per cent had not yet decided which



route to follow and 3 per cent did not respond or had moved away. Fifty-two per cent of school leavers who entered employment entered jobs with no training.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Dudley MBC carried out its third self-assessment of its youth programme in May 2000, in preparation for the inspection. Previous self-assessment reports had been completed using a template. The most recent self-assessment report was produced by the manager in consultation with the trainers. The report was updated and its grades were raised in November 2000 on the advice of staff from Dudley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The report lacks rigour and does not clearly identify key strengths and weaknesses. In each section, many strengths are identified. A significant number of these do not relate to the aspect of training described or are normal practice. The action plan does not clearly specify timescales for action, or indicators of success in remedying identified weaknesses. It does not indicate timescales for monitoring progress in building on the strengths. The grading of the training is not accurate. Inspectors awarded three grades which were one grade lower, and two grades which were two grades lower than those contained in the self-assessment report.

4. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days with Dudley MBC's youth training section during February and March 2001. One occupational area, business administration, was inspected. Inspectors visited the council's premises where trainees are based and the subcontracted college. Interviews took place with 31 trainees and nine workplace supervisors. Inspectors also conducted 11 interviews with Dudley MBC's staff and six interviews with the subcontractor's staff. A wide range of documents was reviewed, including trainees' files, records of meetings, procedural manuals, policies and correspondence. Three learning sessions were observed and graded. Two assessments and three reviews of trainees' progress were observed.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		2	1			3
TOTAL	0	2	1	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

5. There are six advanced modern apprentices. Four are working towards accounting NVQs at levels 3 and 4 and two towards administration NVQs at level 3. There are 42 foundation modern apprentices. Thirty-six are working towards level 2 NVQs in administration. Eleven of these are following training in customer service leading to an additional qualification at NVQ level 2. Six are training in

information technology, working towards an NVQ at level 2. Eighteen of the foundation modern apprentices are employed. Off-the-job training for business administration, information technology and accounting is undertaken at the premises of a local subcontracted college. Most trainees attend for one day each week for lessons in theory, support in portfolio-building, word processing and the development of key skills. Three qualified trainers from Dudley MBC carry out some assessment of administration at NVQ level 2 in the workplace. The subcontractor's staff carry out some assessment of trainees in administration, information technology and accounting in the workplace. Training in customer service, provided through monthly workshops and learning sessions, is subcontracted to the council's NVQ assessment centre. Work-based assessment takes place every two months. Trainees are either on work placements or are employed within a range of departments of the council. Trainees in business administration change their work placement every six months. Information technology trainees are on 12-month work placements. The work placements are well established and are used by the youth training team on a yearly basis. The self-assessment report explains the way in which training is managed. Numerous strengths are identified, including many which are more appropriate to the generic areas. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with two strengths and one of the weaknesses and found additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good assessment for the customer service NVQ
- ◆ well-structured and planned off-the-job learning
- ◆ wide range of additional training undertaken
- ◆ good, varied work placements leading to employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little integration of key skills into training
- ◆ low achievement rates in business administration and information technology
- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ little adaptation of the learning programme to meet trainees' individual needs

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees in administration are provided with an adhesive label at the start of their programme giving the names of their assessors and the internal and external verifiers. They attach this to the cover of their portfolios for reference.

6. Some trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 in customer service in the second year of their foundation modern apprenticeship in administration. The subcontractor assesses trainees in the workplace every two months. Trainees attend a training centre for workshops and learning sessions each month. Trainees complete a detailed assessment plan each month when they are at the training centre. They use this to support recording of work-based evidence. Trainees receive sessions in theory, which comprise a variety of activities, ranging from written exercises to role-play. They are encouraged to include relevant evidence

from these sessions in their portfolios. All portfolios contain a wide variety of evidence for assessment, including many observations and evidence of oral and written answers to questions.

7. The trainer/assessors for administration, information technology and accounting all provide well-structured sessions in theory for the trainees. Detailed session plans are used. A good variety of learning resources and good planning documents are used. Every trainer/assessor records the progress of the trainees towards the qualification being followed. The resources available to trainees are of a good standard and trainees are encouraged to use other facilities which the subcontracted college has available. Most sessions are held in computer rooms, which gives trainees the opportunity to use the equipment to present their work to a high standard.

8. Foundation modern apprentices take word-processing examinations or NVQs at level 2 in customer service as an additional qualification. All accounting trainees take two accounting qualifications and Dudley MBC funds accounting trainees to continue their training to achieve the level 4 NVQ. All trainees undertake a learning programme as part of their first year with the council. This includes basic computing training at the council's information-technology training centre. The training provided is the same as that for other external and internal clients. Trainees also receive training in interview skills, which includes practice interviews by council managers. When trainees become employed, the wide variety of training offered by the council is available to them. This includes in-house training such as NVQ training and the opportunity to study for external professional qualifications. Trainees also receive additional training in health and safety and appraisal when they transfer to employment by the council.

9. Trainees are placed in all departments within the council, ranging from schools, the housing and property departments, information-technology services and financial services. Each workplace supervisor carries out a skills audit of the work placement to ensure it is at the right level for trainees and contains appropriate tasks. Trainees are involved in a wide range of activities. These include computer maintenance, data entry, contacting supply teachers over the telephone and receiving visitors. One trainee has been appointed to provide maternity cover and is responsible for departmental finance with supervisory responsibility for other members of staff. Currently 18 out of the 42 foundation modern apprentices are employed, with four becoming employed during March 2001 while still in the early months of their training.

10. One subcontractor provides all the theory sessions in key skills. During the first four months of the foundation modern apprenticeship, trainees prepare for external tests. After sitting the external tests, the trainees work on their key skills portfolios. These are mainly compiled from project work and evidence from simulated exercises. No assessment of key skills takes place in the workplace and trainees are not encouraged to use work-based activities as evidence of key skills for their portfolios.

11. Trainees in administration and accounting are assessed only infrequently in the workplace. Accounting trainees use very little work-based evidence in their portfolios and have not been observed in the workplace. The subcontractor's assessors have been allocated time to assess trainees in information technology in the workplace every two months, but this has not yet started. Dudley MBC's youth trainers observe and assess trainees in administration, but this is infrequent. Some observations check trainees' knowledge but do not assess their competence. The evidence from these observations is not recorded in the NVQ portfolio and the assessors are not registered with the awarding body.

12. The rates of achievement of targets on individual learning plans over the past three years by foundation modern apprentices in both information technology and administration, at 29 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, are low. To date, no trainees in accounting have completed their programmes. The rate of achievement of NVQs for foundation modern apprentices is 64 per cent in administration and 71 per cent in information technology. The training staff and workplace supervisors place greater emphasis on achieving NVQs than on achieving the apprenticeship framework.

13. All trainees in administration and information technology are given a workbook which explains in simple terms the performance criteria and knowledge requirements for the NVQ units. Within this booklet, there is a list of evidence with references to NVQ standards. Both assessors and trainees use this as a check list of evidence for the NVQ. Very little additional work-based evidence is used. Every trainee takes the same optional units and additional qualifications for administration and information technology, and every trainee in administration is required to take one higher-level key skill. Most trainees start with the council in September and are expected to achieve their main NVQ by the June of the following year. Staff and trainees perceive the length of the learning programme in terms of the academic year. Some trainees who start later in the academic year perceive that they have to complete their training in key skills and NVQ competencies at the same time as the other trainees. Arrangements have been made for trainees to attend the subcontracted college for additional support in key skills and NVQ training during the college's summer holiday period. Several trainees took up this offer during 2000.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. Dudley MBC's youth training programme uses the same equal opportunities policy and complaints and grievance procedures as the rest of the council. The equal opportunities policy is under revision and is currently awaiting the council's approval. This policy covers age, social background, disability, gender, race and sexuality. All staff and trainees are made aware of the policy and procedures at induction. Subcontractors sign an agreement to comply with current equal

opportunities legislation. Data on applicants' ethnicity, gender, and disabilities are collected and analysed. The training and development section of the council is represented on several local initiatives to promote equality of opportunity, including a TEC suppliers' subgroup. Inspectors considered that most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed that opportunities to reinforce equality of opportunity are missed and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good awareness of equal opportunities by trainers and workplace supervisors
- ◆ systematic monitoring of the recruitment of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities to reinforce equal opportunities
- ◆ underdeveloped use of data on equal opportunities

15. Dudley MBC is currently reviewing its equal opportunities policies. While this review is nearing completion, staff involved in youth training have adapted the policies and procedures to enable them to be more easily understood by trainees. This has led to trainees being more aware of their rights and responsibilities within the learning programme. The council's equal opportunities officer checks the adapted versions of the policies. This happens annually, and the most recent revision took place in January 2001. A revised disciplinary procedure, which covers all trainees and employees, has recently been introduced, following a comprehensive review. Most training staff and workplace supervisors have attended a range of internal courses covering equal opportunities issues. Trainees also have access to these courses where a need is identified either through their workplace supervisor or the training team. Courses attended include racism awareness, disability awareness, disability matters in employment and equal opportunities. Managers are required to attend courses on recruitment and selection. Trainees benefit from managers' experience by taking part in practice interviews as part of their preparation for work.

16. There is systematic monitoring of trainees' applications in terms of ethnicity. This has taken place over the past three years. Data are produced and analysed. Trends are established and reasons are identified for trainees from particular ethnic groups not taking up places offered. For example, reasons for a high drop-out rate of applicants from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds have been identified. The data show that the proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is higher than that in the local population, which is 5.1 per cent. In 1998-99 and 1999-2000, 9 per cent of foundation modern apprentices were from minority ethnic backgrounds. This has risen to 16 per cent in 2000-01. In 1998-99, 13 per cent of advanced modern apprentices were from minority ethnic groups, but no trainees were recruited from minority ethnic groups in 2000-01.

17. Opportunities to reinforce equal opportunities during the learning programmes are missed. The review of trainees' progress does not specifically cover issues such as harassment, bullying and other equal opportunities matters. These issues are not highlighted in the paperwork for the progress review. All trainees receive a learning journal at induction in which to record their experiences of work placements and college. There is no mention of equal opportunities in this booklet. Workplace supervisors have a booklet which provides guidance on their role and responsibilities. There is no reference to the equal opportunities policy in this. However, a brief section outlines the disciplinary and grievance procedures.

18. Little systematic use is made of the equal opportunities data available from the management-information system. Analysis of data on recruitment has been carried out consistently over the years. However, specific action has not been taken to address the issues identified, including gender imbalances. For example, during the previous three years, 80 per cent of those recruited to programmes in information technology have been men, but only 20 per cent of those recruited to programmes in administration. A reversal of the gender imbalance has been noted from applications received so far in 2000-01. Reasons for this have not yet been determined. There is little mention of equal opportunities in meetings of workplace supervisors, training staff and trainees. There are inconsistencies in subcontractual agreements. The contract requires compliance with equal opportunities legislation. However, the monthly check list completed by training staff states that it is Dudley MBC's policy which should be complied with.

Trainee support

Grade 3

19. The youth training programme is promoted through the local careers service, in schools and through the TEC. Many trainees find out about the programme through family contacts or through the recommendation of previous trainees. Applicants' suitability for the programme is established at an initial interview. Previous work experience and achievements are also discussed at the assessment day. A five-day residential course, which includes training for the development of team skills and confidence building, takes place at one of the council's centres in a nearby town. Regular progress reviews are conducted by the training staff, college trainers, and assessors from the internal NVQ assessment centre. All trainees receive a learning journal to complete during their work placement. All have access to advice and guidance from Dudley MBC's staff and basic skills support from the subcontracted college. Inspectors agreed that induction was a strength and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good individual support
- ◆ well-structured recruitment process

- ◆ comprehensive induction
- ◆ good preparation for employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no updating of individual learning plans
- ◆ lack of clear target-setting at reviews of trainees' progress

20. Trainees' individual needs for support are identified effectively and sensitively. Trainees have access to all the support services available at Dudley MBC. Specialist equipment is provided for trainees where necessary. For example, one trainee with a disability was provided with a voice activated laptop computer, special chairs, and an electronic stapler and hole punch. This equipment moved with the trainee into her employment with the council. A magnifier for a visual display unit was provided for a trainee with a visual impairment. Another trainee was identified as needing additional support with literacy, but he declined the support offered. His needs were monitored through progress reviews. Eventually, the trainee requested support when he realised he was having difficulty making progress. The training team quickly arranged support with the subcontracted college. Two members of staff hold a counselling qualification. Trainees are referred to specialist agencies when appropriate. Trainees are encouraged to discuss any problems they have in one-to-one sessions. Confidentiality on matters concerning individual trainees is maintained at all times, but staff support each other by raising with their colleagues issues relating to the general nature of the problems they are dealing with.

21. Two members of staff interview all applicants. A scoring chart is used to determine the suitability of the prospective trainee for the programme. This is followed by a day of assessment, when a range of numeracy and literacy tests is conducted to check the aptitude of applicants for training. Successful applicants receive the results of these tests within two weeks and are then invited to take part in the five-day residential course held at one of the council's centres, in a nearby town. Trainees speak highly of this course, which develops their confidence, together with team-building, decision-making and assertiveness skills, through a varied programme. At the end of the course, trainees agree an action plan, the outcomes of which are discussed at the first review of their progress. The residential course is reviewed each year as a direct result of feedback from trainees.

22. A comprehensive induction takes place over four days and includes information from the council's programme of corporate induction. Speakers include the equal opportunities officer and a trade union representative. Trainees are given a learning journal in which to record their experiences in their work placements, and a copy of the TEC's trainees' charter. Trainees undertake a 'getting to know you' project during their first week on work placement. This encourages trainees to become familiar quickly with staff and the working environment. There is also advice on whom to contact if trainees have any

concerns about their training. The induction is memorable for trainees and provides them with a strong foundation for training. Trainees receive further induction when they change work placements or begin employment with the council.

23. Job-search training sessions are well structured and comprehensively planned. There are good resources for trainees, including access to the Internet and interactive computer packages. Trainees acquire good job-search and interview skills. Practice interviews are held with managers from different council departments in a range of settings. This has a two-fold advantage: trainees gain valuable experience, and managers practise their newly acquired interviewing skills. Role-play is encouraged among trainees and they are given help to complete job application forms. Exercises in compiling curricula vitae are provided and trainees can use computers in the training and development section. All trainees are given copies of the council's weekly jobs bulletin and are encouraged to apply for jobs. All trainees are given opportunities to update their record of achievement.

24. Individual learning plans are not used as working documents. The plans, which meet the TEC's contractual requirements, are drawn up at the beginning of the learning programme. These record details about the trainee and the learning programme to be followed. Details of qualifications do not specify the level of key skills which trainees are working towards. Details of additional qualifications taken as part of the apprenticeship framework are not included. The plans are not updated when trainees achieve a unit towards their qualification and in some cases details of registration with the awarding bodies are incomplete. Amendments to the plan are made on a separate document as stipulated by the TEC. Only dates of progress reviews may be added to the original document. Plans are not routinely monitored at progress reviews and many trainees are unaware of their purpose.

25. The college's trainers set short-term targets each week for work towards the NVQ carried out in the college. These are followed up weekly and concerns about progress fed back to training staff at the council. Trainees have a termly progress review with the college's trainer but the information recorded is brief. It consists mainly of a record of the units being worked on, or those which have been achieved. Progress reviews carried out by the youth training staff at the council, conducted every six to eight weeks, are mainly concerned with pastoral matters. Units currently being worked on are discussed and recorded. Training staff do not set the trainees sufficient clear targets for the achievement of elements or units leading towards their qualifications for the next period of their training. Progress in key skills is rarely discussed.

Management of training

Grade 4

26. Dudley MBC's youth training team is based in the central training and development section, which is a part of the chief executive's department. This department provides youth training, training towards NVQs for employees of the

council and other training and development for employees and councillors. The manager of the youth training programme reports to the training and development manager. She has a team of four: two permanent trainers, one temporary trainer and a foundation modern apprentice on a work placement within the office. The trainers are responsible for undertaking progress reviews, both in the workplace and at the subcontractor's premises and for assessing trainees in administration in the workplace. The youth training team holds monthly team meetings. All staff in the central training and development section meet together every three months. Dudley MBC's procedures for recruitment, staffing and appraisal are used by the section in its work. Appraisals of all members of staff are carried out annually, with a review every six months. Each member of staff has a detailed job description. Training and development are planned for the coming year against the requirements of the job and personal and professional development requirements. Information on the youth training programme is held on a computerised system. The council has a plan for recruitment and deployment of its workforce. The youth training team has a business plan, which is reviewed annually and links into the council's plan for its workforce. The council is accredited as an Investor in People. Many strengths identified in the self-assessment report were more appropriate to other generic areas. Inspectors considered most of the strengths to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed that good communication and staff training are strengths and identified additional weaknesses. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good communication among the youth training team
- ◆ wide range of relevant training undertaken by staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little analysis of management information
- ◆ weak management of subcontractors
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job learning
- ◆ failure to enforce training agreements with some workplace supervisors

27. The youth training team meets formally every month. Between meetings, ongoing issues relating to training are discussed daily as they arise. Team meetings have an agenda and performance against the contract, the progress of trainees and other relevant issues are discussed. The trainers visit the subcontractors twice each week to monitor the attendance of trainees and to discuss with trainers and assessors any problems which have arisen. Trainer/assessors sign a record of this conversation. The two full-time trainers have recently acted as temporary managers to provide maternity cover for the youth training programme manager. They have shared the role between them, reporting directly to the manager of the central training and development section. The youth training team also meets with

the rest of the central training and development section every three months and reports on contractual activity.

28. All trainers hold assessors' awards and counselling qualifications. Both permanent, full-time trainers have either completed or are working towards training and supervisory qualifications. The youth training programme manager is currently studying for a professional qualification in management. All team members are undertaking training for in-house and external qualifications in computing and the two permanent full-time trainers have had training in equal opportunities. The temporary trainer has attended training in equal opportunities and cultural awareness. The trainers attend external community working groups and report back to internal working parties. For example, they attend an equal opportunities subcommittee of the local training suppliers' group. Staff are on the executive of a regional progression forum and are members of a group which develops links for young people between school and work.

29. Data about achievement against contractual targets are collected regularly. However, this information is not routinely analysed and used to improve the programme. Contractual information is discussed at team meetings and at meetings of the central training and development section. More detailed information is presented to an annual meeting of a senior management committee. However, the youth training programme manager does not attend this meeting and has little influence on how youth training is perceived by the rest of the council. The subcontracted college holds information about when trainees are to sit external examinations and key skills tests. Members of the training team are not aware of this information. Health and safety is monitored through work-placement checks, but health and safety information is held centrally by the council. The training team does not hold information on accidents and risk assessments.

30. Agreements have existed with each subcontractor for two years. These are general agreements with no details about the content of the training. No confirmation of the agreement has been recorded and Dudley MBC does not specify how the training should be conducted. Monthly monitoring of the agreement started in January 2001, but some information required from one subcontractor is not being supplied. A check list of contractual requirements is completed. This is not dated or signed to indicate who is responsible for carrying out the monitoring. There is little indication of action to be taken in the event of non-compliance.

31. Off-the-job learning is not linked to the work which trainees are doing during their work placements and jobs. Progress reviews are not used as an opportunity to discuss possible links between work done at college, training towards NVQs and job roles. Workplace supervisors do not know what the trainees are doing at college week by week. They are familiar with the requirements of NVQs but do not know what the trainees have to do to complete their individual learning plans. A workplace supervisors' forum was held in 1999 and as result a workplace supervisors' handbook was produced. Some actions agreed at the forum were not implemented and very few workplace supervisors are aware of the handbook. The

handbook contains detailed information about trainees' responsibilities, but does not advise the supervisors of their roles and responsibilities in the learning process.

32. There is a training agreement with every work placement, but these are not complied with consistently. Some workplace supervisors of employed trainees are reluctant to allow their trainees to attend all of their off-the-job training. This affects the trainees' progress towards their NVQs. Some workplace supervisors have stopped trainees from undertaking training in key skills. Some trainees have gained agreement from their workplace supervisors and trainers to postpone work towards key skills until they have completed the requirements of their NVQ. These trainees are still in training, but they are unable to complete the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework until qualifications in key skills have been obtained.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

33. The youth training programme manager has overall responsibility for assuring the quality of the training. There are procedures for quality assurance which cover all aspects of training. These are updated annually by the manager in consultation with the trainers. Feedback is gained from surveys of trainees' views using questionnaires. These surveys take place following the induction, the residential training week and any additional training courses, and once during each year of training. Feedback from workplace supervisors and trainees is obtained through quarterly meetings. Workplace supervisors also contribute as a result of their reviews of trainees' progress. The self-assessment report was the third produced by the council. An action plan for quality assurance is incorporated into an overall plan for improving quality, which is monitored monthly. Many strengths were stated in the report. Few of these relate directly to quality assurance. Others are normal practice. Inspectors agreed that the use of regular feedback from trainees is a strength and that the monitoring of the subcontracted college is a weakness. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade which was two grades lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic use of surveys to gain feedback from trainees
- ◆ regularly updated procedures for all aspects of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsystematic quality assurance of training provided by subcontractors
- ◆ underdeveloped monitoring of quality assurance
- ◆ lack of rigour in self-assessment

34. Trainees complete evaluative questionnaires on several occasions during their training. Standard questionnaires on most aspects of the programme have been used and the results analysed over several years. The results are used when planning future activities. For example, the length and content of the induction programme has been amended for the past two years as a direct result of feedback from trainees. A programme-review questionnaire is issued to trainees annually. This is designed to gather information about all aspects of the programme, including the off-the-job training provided by subcontractors. In addition, there is a well-attended programme-review meeting held every three months. This meeting is attended by trainees' representatives, Dudley MBC's training staff and workplace supervisors, and staff from the subcontracted college, the TEC and the careers service. Feedback from these meetings is used to complement the views gathered from surveys and is used to assist in the planning and review of programmes.

35. There is a manual of procedures which contains the policies and procedures for all aspects of the training. These are systematically reviewed annually by the training and development manager in consultation with the trainers. Revisions take into account feedback from trainees and changes in the TEC's and in Dudley MBC's requirements. Procedures are clearly written and include detailed guidance on the operation of all aspects of training. The procedures cover recruitment and initial assessment, training, including liaison with subcontractors, reviews of trainees' progress and evaluation of programmes. Stages in the training programmes are summarised on a clear flow chart, which indicates when each procedure is to be used.

36. The quality of training provided by subcontractors is not systematically monitored. The subcontractual agreement requires the college and the in-house team which provides some of the training and assessment to provide internal and external verifiers' reports. Although internal verification of all programmes is satisfactory, reports are not regularly obtained for accounting. Observation of training is not carried out systematically by either of the subcontractors. Both the college and the council's NVQ assessment centres undertake observation of training as part of their internal arrangements for quality assurance. The results of these observations are not routinely sought by Dudley MBC. The college undertakes regular surveys of trainees' views through questionnaires and undertakes an annual course review. Information from these for the courses provided for Dudley MBC is not routinely sought. A check list to review the subcontractual agreement at monthly meetings has been introduced recently. This is not signed or dated and there is no indication of what action will be taken if problems are identified.

37. The monitoring of quality assurance is underdeveloped. Monitoring of progress on action points arising out of self-assessment which took place in May 2000 and out of a quality audit by the TEC in March 2000 has only recently been implemented. Although some remedial actions did take place before systematic monitoring started, the recording of these started only in January 2001. Staff shortages have led to slow progress in implementing many items for action. Some

actions implemented have not yet led to the improvements claimed in the monitoring document. For example, there is still insufficient work-based assessment on most programmes and reviews of trainees' progress do not involve clear target-setting.

38. Dudley MBC undertook its third self-assessment of its youth training programme in May 2000 in preparation for the inspection. The manager of the youth training programme, in consultation with the trainers, produced the report. The previous self-assessment reports had been completed using an approach based on a template. Feedback from surveys of the views of trainees and three-monthly programme-review meetings was used. Trainees, workplace supervisors and subcontractors were not consulted directly about the self-assessment. They were not asked to review drafts of the report before the document was completed. The report was updated and its grades raised in November 2000 on the advice of the TEC. The sections of the report do not contain a description of the training. The report lacks rigour and fails to identify clearly the key strengths and weaknesses. In each section, many strengths are identified. A significant number of these are more appropriate to other sections or are no more than normal practice. Key strengths are not set out clearly. Some key weaknesses are identified. There is no evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The action plan does not indicate with sufficient clarity timescales for action, or indicators of success in rectifying identified weaknesses. It does not indicate timescales for monitoring actions to build on the strengths. The grading of the training was unrealistic. Inspectors awarded three grades which were one grade lower and two grades which were two grades lower than those given in the self-assessment report.