UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

TRAINING AND NEW TECHNOLOGY.
A CASE-STUDY OF YOUTH TRAINING IN AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

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ABSTRACT

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TRAINING AND NEW TECHNOLOGY: A CASE-STUDY OF YOUTH TRAINING IN AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

by Peter Dornan

This thesis examines a public policy initiative introduced within the Youth Training Scheme during the 1980's, namely Information Technology Centres (ITeCs). In the first main section, the high profile given to technological education and training for 16-18 year olds, is critically reviewed. Building on this examination, which shows a number of reasons given for the introduction of information technological training to be questionable, other explanations for its inclusion in youth training are sought. Issues such as 'attitudes' and 'dispositions' of young people are highlighted and the relevance of these concepts to trainees, ITeC staff and employers are considered.

In the second main section, the case-studies concerning the above three groups are presented. In these chapters it is demonstrated that those involved with ITeCs all hold differing, sometimes contradictory views, concerning their requirements from youth training. These include issues such as the image of training for ITeC staff, the priority of jobs for trainees and the shortage of 'suitable' staff for employers.

The thesis concludes that for many of those involved with ITeCs there is a strong desire to make the scheme work, however, the technological requirements of local organisations are often secondary to the 'social' attributes of their potential employees.

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This is dedicated to my family and to the memory of my mother.

CONTENTS

Training and New Technology. A Case-Study of Youth Training in an Information Technology Centre

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 The Youth Training Scheme and the 'New Vocationalism'

Over the last ten years several public policy initiatives have been introduced directed towards vocational and technological education and training. The establishment of Information Technology Centres (ITeCs) within the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), the funding of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and more recently the opening of the first City Technology College, may be seen as examples of this.

This 'new vocationalism' as it came to be called (Bates et al, 1984), was intended to make education and training more relevant to the world of work, which was seen as changing rapidly as a result of the introduction of new technology. The impression created was that new technologies would provide economic growth and employment opportunities which required a more highly skilled, better educated and more mobile workforce (MSC, 1981a). However, it was felt that economic progress was being held back because young people lacked the skills, knowledge and attitudes required by employers (Finn, 1985).

One response to this situation was the creation of ITeCs, which were to provide 16-17 year old school-leavers with between one and two years' training in electronics and computing, and, as YTS courses in general, act as a permanent bridge into work (MSC, 1984c).

In this study I have taken seriously the claim that YTS will provide young people with the opportunities to acquire skills and improve their job prospects. I describe the process of training during one year in an ITeC in a city in the South-East. I have examined how the ITeC affected the lives of trainees, its impact on the behaviour of the ITeC staff and the work placement providers, and also where it fitted in the local economy.

In the early 1980s, YTS was seen as part of the solution to the long-standing skill shortage in Britain. ITeCs, in

particular, were seen as providing a technological aspect of this solution. Here young people spend between one and two years learning about electronics and computers in training workshops and on work placements with local employers. However, the social, economic and political context in which these claims were made must also be considered. Therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind the following two points.

First YTS, and the new vocationalism in general, takes place within a specific social terrain - a terrain whose character has been shaped by historical factors such as increasingly high levels of unemployment, especially youth unemployment; a loss of confidence towards the purpose of schooling; and a redirection of government policy with regard to young people, their jobs, training and education (Pollard, Purvis and Walford, 1988).

Second, the transition of young people through this process is problematic, their progress is affected by their family background, gender, ethnicity and region of residence (Rees and Atkinson, 1982; Bates, et al. 1984; Cockburn, 1987).

Furthermore, ITeCs themselves vary greatly in the way they operate and in their objectives, depending to a large extent on their sponsors and the perspectives and orientations of their staff.

Sponsors are drawn from both the public and private sectors and usually include local businesses and/or local authorities. Some sponsors emphasise the 'social' and training aspects of the curriculum, with wider commercial ventures a secondary pursuit. Others have decided to operate as small businesses and attempt to provide a working environment and to establish good working habits in trainees.

Some staff are 'professional' people with experience in teaching, youth work or commerce, while others may have industrial backgrounds. Some ITeCs are selective and insist that trainees have specific academic qualifications, while others have an 'open access' policy, the only criterion being enthusiasm.

The point is that no two ITeCs are likely to be the same

as the way they operate and their impact is not uniform throughout. For this reason it was decided to conduct a study of one ITeC in a particular locality which it was hoped would provide a 'snapshot' of the impact of this feature of YTS.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study is concerned with the impact of the ITeC upon the values and attitudes of a group of young people as they moved through their training during their year at the ITeC. It is suggested that this process can only be fully understood when the way in which both ITeC staff and employers providing work placements understand and interpret the course is also examined. Therefore a secondary aim of the study is to describe and analyse the views of staff and employers involved with trainees as they progress through the course.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

In this study, the main concern for the majority of trainees I spoke to was to find a full-time job. Their reasons for this were not couched simply in material terms, but also included their notions of 'status', 'respectability' and 'self-esteem'. Most of them saw their ITeC training as providing some of these features. Therefore, it is these concepts which are analysed when the views of trainee are examined.

However, in order to understand the above it is also necessary to appreciate the ways in which staff and work placement providers, view the course. Here also the concept of 'respectability' is examined.

In Chapter 2 I examine the social, economic and political context in which YTS was introduced and questions many of the premises on which technological training and ITeCs were based. Chapter 3 describes the ITeC setting including the staff who work there. In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I present the findings of the study. Here I point out some of the ways in which staff

see their role in the ITeC, and examine some of the views of trainees and work placement providers in this process of training. I conclude by summarising the main themes of the study and the significance of them to the groups involved.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW VOCATIONALISM AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

2.1 Introduction: The nature of the new vocationalism

Over the last ten years there have been wide-ranging changes in the relationship between education, training and employment. Many of the changes were initiated by the 1976 Ruskin College speech by James Callaghan which contained an attack on informal, modern teaching methods, a complaint about falling standards, and a criticism of the poor relationship between schools and industry.

These issues together with other pressures like those created by high levels of unemployment and the Central Policy Review Staff, or 'Think Tank', reports on training (Finn, 1987: 138) could be seen as instrumental in setting in motion attempts by pressure groups and policy-makers to strengthen the links between education and the economy. The contention was that schools and colleges should be more vocational so that their products would be more employable and the economy more competitive. A key feature of the schools-industry link was the high profile given to technological education and training with, for example, the establishment of ITeCs and the funding of the TVEI project.

However, these attempts to link the educational system more closely to the world of work are not new. From the Industrial Revolution onwards there have been repeated criticisms from employers about the education system's perceived lack of concern for the needs of industry in terms of skilled, obedient and time-disciplined workers (Watts, 1985: 11). Such criticisms may be seen as an example of fundamental dilemmas concerning the purpose of education in society, between the conflicting demands of what (Williams, 1984edn) described as the 'public educators', the 'industrial trainers' and the 'old humanists'.

Indeed, this point is reinforced by Finch (1984) in a discussion on education as social policy, who suggests that the process of educational policy-making can best be seen as a struggle between those who see education as being foremost concerned with individual self-development and fulfilment of potential and those who view it more as serving the needs of the economy and industry by preparing young people for future positions in the occupational structure (1984: 4).

Generally, Finn (1987) has demonstrated that criticism from employers about schooling has intensified in periods of economic contraction, as industry searches for a convenient scapegoat for its failures. Thus, it was to be expected that those who held the more utilitarian view of schooling as a servant of industry would gain increased prominence during the economic decline of the 1970s.

However, while this recurrent debate is longstanding, the present restructuring of education's relationship to economic performance is qualitatively different than previous attempts. By the time the Conservative government came to power in 1979, there were several pressures which came together, such that the early 1980s saw the emergence and gradual development of a new broad ideology concerning education and training which came to be known as 'the new vocationalism' (Finn, 1987). The new vocationalism is still evolving and has been conceptualised from various standpoints (eg. Moore, 1987; Brown, 1987).

However Dale (1985) has identified four main main characteristics. First, the boundaries of the new vocationalism are specific, being intended for the 14-18 age group and aimed much more at the lower two-thirds of the ability range than at those who take the traditional academic route. Second, its aims are clear and are not confined to training young people for jobs. As a result of high levels of youth unemployment, there is a need to adjust young people to a status somewhere between work and non-work. Occupational versatility and personal adjustment of attitudes are thus a major objective of the new ideology. Third, the new

vocationalism largely retains the role that education and training has had in the generation and legitimation of inequalities according to gender and ethnicity. Fourth, in spite of its wide range of support at the highest levels, the new vocationalism does not go unresisted by those who have other, wider views about the purposes of education whether they be teachers, politicians or young people themselves (Dale, 1985: 7).

2.2 The emergence of the new vocationalism

A number of commentators have provided accounts which analyse the major influences which have led to the emergence of the new vocationalism (e.g. Bates et al, 1984; Finn, 1987; Holt, 1987). Although these accounts place greater or lesser emphasis on different causal elements, it is possible to identify three major and interrelated developments which have had a major influence on the emergence of the new vocationalism: first, increasingly high levels of unemployment, especially youth unemployment; secondly, loss of confidence towards the purpose of schooling; and thirdly, redirections of government policy.

Unemployment

Escalating unemployment has been a major factor in the rise of the new vocationalism. During the acute economic crisis of the 1970s, young people suffered disproportionately badly as the average unemployment rate rose from 3.8 per cent in 1972 to 6.8 per cent in 1977 (Baron et al, 1981: 170). Males under twenty-five constituted 30 per cent of all male registered unemployed in the late 1970s, with the corresponding figure for females standing at 52 per cent (Rees and Atkinson, 1982: 3). In 1975, 3 per cent of the 16-18 year old age group were unemployed, whereas in 1986 this figure had risen to 15 per cent (Pilcher and Williamson, 1988: 3). It must be recognised that unemployed young people have always been viewed with some concern by governments as:

> Historically, workless youth have served as a focus for successive panics and fears as to the suggested

> social and political implications of large scale and long-term youth unemployment. [They] have been viewed ... as prime fodder for agitators ... and as a potential source of instability and unrest (Mungham, 1982: 29).

However, these figures only tell one side of the story. The fact of high youth unemployment is likely to influence the decisions of those who reach school leaving age, and many young people now decide to continue their education in schools and colleges, hoping to increase their chance of a job through gaining higher qualifications. In 1975, 25 per cent of 16-18 year olds were in education, compared to 31 per cent in 1986 (Pilcher and Williamson, 1988: 4).

At the same time, there has been a rapid rise in the number of work experience schemes and training schemes arranged by the Manpower Services Commission, (now known as the Training Agency), for those who choose to leave school and are unable to find jobs. In 1983, the proportion of 16-18 year olds on government training schemes stood at 9 per cent, four years later, in 1987, this figure had increased to 12 per cent (MSC, 1988: 4).

In both cases, the young people involved are not counted as unemployed, even though in earlier times they would have gone most likely, straight into the labour force on reaching the school leaving age. In considering the effects of unemployment on young people it is therefore the overall changes in patterns of employment, education and training that are important rather than the youth unemployment figures alone. It must also be recognised that the rise in unemployment is likely to profoundly structure not only young people's chances of getting work but also their chances of obtaining desired jobs, and the wage levels and conditions of working once in the job.

However, the effects of rising unemployment are not only of concern to those young people who are old enough to leave school. As Wellington (1987) points out, unemployment has affected the nature and content of the school curriculum. He suggests that the impact of unemployment on education can be

crudely, but usefully, divided into four sequential stages:

(1) the implicit promise in schooling (i.e. 'work hard at school to get a job after it') is undermined;

(2) the direction and traditional function of schooling and education are questioned;

(3) education, training, and 'pre-vocational education' are increasingly seen as an instrument to respond to youth unemployment;

(4) the bonds between education and employment are tightened (Wellington, 1987: 22).

Thus, ironically, the effects within the schools of rising unemployment has been to increase the attention given to the preparation of pupils for work with greater emphasis on qualifications in the hope of enabling pupils to gain a competitive edge on others in the struggle for jobs (Walford et al, 1988:7).

Loss of confidence in education

During the 1970s there was an increasing loss of confidence in the education system. The economic decline at the time, helped to undermine the social democratic notion of the 1950s and 1960s that an expanding education system contributed to economic growth and efficiency. Various pressure groups of the New Right joined forces with those responsible for the publication of the Black Papers on Education in 1969 and 1975, such as Sir Rhodes Boyson, to claim that the standards in schools were declining, that political indoctrination was rife and that schools simply failed to educate the majority of their pupils (Education Group, 1981:200-205).

The dissatisfaction with schooling expressed in the 1975 edition helped to change the terms of reference of the debate about educational means and ends. A more populist argument emerged in which parental involvement in the work of the schools became a basic element of the programme. This argument exploited the concerns of parents who, it was claimed, were apprehensive about their children's futures and bewildered over progressive teaching methods as practiced by

'trendy' teachers owing responsibility to no-one outside the school (Finn, 1987).

This crisis in education in which schools were held responsible for the growth of youth unemployment, helped to legitimise the feeling that 'schools had failed'. This loss of confidence and direction created the political space which allowed proponents of the new vocationalism to redefine educational objectives.

Government policy

The third major change of the last ten to twelve years has been in central government policy towards education and training. During this period many commentators agree that the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) has played the major role in the generation of new forms of education and training both in and out of schools (Education Group, 1981; Finn, 1985, 1987; Church and Ainley, 1987). The MSC is subject to continuing change and its development may be more easily understood if explained in stages.

The Commission was created by the Employment and Training Act of 1973 with a brief to rationalize and restructure all training and employment services provided by the Department of Employment. It is an appointed body and Parliament has access to its work only via the Secretary of State for Employment. The Commission is structured as a tripartite body with built-in participation by industry, the trade unions and the education service. Its functions included making arrangements for 'assisting people to select, train for, obtain and retain employment, and for assisting employers to obtain suitable employees' (HMSO, 1973: 2).

It was responsible for a wide range of services and institutions such as Skill Centres and Jobcentres and increasingly concerned itself with training. At the time of its creation social-democratic politics still held sway, and during its first stage of development, 1973 to 1977, the MSC was seen much less as a direct organ of government policy than it was to become in later years.

During this period the MSC introduced the Job Creation Programme in 1975, and the Work Experience Programme (WEP) in 1976. This scheme provided work experience places for six months for unemployed young people under the age of nineteen, who received an allowance of £16 a week. It was based on an 'individual deficit' model where unemployment was interpreted as the 'fault' of individual young people who lacked the necessary skills and attitudes for the work that was available (Atkinson et al, 1982). Arguably at this stage the model still made some sense with unemployment still relatively low and jobs left unfilled. However, as the years past, it became less and less credible as an explanation. Nevertheless, it continues as part of the underlying ideology behind many of the current schemes.

The second stage in the development of the MSC began in 1978 with the emergence of the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP). The programme was to provide 234,000 thousand places for all 16 - 18 year olds confronted with unemployment who were to receive an allowance of £18 a week. It consisted of several elements. A young person might be placed on Work Experience on Employer's Premises (WEEP); in a training workshop; or a work preparation (thirteen or sixteen week college-based) course, with, perhaps some work experience. WEEP was always the largest element of YOP, accounting for 70 per cent of the places. Young people could spend up to six months on a placement, and a year in total on the scheme. By 1980/81 one in four school-leavers passed through the programme (MSC, 1981a: 3).

YOP was an ad-hoc measure designed to give young unemployed people a period of work experience to break the 'vicious circle' which was seen to prevent young people with no experience from getting a job precisely because they lacked work experience. At first the proportion finding jobs or places in education, at over 70 per cent, was high enough to sustain YOP's credibility (Varlaam, 1984). However, over the next few years with the deepening recession and rising unemployment, the success rate fell dramatically. In

addition, criticisms came from trade unions who detected that a large proportion of YOP trainees were being substituted for paid labour, and from trainees themselves who because of the low training allowance and poor quality of training saw it as a cheap labour scheme (Finn, 1985; Cockburn, 1987).

After their election victory in 1979, the Conservative government had to decide whether to continue to expand YOP or to introduce a new programme of vocational training. They chose the latter and in 1983 replaced YOP with the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), the establishment of which may be seen to mark the third phase of the MSC's development (Walford et al, 1988). A number of commentators have suggested that during these second and third stages, the MSC can be seen to have moved towards being an important instrument of government policy (Finn, 1985; Cockburn, 1987; Walford et al, 1988).

During these stages, beginning in 1979, the MSC has lost much of its independence. For example, the social-democratic nature of the Commission was drastically altered with the appointment of David Young (now Lord Young) as chairman, who worked very closely with Mrs Thatcher, then prime minister, Norman Tebbitt, then Employment Secretary, and Sir Keith Joseph, then Education Secretary. Their belief in the necessity of government to follow an uncompromising monetarist strategy involved, amongst other things, the idea of a structural transformation of the youth labour market. It was felt that the historical market value of young people as cheap labour had been undermined by protective legislation, trade union strength in collective bargaining, and by high rates of supplementary benefit. Government policy now involved the reconstruction of young people as cheap labour (Finn, 1987). As David Young put it, 'youth rates of pay in Britain are far too high', and 'the young should be the source of cheap labour because they can be trained on the job' (Observer 7/2/1982).

The Youth Training Scheme

The Youth Training Scheme was proclaimed as a 'permanent bridge between school and work' (MSC, 1982b). It offered a

year's training to all sixteen year olds and eventually also seventeen year olds leaving school and failing to find a job or a place in further education. During the early years of the scheme, MSC's funding of YTS was bi-modal.

Most provision involved a firm or consortium of firms who acted as managing agents. They provided work experience, combined with on-the-job training, and were also responsible for obtaining for each trainee thirteen weeks off the job training. This was often purchased from an educational institution. The managing agent received £1,950 for each trainee, out of which they paid each trainee a weekly allowance of £25.00. The government hoped to secure 300,000 places in industry on this basis. This was Mode A.

However, in some areas, and for some purposes, it was recognised that employer - based schemes could not provide all the training places required. Therefore, some schemes were not designed around a firm or a consortium of firms but based on a community project, a training workshop or an Information Technology Centre. Here the trainees were to experience a simulated working environment and from here they were to be sent out for short periods of work experience on employers' premises. This was Mode B. The payments for trainees on Mode B schemes was higher than on Mode A in recognition of their higher costs.

Since April 1986 YTS has changed to a two-year programme and a number of revisions have been introduced. For example, the Scheme is now open to both sixteen and seventeen year olds, with provision for two years of training. In the first year trainees are paid £29.50 a week, and are entitled to thirteen weeks off-the-job training. In the second year, the allowance is £35.00 a week with seven weeks off-the-job training.

An attempt is made to ensure that all trainees can work towards a recognised vocational qualification, or part of one, while on the Scheme. The 'managing agents' through which YTS was delivered in its first three years are now required to submit themselves for assessment according to certain agreed

criteria. If acceptable they are awarded Approved Training Organisation (ATO) status and thereafter will be more autonomous than were the managing agents. A new inspectorate has been established the Training Standards Advisory Service. These have a function similar to that of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools and aim to monitor outcome performance (Cockburn, 1987).

The Youth Training Scheme was initially conceived within the context of a plan to transform training for both adults and young people, outlined in a White Paper on A New Training Initiative (MSC, 1981a). The NTI was part of a far - reaching reform of education as a whole. The 'Great Debate' of 1976 established the groundwork for a utilitarian approach to education. Since then there has been a shift away from liberal pupil-oriented teaching, with the reliance on the professionalism of teachers, towards the direct satisfaction of employers' demands for disciplined, work-ready school-leavers.

The influence of the MSC on schools and colleges has been considerable and has included a transformation of the school curricula for 14 to 18 year olds, in the shape of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education. It was seen by government as a body which could very quickly redirect the curriculum towards greater 'industrial relevance'.

The New Training Initiative dealt with post-school training in a similar fashion. This document described the MSC's interpretation of the training problems which needed to be confronted. The labour market was in a period of transition. Unskilled manual jobs were declining whereas growth was concentrated in the service sector in white collar jobs at technician level and above. This trend was likely to be accelerated as new technologies were introduced across a wide variety of service industries.

A further concern of the NTI was the apprenticeship system, which they saw as restricted by age and one which passed on skills likely to be of less relevance in the future.

It proposed to replace it with a modular system of training, open to people of all ages and leading to a recognised qualification. The document called for a combined effort from government, employers, trade unions and the education service so that Britain would not lose out to international competition because of the inadequate training and productivity of the workforce. It focussed on three kinds of training: for adults, for potential skilled workers entering direct from school, and for the remainder of young people under 18. It was a concern with this last group, the least privileged school-leavers and those most likely to be unemployed, that YTS was designed to meet.

YTS and technological change

In September 1983 the YOP was replaced by the Youth Training Scheme, in which 460,000 places would be provided at a cost of about £1 billion. The scheme was heralded by a national publicity campaign which portrayed the YTS as a permanent bridge into work. The impression created was that YTS was at the forefront of economic progress and would prepare all school-leavers for job opportunities related to new technology, and perhaps even social mobility (Finn, 1985; Wellington, 1987). Parents, and the general public, were assured that the scheme would harness young people's talents and would enable employers to compete more effectively with the UK's international competitors.

Concern for the skill requirements of international competition had been voiced earlier by the Confederation of British Industry. The CBI, the principal employers' association, had supported the MSC's recruiting drive for employers to offer work-placements for the scheme by suggesting that YTS:

> would help to provide participating employers with a young workforce with some competence and practical experience in a wide range of related jobs or skills and help to provide the country as a whole with a more versatile, adaptable, motivated and productive workforce to assist us to compete successfully in world markets (CBI, 1982)

This focus on YTS as an employer-led scheme was emphasised by David (Lord) Young, then chairman of the MSC, who pointed out that:

> YTS ... is attractive financially to employers. You now have the opportunity to take on young men and women, train them and let them work for you almost entirely at our expense, and then decide whether or not to employ them (The Director, October 1982).

The CBI's emphasis on a skilled, adaptable and motivated workforce, able to use new technologies and compete successfully in international markets, endorsed many of the proposals outlined in the New Training Initiative. New technologies in particular, were seen as responsible for changing patterns of employment while at the same time offering job opportunities and economic growth (MSC, 1981a: 2). In this context, great stress was placed on the fact that all YTS trainees would be getting two weeks training in information technology; that 500,000 would be receiving a year's training in ITeCs, and that all schools would be installing microcomputers. Kenneth Baker, then Minister for Information Technology, emphasised the importance of keeping in step with technological change:

> ...I want to try and ensure that the kids of today are trained with the skills that gave their fathers and grandfathers jobs. It's like generals fighting the battles of yesteryear...And that is the reason why we've pushed ahead with computers into schools. I want youngsters, boys and girls leaving school at sixteen, to actually be able to operate a computer. (cited in Wellington, 1987: 33).

The optimism for the vocational significance of information technology was shared by central government, curriculum developers, academic staff, employers and parents. Finn points out that the publicity at the launch of the YTS 'attempted to associate it with the new technologies at the forefront of employment creation' (1985:120). Similarly, Tomlinson extolling the virtues of ITeCs asserts that their aim is:

> ...to train young unemployed people in the area of new technology in order to improve their chances of

> obtaining employment and also to provide a workforce with the new skills necessary for Britain to take a leading part in the technology revolution (1985:143).

Clearly the views of those expressed above show a concern for the educational consequences of the pace and nature of technological change. The educational implications of the pace of technological change have most often been derived from the assumption that it will mean that very few people are likely to stay in the the same job, or even the same broad area of work, all their lives. There is a consequent need for 'education for flexibility', and on pre-employment courses, specifically an emphasis on 'transferable' skills and 'core skills' rather than 'specific' skills (Dale, 1985; Wellington, 1987). It is on these assumptions that the content of YTS has been developed and it is to a critique of these assumptions that we now turn.

2.3. The 'Marketing' of Information Technology

The necessity of new technologies

It is clear that there are few doubts on the part of enthusiasts for vocational training in information technology and computer literacy as to their relevance, and importance, to young people on YTS courses. For example, Tomlinson describes IT training as providing young people with the 'new skills' which will 'improve their chances of obtaining employment' and thus ensure that Britain will be at the forefront of the 'technological revolution'(1985: 143).

It is less clear quite how this idea of IT's 'relevance' and 'importance' became established. The commonplace is that young people need the 'skills' provided by courses which provide components on programming, an awareness of the uses of computers in commerce and industry and so on. The Further Education Unit, the body responsible for providing much of the initial curriculum material on 'computer literacy' for YTS courses suggests:

> ...computer literacy has enabled students to cope confidently with the technology when they have encountered it in its various forms at work and home

> and to adopt a considered view of its social implications. It has enhanced their employment potential particularly in small businesses where the need is for the possession of a wide range (but not necessarily depth), of microcomputing and other skills (1983: 8).

We are not told what criteria were used to define the assertion that the employment potential of young people will be 'improved' once they have acquired the 'new skills' in the area of IT. We will see that there are research reports - including some on ITeCs - that indicate this is rarely the case.

In summary, 'information technology skills' and 'computer literacy' are regarded by their proponents as crucial elements of vocational courses as young people need to know something about new technology in order to be able to compete effectively for jobs, understand the 'high technology' consumer market, and be responsible citizens. Below these premises are critically assessed using a model developed by Douglas Noble in America and taken up by Webster and Robins in Britain.

The necessity of new technologies?

In one of the few critical papers written concerning developments in computer literacy, Noble (1984) suggests that 'computer literacy, however it may be defined, is unimportant, despite its plausibility and its fervent promotion' (1984:602). We shall see that some of the points raised by Noble, together with a number of other theoretical and empirical studies, show some of the assumptions of the proponents of computer literacy to be questionable.

Noble is critical of those who view computer literacy education as essential for developing in students skills necessary for employment in the 'information age'. Writing in an American context, he questions the assumption that the majority of future jobs will require any familiarity of information technology. Bureau of Labor Statistics data

demonstrates that most of the jobs that will be created in the next decade will not require a high degree of IT capabilities and that such as are required can be achieved with only a few weeks training (Noble, 1984:605).

This analysis is confirmed by Norton Grubb (1984) in a study of vocational preparation for high technology occupations in America. He points out that 'the real growth in jobs between now and 1995 will come in conventional occupations requiring no real training, such as janitors, cashiers, secretaries, office clerks, and sales clerks' (1984:439).

In Britain, the theoretical position of (Webster and Robins, 1986, 1987) adds weight to this 'low tech' jobs argument, as does the empirical work conducted by (Wellington, 1987a, 1987b). In these studies of the skill requirements by employers of school-leavers and trainees, Wellington found that 'attitudes' and 'dispositions' were overwhelmingly more important to employers than IT skills (1987a:32).

Noble suggests that high technology working environments do not require high technology skills from the majority of employees. He offers the example of numerical controlled machine tools, where less skill is required by the operator as competence is designed into the tool itself. David Noble's (1979) article on numerical controlled machines is a critical account of their development and their potential for deskilling. Electronic equipment designed to tune carburettors, process words and control stock may also be shown to have this potential.

Although Noble offers little evidence to support his argument, which is essentially that the learning of computer skills is 'unquestionably a waste of time' (1984:606) for the majority of the workforce in advanced industrial societies, a variety of commentators have demonstrated that deskilling is occuring across a range of occupations. This work has often pointed to the reduced need for specific skills; good examples are found in the work of Braverman (1975), Noble (1979), Cockburn (1981), and Barker and Downing (1984), none of whom

lapse into a technological determinism which assumes the successful and straightforward control and regulation of workers by employers.

Braverman detailed the tendency towards simplification and rationalisation of clerical work from the nineteenth century to the present day and found that the 'progressive elimination of thought from the work of the office worker takes the form, at first, of reducing mental labour to a repetitious performance of the same small set of functions' (1975:319). He examined the trends towards computerisation in the office in the context of the labour process and found that most 'computerised' jobs were routine and involved the adherence to rigid and specific instructions.

Braverman showed that a wide range of office personnel needed less skill and decision-making ability. He draws a comparative picture of a bank clerk's role before and after management utilised electronic equipment which, though somewhat romantic and deterministic, shows how the form of its application results in deskilling.

> ...we may note the role of the bank teller, once an important functionary upon whose honesty, judgement and personality much of the public operation and relations of the bank used to depend. Attached to mechanical and electronic equipment, these employees have been transferred into checkout clerks at a money supermarket counter, their labour-power purchased at the lowest rates in the mass labor market, their activities prescribed, checked and controlled in such a way that they have become so many interchangeable parts. And it should be added that the tellers function, limited as it now is, will gradually be replaced by new ... electronic equipment ... So-called automated tellers are ... to transact any of a number of banking functions ... The fact that it is becoming increasingly common in trade and service areas indicate that much automated equipment is so simple to operate that it requires no training whatever (Braverman, 1975: 341).

A good example of simple-to-operate computer technology is Amstrad's computer 'designed to be used by people who had never seen a computer before ... its operation is appropriately straightforward ... the rest of the computer industry has caught up and it will soon be possible to

approach any professiional microputer with the same carefree attitude' (Guest, 1988:35). Webster and Robins (1986) question whether the use of new technology requires high skills, and point instead to the deskilling effects on most jobs. They argue specifically that the diversion of educational resources to the achievement of computer literacy is at the expense of other more valuable forms of education.

It is true that occasionally research reports offer contradictory advice with , for example, Wellington (1987a) emphasising employers' wishes for employees with key board skills, and Rothwell and Davidson (1984) reporting that these were not regarded as terribly important. But there has been plenty of evidence amassed which suggests that, in general, skill levels required are inversely related to the complexity of the technology utilised; and that the need to make educational provision of the type and for the reasons suggested by the proponents of 'information technology skills' and 'computer literacy', has not been coherently established. Both Norton Grubb (1984) and Webster and Robins (1987) cautioned that the enthusiasm in education for new technology ignores the fact that new areas of employment are likely to involve ...'not so much low tech as no tech' (1987:13).

Both Noble (1984) and Webster and Robins (1987) believe that most people need no computer skills at all to be effective consumers, as consumer electronics are usually designed to be extremely simple to use. Modern televisions and telephones, kitchen gadgets, washing machines and banking terminals will usually require nothing more from the user than the ability to follow simple instructions, and will, of course, often make life easier. For example, banking terminals allow the user to obtain money while following prompts, which may be seen as a simpler process than writing and presenting a cheque. As Noble observes:

> It is often said that 'using computers is going to be just like driving a car', but given the ease with which a typical teenager learns how to drive, it is difficult to understand why this analogy is offered as an argument for computer literacy. Furthermore, such a skill as driving is best acquired as the need

> for it arises; similarly, people can learn whatever they need or want to know about computers without having to be prepared or 'literate' beforehand. The idea of computer literacy as preparation for later application ... fits nicely within a 'basic-skill' mentality that refuses to allow that fundamental knowledge is best acquired in the process of useful activity, not beforehand in useless introduction (1984:603).

As for the supposed role computer literacy programmes might play in contributing to the production of 'computer aware' citizens, both Noble (1984) and Webster and Robins (1986) focus on their technical bias to demonstrate the inadequacy of the knowledge they transmit. Even if technological knowledge could be shown to be required before a person could understand policy decisions and their implications 'the level of technical knowledge offered ... is many orders of magnitude removed from the understanding of large systems that could conceivably contribute to public deliberation' (1984:606).

Moreover, both Noble and Webster and Robins, deny that any particular technical expertise is necessary for people to understand issues of 'social control' and 'social engineering' of computer technology. They believe that what is needed is a political understanding of power and control in society which would enable people to understand who controls policy and for what purposes. However, nothing in current computer literacy courses will so equip students. Instead Noble suggests that discussions of 'social' questions oversimplify things by focussing on issues such as 'the automated office' and 'the unmanned factory' (1984:606).

Both Noble and Webster and Robins call for progressive debate about the relation between education, industry and the new technologies. Their polemical critiques may assist in developing a model which may account for the establishment of information technology courses on vocational courses for 16-18 year olds in this country.

Conclusion

If we take the theoretical critiques of Noble and Webster and

Robins, together with the empirical studies by Wellington and others which examine labour processes, some evidence is offered which suggests that the major justification for the inclusion of information technology training within the Youth Training Scheme are questionable.

Therefore, other explanations for its inclusion must be sought: the alternative is to regard its presence as irrational. We have seen that a variety of reasons have been advanced to attempt to explain the evolution of computer literacy. These range from arguments that pressure from manufacturers is an important element and that employers are demanding 'computer literate' recruits, to those that see demands from the students themselves, and their parents. All of these groups presumeably, exert pressure, directly and indirectly, on agencies concerned with curricular development.

Writing in an American context, (Sloan, 1984) is concerned with what he sees as a developing 'industrial connection' between education and industry in which computer companies are mainly concerned with selling their products than with the interests of young people. In this country, it seems that manufacturers took advantage of a demand created by the initiatives of central government which itself may be traced back to economic imperatives which have been remarked on by Lord Callaghan in his 'Great Debate' speech and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher when she promised to provide every school in the country with a microcomputer. It may be that micro manufacturers like Sinclair, Acorn and Amstrad who have been the main beneficiaries of the expansion of computing in education and training exerted pressure at those times and levels, however this is questionable.

We have already seen that arguments concerning 'pressure from employers' are supported by little evidence. Most jobs that young people on vocational training programmes compete for require little knowledge of information technology; and when they do, as is the case in certain low-grade supermarket jobs, it is quickly and effectively taught on the job. (Wellington, 1987) points out that employers were more

concerned with attitudes, such as interest and motivation, than with technological skills (1987:32).

Pressure exerted by students, or their parents on their behalf, is also most unlikely to have been a significant factor. It is suggested that none of the reasons put forward by various agencies and individuals adequately explains the expansion of the computer literacy campaign within the new vocationalism. It is further suggested that only an explanation such as described in this chapter, which traces the social, economic and political context of vocational and technological education and training and relate it to ITeC provision, can hope to do so.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCING THE ITEC

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in chapter 1, there are now 170 ITeCs countrywide which aim to offer a one year training, two years since April 1986, under the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), in the basics of electronics, computing and office technology, to school-leavers and 16/17 year-old unemployed people, and assume no previous academic qualifications. The original aim was that ITeCs should be community-based, becoming real workshops, selling their services to local firms and giving adults as well as unqualified school leavers, the chance to learn about computers.

In 1982, Kenneth Baker, then Minister for Information Tecnnology, adopted the ITeC idea and directed them under the guidance of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). These organisations saw them as one response to the worsening job market for young people, and a mismatch between skills offered and jobs available in the local economy as a result of the introduction of new technology (MSC, 1986:8).

The MSC's primary interest is linked to the training element of YTS programmes and see ITeCs as providing young people with vocational training and work experience which should improve their chances of finding full-time employment. The DTI see ITeCs as also increasing awareness of information technology in business and the community by allowing open access to training and information, promoting the generation of new business in the IT field, and helping to create new jobs associated with technology (1986:8).

3.2 The Local Scene

The ITeC studied in this research, is located in Southampton, in a city which over the last ten years has seen significant changes in its economic activity with a decline in

manufacturing and shipbuilding and repairing, and growth in service sector employment. The city's economy is closely integrated with a number of towns within a 12 mile radius, and its workforce of approximately 225,000 is well served by road and rail links. Although the city's maritime connections are still important, the city itself has traditionally been the service centre for a large part of the region. This is reflected in jobs for example in wholesaling and retailing, business trades and tourism, accounting for 55 per cent of employment. The city has a thriving shopping centre and has attracted the regional headquarters of many banks, insurance companies and building societies.

According to a 1987 Southampton City Council report, during 1986 and 1987 the unemployment rate in the area was approximately 11 per cent, similar to the national figure. This represented just under 13,000 people out of work, approximately 1000 of whom were males and 400 females aged 18 or less.

3.3 The Youth Labour Market

The idea of a labour market specific to young people may be criticised on the grounds that few jobs are held exclusively by young people. It is nearly always the case that young people are in open competition with adults in the general labour market to find work. However, it is widely recognised that young people's experience in the general labour market is distinctive from that of adults, thus allowing the youth labour market to be seen as a segment within the general labour market.

There are a number of models of labour market segmentation in which jobs are divided between 'primary' and 'secondary' sectors. The primary sector contains internal labour markets with high pay leading to promotion and stable employment. The secondary sector contains insecure, low-paid jobs, in which young people and women are confined (Barron and Norris, 1976; Loveridge and Mok, 1978). Others have suggested that labour markets are segmented in more complex

ways by sex, age, skill and race (Ashton et al., 1982; 1987), and by their local character (Roberts et al, 1986), rather than being divided into just two sections.

More often than not, young people are restricted to considering the job opportunities that are available in their immediate locality, as they lack the transport and resources to move further afield (Roberts et al, 1986; Pilcher and Williamson, 1988). Their employment chances are thus likely to be influenced by changes in the occupational structure of the area. This was the case in the area in which the ITeC was located.

According to a 1987 Southampton City report, during the last ten years the area has lost 13,500 manufacturing jobs in traditional industries such as shipbuilding and repairs, while in contrast there has been a greater demand for workers in private sector office-based industries, in retailing, leisure and tourism and small scale, technology-linked manufacturing. This has meant that the proportion of higher-level jobs has risen thus increasing demand for well-qualified young people to train for these positions. The proportion of lower-level jobs has declined, thereby reducing demand for less-qualified young people.

3.4 The ITeC Setting

The ITeC opened in 1982 and moved to larger premises in 1987. It is part of a group of buildings which house a variety of YTS courses, all sponsored by the City Council. It is governed by a board that has representatives of the City Council, the local Chamber of Commerce, the trade unions and the education authority. The staff are employees of the Council, who also provide the accomodation and top up the trainees' allowance. There are seven full-time staff and one part-time, of whom four are female and four male, and places for approximately sixty trainees in electronics, computer programming and office technology. The ITeC has close links with the Careers Service and with local schools and colleges in which it holds recruiting drives for trainees throughout

the year.

When trainees applied to join the course, they were invited to an interview, usually with the assistant manager. Although no formal academic qualifications are required, trainees were expected to show a high level of enthusiasm for the course. Preference was usually given to young people who had worked part-time while at school, in jobs such as delivering newspapers or Saturday work in shops, which the assistant manager felt 'showed that they had some go about them'.

For most of the trainees, joining the ITeC meant spending the first three or four months in the various workshops, before moving onto work-placements with local employers to begin their on-the-job training. It was usual for about 30 trainees to begin the course in both July and October, those joining at the age of 16 were entitled to two years on the course, while those beginning at 17 were entitled to one. All of them received an MSC allowance of £33. 50 per week during their first year, which included a £5. 00 supplement from the City Council. In the second year, they receive £35. 00 per week.

3.5 Getting Started: Off-the-job training

The regime at the ITeC appeared strict, partly because of the preference and style of most of the staff. Trainees were expected to begin work at 8 a.m., and lateness or absenteeism required a very good reason, sometimes from themselves, more often from their parents. Trainees were not allowed to smoke on the premises, and were responsible for keeping their rest area clean and tidy. Poor attendance or bad behaviour were dealt with by spoken, then written, warnings and finally by dismissal. They were all expected to be of a neat appearance, at all times.

On arrival at the ITeC, each trainee was given a week's induction period, during which time they visited the City Council's Equal Opportunity Division, where their rights as young workers was spelt out for them. The rest of the week

was spent in the three workshops in which they were given a practical aptitude test to see in which areas they might be weak or strong. Unlike most other YTS courses, trainees were not given 'life and social skills' lessons as it was felt that the trainees recruited by the ITeC were of a higher standard than the usual YTS young person and therefore did not require such lessons.

During their first three to four months all trainees were required to spend equal amounts of time in the three work-rooms, from where they would move on to work-placements with local employers. Once they had got into the routine of the ITeC, most of the the trainees I spoke to had taken a preference for different work-rooms. Most of the young men were preferred the electronics and computer work-rooms, while the majority of young women preferred the office-technology room.

There were three work-rooms: electronics, computer programming and office-technology. The electronics room was arranged to simulate a workshop, with raised work benches and cabinets for spare parts lining the walls. It contained equipment such as multimeters, oscilloscopes, soldering torches and micro-processors. The computing room had eight micro-computers, some with colour monitors and a variety of printers. The office technology room contained eight micro-computers and printers, mainly for use as word-processors, and a number of electronic typewriters. This room also contained a photocopier, telephone switchboard and a reception area, so that it simulated a real office.

The Electronics workshop offered trainees a broad range of skills for those wanting to find work in servicing, maintaining and assembling electronic equipment. It also offered them the opportunity to work as a sales-person dealing with electronic gadgets such as video-recorders and hi-fi equipment. The course covered the recognition of various components and their uses such as building and designing circuits, and fault-finding and repairing radios and televisions. It also covered aspects of basic electrical work

and some teaching of basic maths.

In the Computer Programming room trainees were given practical experience of commonly-used computer hardware and software. Here they were offered skills to equip them to operate computers in a business environment in which they might use word-processing, database and spread-sheet programmes.

In the Office Technology room, trainees were offered skills mainly in word-processing and touch-typing. They also learned about office organisation, telephone and reception techniques, photocopying, filing and keeping records and handling petty cash. With these skills many trainees could move into work such as typists or secretaries.

During the induction period the ITeC staff did their best to ease the trainees into the course programme, by encouraging them to use all the equipment in the three work-rooms. After the induction week, most of those I spoke to said they had enjoyed the opportunity to try equipment which had not been available to them at school. Besides, most pointed out that they were glad to see the back of school and appreciated being treated like adults by the ITeC staff.

3.6 The ITeC Staff

Of the eight staff, two are in their thirties, four in their forties and two in their fifties. One member of staff had worked previously in education and held a teaching certificate, two had been involved with training in the Royal Navy, four had professional backgrounds as managers or supervisors in industry and one had previously been employed as a youth worker.

Although all the staff were involved in some aspect of teaching at different times, three of them spent most of the time teaching in their respective work-rooms viz. electronics, computer programming and office technology. These people were known as Training Supervisors; two of them were men, the other a woman. The rest of the staff were as follows. The Manager was a man whose duties included such things as generating

finance to keep the ITeC going, arranging courses with local companies, organising new courses for the trainees and teaching. The Assistant Manager was also male and his main duties involved interviewing potential trainees, organising events with local schools to promote the ITeC, obtaining work placements with local companies and teaching. The Work Placement Supervisor was a woman who was concerned mainly with advising trainees of the various work placements available to them, monitoring the progress of trainees on those placements and obtaining new work placements. She also helped out on occasions with teaching. The Business Supervisor was a woman who was responsible for ordering and receiving stationery and other types of equipment used in the ITeC. Occasionally she also monitored the progress of trainees on work placements and assisted in the work-rooms. The part-time member of staff was a woman who dealt with general administration such as typing, filing and reception work. She was also responsible for processing the personal files of trainees and on occasions monitored trainees on work placements and assisted in the work-rooms.

The staff at the ITeC saw their duties as equipping trainees with the necessary skills so that when they finished the course, they could take up semi-skilled jobs. They were extremely proud of the ITeC's post-course employment record for trainees, which over the seven years since opening had risen to 98%. They also wanted to offer them the opportunity to grow up and develop, to meet other young people and to enjoy themselves. This orientation to the trainees was illustrated by the encouragement of extra-curricular involvement. For example, in the past staff had organised 'outward-bound' weekends, during which a group of trainees and some of the staff had explored the countryside and lived under canvas. It was felt that these types of activities encouraged 'independence' and 'leadership' qualities in trainees, and were also enjoyable. More recently the staff had arranged an annual football match with another ITeC, after which a trophy and medals were presented to the winners and a buffet meal

provided for both teams and their supporters.

Most of the staff spoke highly of the continued support they received from their sponsors, the City Council. They were keen to emphasise what they called the 'arms-length' approach of the council, which they felt provided them with a certain autonomy and enabled them to get on with their job with only the occasional interference from officials. They were not so complimentary towards the Training Agency, who they felt regarded all YTS schemes as the same, and failed to understand the special qualities of ITeCs and theirs' in particular.

The manager pointed out that although all ITeCs received a grant from the MSC of around £4,000 a year for each trainee, compared with £2,000 for routine youth training, he felt that he was under continual pressure from the MSC to justify this extra funding. He felt that the ITeC's post-course employment record and their business generation activities, such as providing a computer consultancy service and computer courses for local employers and their staff, should speak for themselves. Indeed, these activities were achieving around £30,000 each year towards the running costs of the ITeC. Furthermore, the staff felt that in the early days of the ITeC, they had received very little support from the Training Agency in terms of curricular material and general guidance. The overall view of them was that they were a hindrance rather than a help.

All the staff had worked in commerce, industry or in the social services in the past and many of them welcomed the closer liaison with industry on which YTS and the 'new vocationalism' was based. Over the years they had developed their own syllabus which they felt gave them the flexibility to incorporate into it the particular training needs of local employers offering work-placements.

The majority of trainees at the ITeC had no more than two GCSEs. However, formal academic qualifications were not the criteria on which they were recruited. The assistant manager who usually interviewed prospective trainees felt that

a good guide to a 'successful' trainee was whether or not the young person had previous experience of part-time work. He felt that if they had, this demonstrated a young persons 'initiative' and showed that they had 'some go 'about them. On occasions he had recruited trainees without this experience. However, these were young people who had impressed him with their personal presentation and enthusiasm for the course.

The staff were particularly keen to generate an atmosphere of 'elitism' among the trainees who were encouraged to believe that the ITeC was of a much higher status than the rest of YTS, and reminded regularly that they had semi-skilled job potential. Indeed, they were discouraged from mixing with trainees on other YTS courses in the adjoining building. This sense of higher status was also strived for in the work-placements on which trainees gained their work experience.

3.7 On-the-Job Training

After spending three or four months in the ITeC, the opportunity to move into work-placements with local employers came as a welcome relief for many trainees. Placements were for around nine months in the first year and ten months in the second year, and a trainee might get one or two such opportunities during the course. However, in most cases it was usual for trainees to spend all their on-the-job training with one employer.

Over the years the assistant manager and the work-placement supervisor who were responsible for obtaining and monitoring placements had formed and nurtured many contacts with local employers. They found that many firms were cooperative and willing to help young people. However, they were eager to impress on me that they only took 'top quality' placements in which trainees were given proper training and not treated simply as 'dogsbodies'.

Once an employer had offered to become a work experience provider, the assistant manager or the work-placement

supervisor visited the firm to discuss the 'training plan' for the placement, and to view the working environment. If they felt that the firm was suitable, a contract was signed indicating the responsibilities of the employer to the ITeC. Among the employers were hi-fi and television shops, specialist computer shops and small electrical maintenance firms. There were professional practices including solicitors and accountants. But the greater part of the ITeC clientel were commercial offices: shipping agents, estate agents, insurance brokers and travel agents.

Before they were sent out on work-placements, trainees discussed with the placement supervisor the type of placement they were interested in, and the availability of such a placement. Once this had been agreed, an interview was arranged with the employer and the trainee was accompanied by the placement supervisor to the firm. It was overwhelmingly the case that young women trainees avoided placements which invlolved electronics or maintenance work, preferring instead office work. The young men, on the other hand, were prepared to try most types of placements.

On occasions, an employer offered placements for two or three trainees. However, if more than one trainee wanted a placement with a firm which offered only one placement, those trainees were forced to compete with each other. This involved trainees visiting the firm with the placement supervisor, and trying their best during the interview to convince the employer that they were the young person for the job. The ITeC staff felt that this type of competition was good experience for working life. However, the trainees I spoke to were not so enthusiastic towards this practice. It was usually those who had been successful in obtaining the placement who agreed with the method, the others were often very disappointed.

Once trainees began their work-placement, they were likely to spend between nine and eighteen months with the firm, during which time they were visited every four weeks by the placement supervisor who monitored their progress. This

was done by discussing with the employer and the trainee the sorts of tasks they had done, and adding this to the trainee's 'profile' - a report which logged the trainee's progress during the course.

In many cases, trainees were offered 'employee-status' by the firms. This meant that the trainee was paid a 'proper' wage of between £60 and £80 a week, and the employer gave an assurance that if the trainee proved satisfactory, the placement would continue as a permanent job at the end of the course. The training allowance was paid not to the trainee but to the employer to offset the wage. The staff at the ITeC felt that this was not always in the best interest of the ITeC, because although they were happy that the trainee had obtained employment, this sometimes meant that they had lost the placement for future trainees.

Sometimes a trainee messed things up and alienated the employer, in which case, if they agreed, the employer was sent another trainee. In this way the placement was usually retained. Other times a trainee might became dissatisfied with the type of work that was expected of them and requested a move to another placement. If this happened, the placement supervisor and the trainee discussed the grievance together and then with the employer. If it was felt that the complaint was justified, the trainee either returned to the placement on the understanding that they would receive proper training, or moved to another placement. Persistent complaints by trainees about the quality of training provided by an employer, resulted in that placement being withdrawn from the ITeC's books. I was assured by both trainees and staff that placements such as this were a rarity. Occasionally, an employer would offer a trainee a permanent job, without requiring that he or she complete the course. If this happened, the trainee left the ITeC and, if possible, the firm was not be used again.

It was sometimes the case that trainees experienced difficulties in their personal lives which affected them during their time on the course. While I was there, one of

the young women trainees became pregnant by a young man on the course. Both of them received support and advice from the work placement supervisor who was the person who usually dealt with 'personal matters'.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

It has been suggested by a number of writers such as Bryman (1984) and Finch (1986) that one way of studying the effects of social policies, while at the same time helping to develop our understanding of social phenomena, is through the use of qualitative methods. As Finch points out:

> Qualitative research therefore looks not so much for 'causes' as for 'meanings', rejecting the natural science model and seeing the task of social research as uncovering the meaning of social events and processes, based upon understanding the lived experience of human society from the actor's point of view (1986:7).

My intention in this study was to explore some of the issues involved in the implementation and reception of YTS policy at the local level. For example, ITeCs are a feature of this policy in which a major aim is to provide trainees with basic skills in new technology and thus improve their job prospects, I was concerned to explore the processes through which these outcomes were produced, as well to examine some of the outcomes of such processes. This meant looking at not only the experiences of trainees on the ITeC course, but also the role of other participants in this process, such as ITeC staff and work placement providers.

Finch (1986, 1988) has suggestetd that a qualitative approach has the potential to make a significant contribution to documenting the effects of policies when they are put into practice. It is suggested that a particular kind of contribution this study can make is that it makes visible some of the tensions and contradictions encompassed in YTS poilcy. Finch (1988) rightly points out that these can be glossed over when the policy is discussed and presented by politicians, however, staff and/or employers who have to implement them do not have this luxury. Therefore a secondary aim of this study is to expose some of the contradictions and incompatible aims

of YTS policy when it is put into practice on an ITeC course.

4.2 Gaining Access

As a post-graduate with NTRG I was a member of a research 'family' consisting of four sociology lecturers, a fellow, two other post-graduates and a secretary. The Group is concerned with investigating the process of technological change in various work organisations. I discussed my interest in YTS with several members of the Group but was unsure of how I could link this with some aspect of technology. I had been thinking about exploring the usefulness of computer literacy courses in Further Education to the job opportunities for young people. To explore this I visited the Education Department at the University. I rightly assumed they would be likely to have contacts with staff on local YTS courses who might be interested in a number of ideas I had for my study. Eventually I contacted the local Further Education College, but after a chat with the principal decided that there were not enough young people taking computer literacy to warrant an in-depth study.

So I had to re-think my plans. However, it was at this point that one of the many benefits of working within a research unit became apparent, viz. informal contacts. I mentioned to a colleague in NTRG that I had read in the newspaper that 95 per cent of trainees leaving the local ITeC were moving into full-time jobs and in view of much of the general criticism of YTS, this seemed to be a successful training course. We discussed a number of aspects of the local YTS schemes and the potential of carrying out a study in them.

During this conversation he pointed out that these schemes were partly sponsored by the City Council and that as a member of such he could put me in touch with various people involved with YTS. Through my colleague I arranged a meeting with a councillor involved with much of the youth training programmes being implemented within the Training and Temporary Employment section of the Council, who suggested that for any

type of project I would need the permission of all those responsible for various training initiatives.

Therefore, my next step was to arrange to be present at the next sitting of the above Council sub-committee in order to outline a number of areas of potential research. I remember feeling nervous at this meeting, which was held in the grand setting of the Council Chamber, as I suggested a number of ideas for a project involving youth training and technology. These were very tentative ideas which covered a number of issues such as the type of jobs trainees were moving into on completion of their training and the reasons why trainees left the course early. Most felt that some type of research in the ITeC would be worthwhile and gave me their approval, so the next thing to do was to approach the Manager of the ITeC to seek his permission. This I did within a few weeks and the Manager agreed with the decision of the Council sub-committee to allow me access to the ITeC. During the twelve months I spent conducting research there, I was allowed unlimited access to the building.

During my visits to the work placements, which I negotiated by letter to management followed by a visit, the degree of access varied between firms. In the majority of them I was allowed to spend one or two days observing and interviewing trainees and employers. However, due to the pressure of work, five firms only allowed me one hour with the trainees.

4.3 Research Methods

In this study I interviewed seventy-five trainees aged between sixteen and seventeen who joined the ITeC between June 1987 and December 1988. The study was in two stages. In the first stage seventy-five trainees, of which fifty-two were males and twenty-three females, were interviewed during their year at the ITeC. During this stage the eight members of the ITeC staff, four women and four men, were also interviewed. I also sent a questionnaire to the forty-five firms that provided work placements.

In the second stage of the study twenty-four trainees, twelve males and twelve females, were interviewed on their work placement. During this stage twenty-two employers who provided work placements were also interviewed.

The process of 'selecting' trainees and employers for the follow-up stage depended both on the active cooperation of the participants, together with the need to limit the breadth of the study in line with the time and resources available.

4.4 Methodology

The methods used were mainly qualitative and were based on interviews and systematic observation. They included interviews with ITeC staff, interviews with trainees, interviews with employers providing work placements and observation of work. I also used one brief postal questionnaire which was sent to employers providing work placements. Most of the interviews were taped, or recorded in as much detail as possible in fieldnote form. Some were structured and others unstructured. However, most were semi-structured around a series of key topics and questions to allow for a degree of flexibility.

4.4.1 Interviews with ITeC staff

Interviews with ITeC staff were directed at obtaining their views and knowledge on YTS and the role of ITeCs. Staff were asked how they defined and explained the course, their feelings about their role as trainers, how they viewed trainees and the strategies and negotiations used by themselves during their work (see Appendix 1). Interviews with staff varied in length from half an hour to several hours according to their disposition. In all cases interviews took place in private in one of the offices.

4.4.2 Interviews with trainees

Interviews with trainees included trainee's experiences of their latter school years, the ITeC course, expectations of

full-time work, unemployment, present and future family life, and part-time jobs (see Appendix 2). At the beginning of each interview I explained that I wanted to cover the above topics, but they were welcome to discuss them in any order and to bring up other issues concerning themselves and the course if they wished. This enabled me to follow up particular areas, for example, the type of work-placement they wanted; it also allowed trainees to discuss issues amongst themselves. This often happened during questions about the parts of the course some of them disliked. For example, the job of receptionist was usually mentioned as causing embarrassment, especially by the young men.

Trainees were interviewed individually and in groups. The individual interviews took place in the work-rooms and the rest-room. This was considered preferable as away of reducing the formality of the interviews. The interviews in groups took place in the rest-room.

In the second stage of the project carried out at the work-placements I interviewed trainees during their meal-breaks and/or a break from work allowed by their supervisor. These interviews took place in a rest area or in an office, and lasted between half an hour and one hour. I used semi-structured interviews which involved a number of themes concerning their work-placement such as, job satisfaction, working-conditions, work-mates and career prospects (see Appendix 3).

4.4.3 Interviews with employers

Interviews with employers providing work placements were directed at obtaining reasons for their involvement with the ITeC. Employers were sent a brief questionnaire covering issues such as trainees' technical skills and personal characteristics, and a self-selection of those who replied were visited (see Appendix 4). These work placement visits were felt necessary so as to explore in more detail some of the points raised in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked about the organisation, its size, its operations and

recruitment policy. Interviews varied in length from thirty minutes to several hours depending on their disposition and were conducted in an office.

4.4.4 Observation of work

Observation of work was used extensively in this study. This usually took place prior to interviews. The extent of observation also differed between the research sites. In the ITeC I was engaged in observation over a period of twelve months, whereas at most of the work placements I spent a maximum of two days.

During the early weeks in the ITeC my main concern was with what Spradley (1980) refers to as 'descriptive observations'. These are observations which can then be linked to the kinds of questions that are posed by the participant observer. This involved asking myself questions about, for example, the setting of the ITeC itself, the individuals working in the ITeC and events taking place there. I hoped that the descriptions I got from these observations would act as a basic guide and provide a background to further observations from which I could draw more detailed and focused questions. For example, my early impressions of the ITeC, its staff and trainees, raised several questions which I used to offer some direction to my study. I began by asking: What is the ITeC course? How is the course seen by different members of the staff and trainees? What are the patterns of social relations that occur between staff and trainees?

However, on the basis of my observations, the issues that were raised by my informants and my general interest in symbolic interactionism I focused my questions further to include: How do staff define the course? How do trainees define the course? What sort of work do they do? What sort of work are they being prepared for? How are they selected for work-placements? These questions allowed me to move from a detailed description of a particular setting towards making a series of what Spradley (1980) calls 'focused observations'.

4.4.5 Documentary evidence

Documentary evidence was obtained from staff at the ITeC and included trainees' progress files, work materials on the syllabus, work placement agreements and training and publicity material. Two meetings of the Steering Group were also attended. Much of this material was useful for providing information on everyday activity in the ITeC.

4.5 Order of the empirical data

Chapter five will present material on the ITeC staff. Chapter six will present material on the trainees. This chapter is in two parts, the first looks at the time spent by trainees in the ITeC and the second part looks at those trainees interviewed on work placement. Chapter seven will present material on the employers providing work placements.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRAINERS IN THE ITEC: THE PRACTICE AND WHY THEY DO IT

5.1 Introduction

It is suggested that in order to develop our understanding of how the ITeC operates, it is necessary to be aware of the institutional life of the ITeC and the educational practices and perspectives of the staff. Therefore, in this chapter I will describe and analyse some of the ways in which the staff who teach, train and monitor the trainees on the course, see their role.

The ITeC staff are involved daily in the reception and delivery of central government initiatives at the personal level, a level at which class and gender relations are important issues in the shaping of training and the lives of the staff. It is suggested that we need to capture the relationships between the 'personal troubles' of the staff during this process and examine how they manifest themselves in their perspectives towards the ITeC course, and the new vocationalism in general. In doing so it may be possible to make visible the tensions, contradictions and incompatible aims which are often encompassed in the policies themselves (Finch, 1989:189).

Therefore, it is necessary, to pay serious attention to what Williams (1984edn) refers to as peoples's culture '...in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values...in institutions and ordinary behaviour'(ibid:57).

5.2 Trainer Perspectives

From an analysis of the data on trainers' perspectives, what emerges is that staff often have conflicting and contradictory understandings with regard to the purposes of YTS and the ITeC, their role within this process and their outlooks towards it. Nevertheless, it seems that two general perspectives stand out. These can be categorised as a

'developmental' approach and an 'instrumental' approach.

The developmental approach stressed the notion of individual development, and staff who held this view were often critical of the overall philosophy of the YTS and the new vocationalism in general. They were able to identify the wider social influences on their role within the framework of the scheme and held a much more liberal approach to the scheme and life in general. Most of them had joined the ITeC because they wanted a challenge in professional youth work other than social work or teaching.

The instrumental approach stressed the importance of the transfer of skills from one generation to the next. Staff who held this view explained their role in terms of work and jobs. For them the process of training was conceived of as instruction in which they emphasised their role as being concerned with getting trainees into the habit of work. Although they did not support all the official objectives of YTS and the new vocationalism, they saw in ITeCs the opportunity for themselves of a new challenge involving greater diversity than conventional managerial work.

As a result of these two levels of perspectives, trainers adopt two different sets of outlooks towards YTS and the ITeC which influence their views within it. The way in which staff translate these views into practice is often contradictory, with staff holding opposed ideas working along side each other reasonably well in terms of the routines of the ITeC. The demands of survival usually come first, so some trainers may often become reconciled to doing much that they disprove of.

In general then, these two trainer perspectives were reflected in their outlooks towards the whole scheme, whether they were directed at the politics surrounding the new vocationalism, their relationships with the MSC, employers and trainees, or in regard to their teaching/training and coping strategies and towards their own role within this process.

The trainers' general views and objectives towards the trainees and the new vocationalism will now be outlined in order to demonstrate more fully the characteristics of these

two perspectives.

5.3 Trainers Perspectives and the New Vocationalism

a) Concepts

From the data it was possible to identify a system of categories that the staff used depending to a large extent on their respective outlooks towards YTS, the ITeC and the new vocationalism. There seemed to be three main types of categories used in describing the trainees.

The first was a set of terms that had to do with their success at formal learning. Both groups of staff used terms such as 'low standard', 'dreamer', 'dozy' as well as positive terms like 'trier' 'grafter' and 'management material'.

A noticeable variation on this theme was the use of a number of concepts by both groups of staff to define trainees' success in handling the course. Some of the terms used were 'not very bright', 'high flier','a bit backward coming forward', 'under-achiever'. It was significant that many of the staff who held the instrumental view had the notion that 'less-able' trainees were that way due to a fixed attribute of the young person, not affected by training or learning. A member of staff holding this view described a male trainee's 'low ability' in such a way: "It doesn't matter how hard Jason tries, he's got to realise he's never going to be a high flier.". On the other hand, members of staff who held a developmental view regarded all trainees as having some sort of potential which could be developed with the right kind of coaxing.

The second set of concepts was implicitly contrasted with ability; it had to do with the enthusiasm trainees put into their handling of the course. These concepts were focussed around the notion of motivation. Individual trainees were referred to as, 'a grafter', 'a chancer', 'a slacker', or as 'persistent', some one who would 'have a go'.

The different levels of enthusiasm shown by trainees towards the course was important to both groups of staff. Those holding an instrumental view regarded trainees with low

enthusiasm as having displayed the same characteristic at school. They thus emphasised the need for trainees to have 'the right attitude to life', which could be acquired through 'discipline' and 'teamwork'. Once they had these kind of skills they would stand a better chance of finding a job.

Staff holding the developmental view were less strident in their views. They also felt that trainees had been 'let down' by the education system, but saw their low enthusiasm towards learning as being for wider reasons. Among these were: the 'type' of school they had attended - in the area different schools had reputations for being 'good 'or 'bad'; the resources the school had, in particular the lack of computers; and the kind of homes the trainees came from. These members of staff also emphasised the importance of 'teamwork'.

A third set of concepts had to do with the general behaviour or demeanour of the trainees. Terms used were, 'pain', 'nuisance', 'childish', 'responsible', 'mature'. Both groups of staff used these terms interchangeably to describe trainees' behaviour.

Staff also had categories for describing the trainees family background; 'good homes' and 'problem family' were the terms most widely used. The developmentalists tended to include difficulties at home as one of the reasons for trainees having problems with the course. The instrumentalists either failed to mention the trainee's home, or else gave it a low priority. On occasions all members of staff agreed that some parents were over-concerned to the point of protectiveness. This usually manifest itself in parents phoning the ITeC complaining that the work-placement the trainee was on was either an exploitative or an undemanding one.

b) Knowledge

All the staff had professional knowledge acquired from working in either education, commerce, industry, the youth service or the armed forces. To explain all the intricacies involved in

translating this knowledge into the practice of training is impossible. Much of it took the form of intuitive decisions about what to do at a particular moment in the workshop, how to respond to a particular trainee's difficulty with some aspect of the course, and so on. Nevertheless, it was possible to identify two significant categories of knowledge through the different emphasis given by staff to notions about work placements. After three or four months of what is referred to as off-the-job training in the ITeC, trainees move into work placements with local employers. The idea is that this on-the-job training will give trainees the opportunity to gain work experience in a commercial/industrial environment.

Members of staff who held the instrumentalist view saw work placements as sites at which trainees would be able to improve their general working habits, such as 'punctuality', 'personal hygiene' and 'communication'. They felt that once trainees were involved with technology as a job, whether it be servicing televisions or typing letters, they would acquire a 'sense of responsibility'. These were characteristics they suggested were important to themselves during their working lives and likewise to trainees. These members of staff focussed on the way in which they felt progress was synonymous with new technology, which they felt was important for society in general. They pointed out that the experience work placements provided would enable trainees to be involved with changes in technology, thus preparing them for relatively well-paid semi-skilled jobs.

On the other hand, staff who held the developmentalist view saw work-placements as providing a kind of structure in which trainees could mix with adults and begin to mature as individuals. They felt that even though some work placements offered trainees the possibility of a full-time job at the end of the course, they should take the opportunity to try different types of work-placements on offer at the ITeC. The feeling was that work should be enjoyable as well as provide wages.

c) Images of training

All members of staff emphasised that they regarded ITeC training as at the top of the hierarchy in terms of YTS courses. Indeed, it was pointed out that because of the poor reputation of YTS in general, staff tried to distance the ITeC from the scheme. This was particularly so when trying to acquire new work-placements with employers. This notion of 'elitism' was an important element for both groups of staff in the perception of their work, together with the belief that it was a socially responsible job which required a high level of commitment. They mentioned with a sense of pride that trainees who had left the ITeC often visited or wrote to thank them for helping them find a job and for giving them 'a second chance' in life.

It was clear that the 'sense of fulfilment' staff achieved from their work was bound up with their ability to teach their subject properly, and with their personal and professional identities. Both groups of staff had joined the ITeC for a variety of reasons, and almost all had different interpretations of what professionalism meant to them. Two members of staff who held instrumental views saw professionalism as to do with respectability and social status. They felt that over the years, the ITeC had increasingly gained a reputation locally for producing 'well qualified' trainees, as such they felt that the status of the ITeC had been raised in the eyes of employers and schools. This they felt was good for their self-identity and the image of the ITeC in general.

Almost all members of staff pointed out that professionalism involved the notion of professional autonomy, the 'room to manoeuvre' as one put it. This involved the ability to control their work within the framework of YTS and the space to develop their own practices. They complained however that the MSC failed to understand or even acknowledge this autonomy. Thus, if they developed a new aspect of the course, they usually tried it out in the ITeC; if it worked they incorporated it into the course and told the MSC, if it

failed, the MSC were none the wiser.

For some of the staff the notion of independent responsibility was another interpretation of professionalism. This was clearly demonstrated when staff had to deal with 'individual trainee problems'. All staff were expected to spend a certain amount of time offering 'guidance' and 'counselling' to trainees as they progressed through the course. However, it was pointed out that occasionally staff were called on to devote a large amount of their time and energies on 'individual trainee problems'.

The types of problems staff dealt with included such things as, 'unwanted pregnancies', 'difficulties with parents', 'involvement with police', 'homelessness', 'emotional problems' etc. Most of the staff who held instrumental views said they tried as best they could to deal with problems such as these. However, most felt they did not have the time, apart from which, as one put it, 'I'm here to teach them computing, not to be their social worker'.

In most cases 'individual trainee problems' were dealt with by staff who held developmental views, and even though this took up a large proportion of their time, they felt it was part of their independent responsibility to make the appropriate space within the ITeC schedule to accomodate these problems. Members of staff who held these views felt that this 'pastoral' element of their job was something which contributed to their sense of job satisfaction.

d) Operating principles

For most of the staff, their opinions on how to be a trainer may be said to be guided by 'operating principles', 'something between a rule of conduct and a style of approaching the world' (Connell, 1985:179).

One way in which this was expressed by a staff member holding a developmental view, was through the notion of being reasonable and realistic. He made this point through an explanation of an incident which had occurred at the ITeC involving a local youth officer with a large trade union.

The youth officer's request to speak to the trainees had been granted. However the member of staff felt that the talk had turned into a 'tirade of abuse' about the YTS. He explained that although he believed in unions, he felt that this type of presentation was more likely to turn people off unions rather than encourage them to join. He felt that he was a 'moderate person' who tried to see both sides of an argument.

Another operating operating principle was the notion of 'fairness'. This often arose where the issue of sex equality was involved. The ITeC prided itself on offering the same training to both young men and young women. This was relatively easy to monitor while the trainee were in the ITeC. However, problems sometimes arose on work-placements.

A member of staff who held a developmental view pointed out that when she monitored trainee's progress on placements there were occasions when she felt that a female trainee was only being given 'women's work', such as filing and making the tea. If this happened she discussed it with the employer and the trainee, and if the situation did not improve the trainee was moved to another work-placement. Another member of staff also pointed out that, trainees were moved to other placements if there was a suspicion that they were being 'exploited'. That placement was then no longer used by the ITeC.

5.4 Conclusion

The role played by the members of staff in the ITeC depends to a large extent, on the perspectives and outlooks they have adopted towards YTS and the new vocationalism in general. These have been described as 'developmental' and 'instrumental' views. The variety of ways in which they translated these perspectives into practice and 'lived' them, was through the concepts they used, the knowledge they had, their images of teaching and their operating principles.

The concepts they used for talking about trainees, such as 'ability', 'enthusiasm', 'problem families', tended to reflect their own 'common-sense' notions of the trainees. Much

of the knowledge used by staff was drawn from their own experiences of working life, in particular their views on technology.

The images held by staff of training revolved around different interpretations of 'professionalism'. This varied from concern with social status to autonomy. Within a concern for the latter, staff who held a developmental view dealt with issues which took up a considerable amount of time, such as 'individual trainee problems', and which were not on the official curriculum. Finally, most of the staff were guided by operating principles, which reflected a concern for 'fairness' and 'moderation'.

CHAPTER SIX
TRAINEES IN THE ITEC

6.1 Introduction

It has been pointed out in the Chapter 1 that ITeCs vary greatly in the way they operate, depending to a large extent on their sponsors and the perspectives and orientations of their staff. It was suggested that for these reasons, no two ITeCs are likely to be the same and must not be perceived and presented as homogenous organisations, as the way they operate and their impact is not uniform throughout. For these reasons, this chapter is concerned with how a single ITeC course affects trainees. Before looking at the course itself, its objectives will be contextualised briefly within YTS.

As discussed in chapter 2, YTS was seen by policy makers as providing a bridge between school and working life, through a period of training and planned work experience. During its launch it was associated with new technologies which were seen as having the potential to create job opportunities and promote economic growth. In this context, ITeCs were to provide young people with between one and two years training in workshops and on work placements with local employers, learning about electronics and computers. It was felt that once young people had gained experience of a range of adaptable skills, this would develop their potential and improve their chances of finding a permanent job (MSC, 1986:8).

In summary, the three main objectives of the ITeC course were first, to provide a bridge between school and work which involved a period of training and work experience. Secondly, to give trainees the experience of a range of adaptable skills which would help them to find a full-time job, and thirdly, to increase awareness of new technologies among young people and businesses in general, as it was felt, this was where future jobs were likely to be.

However, it is also suggested by some commentators that YTS is concerned with young people's 'employability', which

means in the main motivating them to submit to work discipline. These writers argue that YTS was designed to compensate for the supposed individual deficiencies of young, working-class school-leavers, who it was felt lacked the good work habits, knowledge and attitudes required by employers (Finn, 1985). However, it is clear from the data presented in this chapter, that the way in which the objectives of the ITeC course are attained, depends to a large extent on the way they are interpreted by trainees. The trainee responses to the three main objectives of the course outlined above, will now be examined.

6.2 The Trainees

In this study, I interviewed seventy-five trainees who were at the ITeC between June 1987 and December 1988. In the second stage of the project, twenty-two trainees, twelve male and twelve female, were followed up on their work placement and interviewed about their experiences at the ITeC and on work placement. In terms of family background, almost all the trainees were working class. However, one or two came from families in which one or both parents had professional or managerial jobs. Most had fathers in skilled or semi-skilled jobs such as electricians or drivers. Some also had mothers with jobs such as cleaners or cooks. Only one trainee came from a family whose father was unemployed. All the trainees had been through the local comprehensive school system with the exception of two female trainees who had attended a local convent school. All the trainees were white except for three Asian females.

Table 6.1 Parents' occupational group.

OCCUPATION	FATHERS	MOTHERS
SKILLED	29	na*
SEMI-SKILLED	45	na
UNSKILLED	0	36
UNEMPLOYED	1	na

* The information on all the mothers' occupations is not available.

All the trainees I spoke to were anxious to find a full-time job, with a fear of being labelled such terms as 'dosser' and 'skiver', by their friends and family if they failed to do so. Many said they were disappointed that they had not managed better results in their exams. The majority had between three and four CSE or 'O' level passes.

Table 6.2 Trainees' CSE/'O' levels.

PASSES	MALES	FEMALES
1	2	0
2	11	4
3-4	39	19

Most of them felt the course would offer them the opportunity to think about 'where they were going' in life, and the chance to find a better type of job than if they had joined another type of YTS course. Many were also looking forward to the money they would earn from a permanent job, and the chance to spend it.

The ways in which the trainees came to be at the ITeC were varied. Some had seen the course advertised in the local Careers Office, and applied through a careers officer.

Others had been impressed by what the course had to offer, after listening to the assistant manager during his 'recruiting drive' in the local schools. And many had joined through the received wisdom gained from friends and/or brothers and sisters who had previously undertaken the course. For many of these trainees, the ITeC had a good reputation locally for helping young people to find jobs. In this context, a number of trainees mentioned that their parents had only allowed them to join the course when they had assured them that it was 'superior' to other YTS courses.

Table 6.3 Modes of recruitment and sources of advice.

RECRUITING DRIVE	CAREERS	FRIENDS/FAMILY
39	18	18

I mentioned in chapter 3 that one of the attributes that the assistant manager looked for in selecting potential recruits was experience of part-time work. This he felt showed that trainees had 'some go in them'. This knowledge of the working environment was contradictory to the assumptions of young people held by policy-makers responsible for YTS, and has been identified in a number of research reports on young people (Finn, 1984;1987). Almost all the trainees I spoke to had direct experience of work through part-time jobs, such as delivering papers and working in supermarkets, garden centres and sports centres. They felt this knowledge had helped them when they applied for the course and would assist them during their time at the ITeC, in particular when it came to work placement interviews with employers.

During induction week, I also asked trainees about the types of work placements they might consider now they had had

a chance to try out the equipment in the workshops. The majority of young men felt they would be happy to take a placement in which they were involved in servicing electrical equipment or using computers. All the young women, except one, said they would prefer some type of office work using computers and word-processors.

Unlike most other YTS courses, trainees were not given formal lessons in 'life and social skills'. It was felt by the staff that the trainees recruited by the ITeC, were more motivated than the usual YTS recruit, and therefore did not require such lessons. The syllabus used consisted of a sequence of modules and projects, completed over any length of time period, according to the aptitude of the trainee. It was sufficiently flexible to meet the needs and interests of trainees, once they moved on to work placements. Depending on their progress, trainees were offered the opportunity to gain the City and Guilds 726 Certificate in Information Technology.

6.3 Experience of a range of adaptable skills aimed at developing trainee's potential and improving their job prospects

During the first three to four months, all trainees were required to spend equal amounts of time in the three work-rooms. Once they had got into the routine of the ITeC, most of those I spoke to had taken a preference for different work-rooms. While most of the young men were indifferent to the various work-rooms, the majority of young women disliked the electronics work-room preferring the office-technology and computer programming rooms. During this period, I asked the trainees how they felt about what they were learning, and if they saw this as improving their chances of finding permanent employment. Trainees on the whole were enthusiastic about the subjects they were learning.

6.4 The Necessity and Desirability of Information Technology

The necessity and desirability of information technology was an important theme in the initial months of the course. It

was presented by all members of staff, through the notion that new technology was the growth area of employment and thus important for the jobs of young people. During induction week discussions between staff and trainees often focused on the ways in which new technology was changing everyone's life. Examples were given, such as fax-machines in offices and cash-dispensers in shopping areas.

Staff also linked what they felt to be the elitist training in the ITeC with the notion of new technology. It was stressed by the staff that they saw the ITeC as providing superior quality training than other YTS schemes, one of which was next door to them. Trainees were told that the high quality training available at the ITeC meant that they would be in demand by local firms, offering them employment as semi-skilled workers in information technology. Staff identified the characteristics of these jobs in general as well-paid, clean and interesting.

I asked the trainees why they thought it was important to know about new technology. Some of the male trainees said, 'You have to know something about technology, it's everywhere, it's progress.' Another said jokingly, 'It helps you play the video games better.' Others said, 'You see it on the telly....there's computerised cars now'. Some of the female trainees said, 'You have to know how to use the microwave, they're computerised now.' Others said they needed to know about computerised tills which they used on their Saturday jobs.

Electronics

In the Electronics room, trainees were involved in learning about components and how to put them together on circuit boards to achieve certain simple purposes. From this they progressed to basic maintenance and repair of computers, typewriters and printers, used in the ITeC. The supervisor also encouraged them to bring in their own broken radios and hi-fi equipment and repair them.

The most usual comments from the male trainees were that

they were learning a skill which they could use in a variety of jobs. Some pointed out that they wanted to work as service engineers and felt that the training would help them to do so. Others said they wanted to work for themselves eventually and saw electronic skills as a way of achieving this. Some also said they enjoyed working on cars and motor-cycles and that the training had helped them to understand those jobs better. Many of the young men said they enjoyed the challenging nature of electronics and found this rewarding. Important for all the male trainees was the idea that the type of semi-skilled jobs they felt the Course was preparing them for would confer on them a certain social status and offer them job security.

All the female trainees I spoke to, with one exception, disliked the electronic training. Most said they felt it wasn't, 'the type of work women did'. Many felt that they had a better chance of getting a job if they stuck with traditional women's work, such as office work and typing. Others said they didn't like 'messy' jobs which meant getting their hands dirty, while a few said their boy-friends wouldn't approve of them doing this type of work. The one young woman who did show an interest in electronics said that her interest had only been aroused when she began 'fiddling' with radios brought in for repair. She had found it easy to find faults in them and felt that she had a 'knack' in repairing them. She thought she might try and work in some sort of electronics job, but she wasn't sure what type. For many female trainees, social status from semi-skilled work was also important, as was job security.

There was usually a buzz of excitement in the Electronics work-room in which trainees were encouraged to work in groups and help each other with tasks. The focus was very much on team-work, emphasised by the supervisor as an important feature of working practice both within the work-room and on work placement. Trainees seemed to enjoy this way of working arrangement and saw it as a beneficial 'skill', likely to enhance their job prospects. Many of them said they felt this approach to work helped them to get on better with others they

were working with. Most of them felt that the notion of co-operation involved in teamwork was an important attribute when working in industry. This they felt was something they had become more aware of as they progressed through the Course.

Office Technology

Training in the Office Technology work-room involved a combination of office and business skills and techniques. These involved word-processing and touch-typing programmes, as well as learning about telephone and reception technique, photocopying, dealing with mail, petty-cash and writing invoices. Almost half of the male trainees I spoke to said they enjoyed learning word-processing more than typing. Typing they felt was a thing of the past and associated with 'women's work'. The rest of the tasks, with the exception of reception work, they enjoyed. As with typing, the reason given was that it was 'women's work'. Many of the young men in this group said they wanted to work in offices, travel-agents and building societies and felt that the skills they were learning in the work-room would give them a good start. Some with parents in unskilled jobs, such as drivers and cleaners, pointed out that they had been encouraged by them to 'get a job with prospects'. They saw this type of work as offering them job security. An important consideration for some, was the idea of achieving a 'respectable' job and being seen as 'white-collar' workers. They felt this was important for their social status among their peers and families.

The other half of male trainees I spoke to disliked most of the tasks in the work-room, except word-processing. They felt learning about this had more to do with computing jobs, rather than the rest of the tasks which they saw as office administration. Many of them felt the word-processing skills would be useful in most semi-skilled jobs, as they felt that 'computers were everywhere'. All of this group said they felt general office work was 'women's work'.

All the female trainees I spoke to in the Office

Technology work-room were enthusiastic about what they were learning. They felt that the skills they were learning would prepare them for a variety of jobs. Many of them wanted to work as secretaries, others as copy and audio-typists and some as personal assistants. Most of them felt that as young women they had a better chance of a 'good' job, if they stuck to traditional female employment. Many had been encouraged by their parents to 'get a job with prospects' and felt that the Course was preparing them for this.

The work-room itself had a sense of orderliness about it. Most of the trainees were sitting at desks tapping away at word-processors in front of them. If one of them had a query, they spoke to another trainee in order to try and sort it out. Occasionally, the phone rang and whichever trainee was responsible for the switchboard at the time would answer it. Their manner was courteous and if the trainee was unable to help the caller they sought assistance from another trainee. The supervisor pointed out that once she had set the tasks at the beginning of the lesson, she encouraged trainees to help each other. She felt that team-work and cooperation were important attributes to encourage in trainees. The young people I spoke to also felt this was an important 'skill' which they should use in work. As one trainee put it, 'It helps you get on better with each other and gives you more confidence'. Two other features also encouraged in trainees by the supervisor, were personal hygiene and smart appearance. All the trainees felt that these were important when working in an office with colleagues and for job interviews. As one put it, 'It's not very nice working with someone with smelly arm-pits'.

Computing

In the Computing work-room, trainees learned about commonly-used computer hardware and software. They were offered skills to enable them to operate computers in a business context. The software packages in use included a word-processing programme (MultiMate with Mailmerge); a

database programme (D-Base 11); and a spread-sheet programme for preparation of accounts (Supercalc-2).

Most of the male trainees I spoke to felt they were learning skills which would enable them to work in jobs such as insurance, estate-agents and specialist computer shops. Some felt that skills in computing assured them of a wide variety of job choice. As one of them put it, 'Look at all the computer-shops around, if you get fed up with one place, you know you can move to another'. Many of them were also concerned with the social status these types of jobs would confer on them.

However, a few of the male trainees said they did not enjoy the tasks in this work-shop. They felt they were too difficult and that the supervisor did not allow them enough time to learn the tasks. These few also said that their main interest was in electronics. Even so, they agreed that the experience they had gained in computing was likely to give them a better chance of a job than other applicants without this experience.

All the young women I spoke to in this work-room said they enjoyed working with the equipment. Most of them felt that the word-processing skills they learned would help them in office work. However, they also found many of the tasks very difficult. Besides, they felt that much of what they found difficult, such as 'spread-sheets' could either be learnt when they were working or would not be used in their job. Three trainees were more enthusiastic about the computing skills they were learning. They were all anxious to get as much from the lessons as possible. One of these, a young Asian woman, was keen on clothes design, and wanted to use her computing skills to 'get a job in the fashion business'. Another white trainee wanted to work 'in computing', and the third wanted to use her skills to work in the tourist industry.

In the Computing work-room itself, trainees spent most of their time at their work-tables. There was a sense of formality in this work-room, with trainees moving about less

than in the other two work-rooms. This reflected the teaching style of the supervisor as well as the difficulty of many of the tasks. He liked to set tasks and preferred trainees to work at them individually. He felt that team-work was beneficial in business, but felt that the nature of the tasks during his lessons required a lot of concentration. Many of the trainees disliked this approach but accepted it, as they felt there was nothing they could do about it.

6.5 Moving onto work placement

During the last fortnight of their first three to four months training period, trainees prepare to leave the ITeC for their on-the-job training with local firms. Among these employers were electronic equipment shops. There were also electrical service depots covering televisions, computers and gaming machines. As well as placements in commercial offices such as shipping agents, insurance brokers, travel agents and estate agents.

The work placement supervisor was responsible for discussing with the trainees their choice and the availability of that placement. In many cases, the supervisor pointed out that a particular employer was looking for full-time staff. In this way the trainee knew that there was a good chance of gaining permanent employment with the placement. Once trainees had chosen their placement, an interview date was arranged with the employer. There was strong competition among trainees for placements and it was usual for as many as four of them to attend an interview knowing that they were competing for the placement against their friends. This competitiveness was encouraged by the staff, who felt that it made the trainees put on their best performance. Many of the trainees did not agree with this procedure, in particular those who received a couple of rejections from their interviews. In some cases, large companies offered three or four placements. In these cases as many as six trainees might attend the interview.

I asked the trainees why they chose their particular

placements. Twenty male trainees were moving onto work placements in which they would be involved in servicing and installing electrical equipment. All said they felt that the placement would help them to gain further skills in a work environment. Some felt confident that if they performed well, they would be taken on full-time. All said that the type of work they would be doing was 'men's work'.

The other thirty-two male trainees were moving onto work placements covering a variety of areas. These included junior salesmen of electronic equipment, demonstrators of computer equipment, management trainees with travel and insurance firms and in one case a trainee computer programmer. Over half said they had a good chance of a permanent job from the placement and felt they would be learning a skill. Some also said they felt the placement would be the start of a career for them. Most of them said that they saw the placements in terms of status, while only a few prioritised them as 'men's work'. Many of those who felt that these type of placements would confer on them a certain status, saw this as important for their standing among their peers and their families. For example, many of them said that they wanted their parents to be proud of the fact that they would not be doing what they saw as manual work.

Seventeen of the female trainees were moving onto work placements with firms involved in a variety of businesses such as insurance, motor vehicles and travel. Here they would be employed as secretaries, typists and general clerical workers. Many of these trainees said they had a good chance of a full-time job with their work placement, while others said that it was a chance to make an impression with the employer, and to see what developed from there. Most of these young women said they saw the types of jobs they were going into as 'typical' women's jobs, and said they felt happy about this.

Three female trainees were also moving onto placements as management trainees in a computer firm, travel firm and estate agent. Two others were moving onto placement as sales staff in an electrical goods showroom. These five trainees

said that they saw these placements as more challenging work than secretarial work and saw the placements as the start of a career. All of them felt they stood a good chance of a permanent job with the firms. The importance of 'typical' female work was not prioritised by these trainees.

The lone female trainee moving onto an electronics placement said she would be servicing electrical equipment in the work-shop of an electronics retailer. She said that she had gained the self-confidence during the early ITeC training to try for the placement, and was looking forward to it. She pointed out that her father felt it was a good idea, but her mother wasn't so sure. The importance of 'typical' female work was not prioritised by her.

6.6 Conclusion

All the trainees I interviewed said they enjoyed their initial three months at the ITeC. For some, this provided the break they felt they needed between leaving school and starting work. Many said they welcomed the chance to discuss job opportunities with staff, which was something they hadn't done at school. They had made new friends at the ITeC, and some said they would miss the daily contact with these friends when they moved on to work placement.

All of them felt that the variety of job skills they experienced during the initial three months training period would help them to find a full-time job with prospects. They said that both practical skills and social skills were necessary in this respect. Many of them felt that the latter had most often been gained from the 'teamwork' approach at the ITeC, which many of them had enjoyed.

Almost all of them felt that the Course had improved their self-confidence and helped them to get on better with others. For many, a full-time job was important for their standing among their peers and families, and for their own personal identity. These views were expressed around the notions of 'respectability' and 'status'.

As for moving onto work placements the data suggested

that the gender of trainees played a large part in determining the type of placement they entered. For many of the male trainees, their choice of work placement and future job was partly determined by their image of 'men's work'. These young men were concerned to work in jobs which they associated culturally with masculinity. The other male trainees were less concerned with this notion in the jobs they wanted, nevertheless, they were still concerned that the white-collar jobs they were going into, were those traditionally done by men.

For the majority of female trainees, their choice of work placement and future jobs were largely determined by their image of 'women's work'. For those moving into secretarial work most saw these as 'jobs with prospects', however, traditionally these types of jobs are usually limited in promotion and career development (Cockburn,1987).

All trainees felt that new technology was important for future employment. Their views were shaped, to a large extent, by the images of technology created on television and from their experience of using technology in the home, during their leisure time and in some of their part-time jobs. Many of these views were reinforced by the emphasis put on the attractiveness of jobs in new technology by staff in the ITeC.

CHAPTER 7
WORK PLACEMENTS: THE TRAINEE'S VIEW

7.1 Introduction

Work placements are a major feature of ITeC training. Their aim is to provide young people with a period of planned work experience on employer's premises, during which they can develop the skills they have acquired during their initial three months training. The lengths of placements can vary from between six weeks to twelve months.

7.2 On work placement

For most of the trainees, the opportunity to move into work placements came as a welcome relief. However, some said they would be sorry to leave the friends they had made over the three months. Trainees usually spent on average eight to ten months on placements, during which they would return to the ITeC one day a week, over a period of three months, to top-up their training. It was usual for trainees to spend all of their time on placement with one employer. However, in some cases trainees might spend time on a second placement, if for some reason they left the first.

Over the years the assistant manager and the work-placement supervisor, who were responsible for obtaining and monitoring placements, had formed and nurtured many contacts with local employers. They found that many firms were cooperative and keen to provide trainees with work experience. The assistant manager or the work-placement supervisor visited the firm to discuss the 'training plan' for the placement, and to view the working environment. If they felt that the firm was suitable, a contract was signed indicating the responsibilities of the employer to the ITeC. The ITeC had an average of sixty work placements on its books.

Among these were hi-fi and television shops, specialist computer shops and small electrical maintenance firms. As well as commercial offices such as shipping agents, estate

agents, insurance brokers and travel firms. Once trainees began their work-placement, they were visited every four weeks by the placement supervisor who monitored their progress. This was done by discussing with the employer and the trainee the sorts of tasks they had done, and adding this to the trainee's 'profile' - a report which logged the trainee's progress during the course .

I visited twenty-two work placements and interviewed twenty-four trainees working there, twelve males and twelve females. My rationale for this selection was that these covered a cross-section of placements available at the ITeC. My visits were after trainees had been working there for between three to four months, which I felt was a reasonable time for them to be settled into their placements. I was interested in such things as whether or not the skills they had learned at the ITeC had been of use to them, and how they were progressing with the placement. What follows is a sample of five male and five female trainees responses.

7.3 Trainees' responses

Electronics placement.

Jason was working in the service department of a large electrical distributors. He was expected to assist the full-time engineers with routine repairs of televisions and video equipment. He explained to me the type of work he was doing.

> 'I'm doing lots of different things. I do a bit of solderin', change a few tubes and clean out the sets. The engineers give me the jobs and I do 'em....Most of the time I'm cleaning out tv's, it's the worst job in the place but I don't mind 'cos it's good experience....It's really good if the engineers have got a rush job on and they want me to do a set for them, they usually tip me. They reckon there's a good chance of a job going if I do alright....I wouldn't mind working here full-time, the blokes are great.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use

to you on your work placement?'

Jason: 'Working in electronics was great, I like fixing things and working with my hands. Lots of the jobs I do here are dead easy 'cos I'd done them before at the ITeC, like soldering and wiring up. I didn't fancy typing and office work, but I don't have to do any of that here. If I do okay here I reckon I've got a good chance of been taken on full-time, but if I don't then I'm still gonna have all this experience when I try somewhere else. The blokes here reckon that with cable tv and all the new channels coming along, there's gonna be a big future in the tv business....The other thing is, when you've got a skill in this line, you can always work for yourself. Lots of the blokes here do jobs on the side. They bring in videos and tv's for their mates and fix 'em in here. Some of them reckon if they were younger, they'd go into business on their own....That's one of the things I like about having a skill, you're never gonna be short of work.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Jason: 'It was a bit hard at first, you know, a new job and that, but now things are great. The blokes treat me like one of them. Mr Green (the ITeC electronics supervisor) used to tell us that working together as a team was important, but when you're in the ITeC you don't think how important it is 'cos you're working with your mates. When you're on placement, you're working with adults and it's different.'

PD: 'Can you explain that?'

Jason: 'Well, like sometimes in the mornings some of the blokes come in in a bad mood and get you running round looking for things for them, like their job-dockets. At first I didn't like being told, do this, do that, but when Jack (a work placement supervisor) told me that that they wanted to get on the road and get their jobs done, I didn't mind. Anyhow, when the engineers have left the workshop, Jack sorts out my work for the day, and we have

a cuppa tea. So after a bit I used to collect the work-dockets from the shop manager first thing, and bring 'em straight in here ready for 'em. See what I mean? when you're in a place for a while, you get to know the run of things.'

Electronics placement

Darren was working for a medium-size electronics firm, involved in the installation and maintenance of fruit-machines and pool-tables. He explained to me the type of work he was doing.

'I'm out on the road most of the time with one of the engineers, fitting up the machines. When I started I was just working in the workshop humping machines around....I was gonna leave after a week 'cos I felt I wasn't gettin' anywhere. After a couple of weeks I went on a job with Dave (an engineer), and we were out all day....collectin' machines from one pub and fixing 'em up in another one....it was great. After that I asked Mr Hart (the workshop supervisor), if I could go out with the engineers more and he said it would be okay if there wasn't much work in the workshop, you know, if things were quiet. Sometimes I have to stay in here (the workshop) cleanin' out machines and puttin' new cabinets on, I don't mind it so much now 'cos I know I can get out on the road. That's what I like about the job, you're always doin' lots of different things. After about three months, Mr Hart asked me if I wanted to work here full-time, so I said, 'Yeah'....I'm gettin' more money now and when I've passed my test, I'll be able to get out on my own.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Darren: 'Yeah, I liked it in Mr Green's (the ITeC electronic's supervisor), but I didn't fancy typing and office work, it was waste of time....I knew that if I got onto a placement in electronics, I'd stand a good chance of

gettin' a good job. I'm like that, when I put my mind to something. If I hadn't gone to the ITeC I wouldn't have known about this job, would I?....The ITeC was okay for gettin' you started, like letting you mess around with different circuits and that....I was bored after a few months, I wanted to get onto a placement. When I came here (work placement), Mr Hart said I could pick this job up in six months....He didn't tell me there was a job going, I only found out from one of the blokes. I think he was seein' what I was like....They've had a trainee here before but they sent him back after a few weeks, they reckon he didn't want to know.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Darren: 'Alright. If I'm in the workshop there's only a few people around, so I only see a couple of people all day. When I'm on the road you're meeting different people all the time, every place you go to you meet someone different. Some of customers are okay, like, all they want is their machine changed or fixed and they leave you alone to get on with it....Some of them are a real pain, moanin' all the time and saying that they're gonna change to another firm....Then you've got to smooth them over and tell them almost anything so that you don't lo se a customer.'

Computer placement.

Andrew was working as a management trainee in the showroom of a large electrical retailers. He was expected to sell a wide range of electrical and electronic equipment, and to deal with customer enquiries. He explained to me the type of work he was doing.

'I'm usually on the shopfloor serving customers and sorting out any problems they have with computers and hi-fi's. If we're busy, I give Jill (accounts enquiries) a hand with customer's accounts. When I started I was just showing customers how the computers worked, but after a few weeks I was used to all the other

equipment....I reckon I can demonstrate any of the stuff in here now.

After about six weeks, Mr James (the showroom manager) asked me if I'd thought about working here full-time. At first I wasn't sure, then he explained what the prospects were like....He said I'd be a trainee showroom sales manager and that I'd be on commission and a wage, like the rest. If I do okay, he said there's plenty of opportunity to run my own shop. It seemed like a job with prospects, so I had a chat with my Dad and he said it sounded okay, so I said 'alright'. The thing is, once you're in this business there's always plenty of other areas you can go into....I'm getting exprience here in computers, videos, hi-fi's....I can work in any of those sorts of jobs if I left here.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Andrew: 'Oh yes. I enjoyed it in computing and in Mrs Black's (office technology supervisor), but I wasn't very keen on electronics. When I was at school we just used to mess about in computing....nobody was interested in you. At the ITeC, they treated you like adults....I didn't think I'd like it in Mrs Black's, but she was really good....she was really helpful. If you didn't understand something she'd explain it to you....she didn't show you up. I couldn't use a computer at all before I went there....after a few months I was doing everything....letters, programming....everything! Yeah, she gave me a lot of confidence....I can do things I never thought I could.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Andrew: 'Most of them are alright....Mr Heath's okay, sometimes he has a go at me, but he's alright. Some of the customers can get on your nerves....you have to have a lot of patience. Sometimes you explain things to them and they say they understand, but you can tell they don't....or else you get someone who thinks he knows all

about CD's....being really flash. Mrs Black used to tell us that the customer's always right....you have to take the good with the bad. When I was in Mrs Black's on the reception, I didn't like it at first....answering queries, but after a while it was okay....when your dealing with people you realise that everyone's different.'

Office placement.

Michael was working in a large insurance company, together with another female trainee from the ITeC. He was responsible for processing car insurance claims. He explained to me the type of work he was doing.

'When the claims have been checked by John (a colleague), I have to feed the ones that are goin' to be paid out, into the computer. Then I get the print-out and take it into the supervisor before they go upstairs. It's more interesting now than when I started....then I was sorting loads of files and getting them ready to go onto computer. Really it's dead boring, doing the same thing every day. I'm fed up here now....I'm just not learnin' anything, I wouldn't even take the job if they gave it to me full-time. I've told Mrs Brown (ITeC placement supervisor) that I want another placement as soon as possible....I'd like to try something different like electronics.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Michael: 'No not really. The only work I do on the computer I could learn in a few hours. When I was at the ITeC, I wasn't sure what sort of placement I wanted....Mr White (the ITeC assistant manager) said that this was a good placement....I reckon he said that just to get me out....I only took this one 'cos my mates had all got their placements and I didn't want to be stuck at the ITeC with all the new trainees coming in.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Michael: 'It's okay here, everyone's been alright with me....it's just that when I ask for a more interesting job, Mrs Green (the section supervisor) says there's nothing else for me to do.'

Electronics placement.

Alan was working for a medium-sized electrical firm involved in office and home security. He was responsible for installing computerised alarm systems. He explained to me the type of work he was doing.

'I'm working with Geoff (an electrician) at the moment, we've got a big job on an industrial estate in Totton fitting the alarm system. I'm doing some of the fitting on my own now, like wiring and that, but if there's anything I can't do I ask Geoff. It didn't take me long to pick the job up....about six or seven weeks, that's all. Some weeks we're on houses, and like now we've got this job, and maybe in a couple of weeks we'll be in another area. There's always different jobs to go on, it's not boring at all. I'd only been here a couple of months and the boss asked me if I fancied it full-time. I jumped at it....it's just the sort of job I was looking for.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placment?'

Alan: 'I liked electronics and computing, that was great....the other stuff was a waste of time. I think I got more out of electronics because that's what I'd set my heart on when I went there. I knew that it was a good chance to learn a skill and get on, because a mate of mine was at the ITeC a year ago, and he got a job with Shelleys, he's doing really well now.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Alan: 'I'm usually only working with another bloke....If we're fitting in people's houses then you've got to watch your manners....make sure you don't dirty the carpets....things like that.'

Office placement.

Lisa was working with the same insurance company as Michael but in a different section. She was involved in general administrative work such as typing and word procesing. She explained to me the type of work she was doing.

'I wanted to be a secretary when I was at school but didn't think I'd be able to....When I came here I couldn't believe it....it's just what I wanted. I'm doing lots of different jobs like typing and using the word-processor....I'm really enjoying it. At first I was just filing and doing the post, but after a few weeks Mrs Clarke (the section supervisor), gave me a lot of typing to do....now I can do most things in here. I knew there was a chance of a full-time job when I came here, so I had a really good go at everything they gave me. Mrs Clarke said there was lots of chances for promotion so who knows....I could be a supervisor soon.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Lisa: 'Oh yes. We used to have a good laugh in Mrs Black's (ITeC officer supervisor), she was really good....I learnt a lot in there. At first I thought she was dead strict, but when you got to know her she was really nice. I was dead scared to answer the telephone when I started, but she never shouted at you, she just said 'take your time'. At school they just showed you up if you didn't know something....I was hopeless at typing and I'd never touched a computer....Mrs Black made you feel that you were some-one, that you weren't thick.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Lisa: 'Most of them are fine, I've made some really good friends since I've been here. At first it was a bit difficult, because I'm quite shy, but everyone was really helpful....It's a really friendly section.'

Office placement.

Jackie was working as a trainee manageress with a travel company. She was responsible for answering customer's enquiries and had various administrative duties. She explained to me the type of work she was doing.

'When people enquire about a holiday, I try and sell them one. Most of the time customer's come in to ask about the offers we have in the window....then it's quite easy....if the holiday's available I sign them up. Other times they're just shoppin' around....seeing where they can get the cheapest deal. Everything's on computer, it's quite easy when you get the hang of it.

When I started I was answering the phone and sorting out the brochures...it didn't take me long to pick up the other things....couple of weeks, that's all. I've always fancied working in the travel business....lot's of cheap holidays....Mrs Gray (the shop manageress) said it was a good business to work in, when I've got the experience here, I can put in for a manageress's job.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Jackie: 'I enjoyed the office work, but I couldn't stand it in Mr Green's (the electronic's supervisor). It was good fun in Mrs Black's, she treated me like an adult....they all did....not like at school. When I went there my mum didn't think I'd learn much....she wasn't happy with me on YTS, she wanted me to be a nurse. When I told her what I was doing, she was alright....she wants me to do something with my life. When I got this job she was really pleased....she's dead proud of me now.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with'?

Jackie: 'There's only four other girls here and they're helpful....they were really nice to me when I started....helping me with the different prices and that. I used to look at all the prices on the screen and think 'I'm never going to know all that'....now I do it without thinking. You have to be polite to all the

customers....the worst is when they have a complaint about their holiday and they want a refund....they really take it out on you. I used to take it personal at first, now I try to explain things to them calmly and if their not happy send them to head-office.'

Electronics placement.

Sue was the only female trainee who had wanted to try a work placement involving electronics. She was working for a large multiple electronics retailer and explained to me the type of work she was doing.

'All I'm doing is serving customers. When I came here, Mr George (the shop manager) said that I could work in the service department after I'd spent some time in the shop. Now when I ask him about it, he just says he doesn't have anyone spare to show me what to do. I've told Mrs Brown (ITeC placement supervisor), that I'm not getting any electronics training here and she said she was going to speak to Mr George, but that was ages ago....I'm disappointed because when I came for the interview, the job sounded really good. If I don't get a move soon I'm going to leave.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Sue: 'When I started at the ITeC I told Mr Green (ITeC electronics supervisor) that I wanted to work in electronics and he was very good. He gave me loads of advice and made me feel confident that I could get on. I wasn't sure about electronics at first, none of the other girls liked it....I found that after a bit I was enjoying it more than computing. It was Mr Green who told me to have a try at a placement with electronics....He said 'See how it goes for a few months, and if you don't like it at least you've got some experience behind you'. I do want to keep on with electronics, but I feel I'm wasting my time here.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Sue: 'I was dead keen at first, you know, I really wanted to do well...I was always chatting with everyone. Now I don't care, I'm not interested any more.'

Computer placement.

Debbie was working as a trainee manageress in a large multiple retailers, specialising in computers, camera and hi-fi equipment. She was responsible for serving customers and demonstrating products. She explained to me the type of work she was doing.

'I spend a lot of time with customers explaining how things work....I suppose I like working with computers most, but I also know quite a bit about hi-fi's....it just depends on what customers want. I'm pleased I came here because I think I've got a chance of making something of myself and not stuck in a dead-end job. Since I've been full-time, I've felt more like one of the staff instead of a just a part-timer.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITec was of use to you on your work placement?'

Debbie: 'I'm glad I went there because it showed me that I could do things for myself. I never expected to be in this kind of job when I went there, but everyone was so helpful I wanted to do well so I wouldn't let them down. I wasn't interested in computers at school, I thought they were too complicated, but in Mrs Black's I picked it up in no time at all....I think it was because she took her time with me, she didn't rush me.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Debbie: 'Fine. The staff are very helpful.....I've made so me good friends since I've been here. I get on alright with the customers most of the time, but things can get a bit hectic during the sales.'

Office placement.

Kathy was working as a junior manageress in an estate agents and was responsible for a variety of administrative duties.

She explained to me the type of work she was doing.

'I type letters, answer the phone, do the filing and generally do all the jobs the others won't do. It was a bit boring when I started, but Mrs Jones (the shop manageress) was very good, she said she wanted me to do as many jobs as possible, and get to know how the business works. It took me a bit of time to settle in, but now everything's alright and I'm full-time. It's a very interesting job....I'm not always in the shop, I'm often out with Jane (another member of staff) showing clients around houses....there's lot's of variety.'

PD: 'Do you feel that what you learnt at the ITeC was of use to you on your work placement?'

Kathy: 'I enjoyed the word-processing and the typing, that was what I liked most. Mrs Black was great, she helped me so much. I was a bit afraid about using word-processors when I went there, but she had such a nice way with her, she made it seem easy.'

PD: 'How do you get on with the people you work with?'

Kathy: 'Everyone's been okay, it's a really friendly place to work. At first I was a little bit quiet and used to think I'd never get used to all the different things to do, but it didn't take long.'

7.4 Early Leavers

Of the seventy-five I interviewed, five left without completing their twelve months training. Of these, three were male and two female. I phoned these young people at home and asked them their reasons for leaving the ITeC and what they were doing now.

Michael was working as a trainee lock-smith. He had spent six weeks on work placement in the service department of an electronics company, and had decided to leave for a full-time job which was better paid and in which he felt their was job security. He said that he had enjoyed the experience of the ITeC. However, he felt that the work placement had not lived up to his expectations.

Ian was now employed as a carpet-fitter with a small local firm. He had left the ITeC after spending three months on work placement with a large insurance company. He told me that he had enjoyed his time at the ITeC. However, he had become disillusioned with the repetitiveness of his job on work placement, and had decided to leave. He said that he had made a request to change his work placement, but this had been refused by staff at the ITeC, as no placements were available at the time. He had found his present job through a friend of his father's.

Chris had been at the ITeC for eight months before he decided to leave. He was working as a trainee service engineer with a small firm maintaining pool-tables and juke-boxes. During his time at the ITeC, he had been on work placement with an electronics company doing similar work. However that company was unable to offer him full-time employment at the end of his placement. Through contacts he had made while on that placement, he was offered a full-time job by a rival firm. Chris said that he had gained useful work-experience at the ITeC and that the chance of a full-time job was too good to refuse.

Caroline was working as a secretarial assistant with a large finance house, and had been at the ITeC four months before she decided to leave. During her work placement she had been involved in general office administration with a large insurance company in the same building in which she now worked. She had become disappointed with the lack of variety on her placement, however, through friends she had made there, she had found her present job. Caroline said that she had enjoyed her time at the ITeC, and felt that the typing and office skills she had learnt there, had helped her to gain her present job.

Tracey was working as a trainee office manager in a large car showroom, she had left the ITeC after eight months. During her work placement, she had worked as a sales assistant with a large electrical retailers. She decided to leave when she realised that she was not going to be offered full-time

employment. Tracey said that the work-experience and training she had received while at the ITeC, had helped her in acquiring her pesent job, which she found out about through her boy-friend.

7.5 Conclusion

All the trainees I spoke to wanted to be accepted as workers by their employers and those they worked with. Most of them felt that after an initial period of being treated as the 'YTS boy/girl', they were accepted by most of the staff they worked with. Occasionally a trainee complained about the lack of variety on a placement but the charge of exploitation was not made by any of those I spoke to. It was usually the case that the level of satisfaction expressed by trainees towards their placement, depended on whether they felt or knew that they would get a job from their placement. In most cases, trainees were satisfied with training not necessarily because of its quality, but because they knew it carried the offer of a job which made trainee status acceptable. Most of those with a job offer and good training accepted that training was compensation for the low YTS allowance.

CHAPTER EIGHT
WORK PLACEMENTS: THE EMPLOYER'S VIEW

8.1 Introduction

Work placements are a major feature of ITeC training. Their aim is to provide young people with a period of planned work-experience on employer's premises, during which they can develop the skills they have acquired during their initial three months training. It was usual for many trainees to spend the remainder of the course on one work placement.

Concerns have been expressed about the reasons for employers becoming involved in work placements on YTS courses (Cockburn 1987; Wellington 1987a,1987b). A significant theme of these studies was that many employer's regarded work placements as protracted job interviews, and that for some firms, the 'attitudes' and 'dispositions' of trainees were more important than with their practical skills. However, these studies provide little information on the quality of work placements and the wider factors which may influence firms involvement in YTS, particularly ITeCs.

In this case-study, the work placement supervisor and the assistant manager had formed and nurtured many contacts with local employers, and found that many firms were co-operative and keen to provide trainees with work-experience. However, the emphasis on quality work placements was a major concern for all members of the ITeC, in particular, the work placement supervisor whose main duties were acquiring and monitoring them. For her, a quality placement was one in which the firm was responsible for providing adequate supervision and a training programme to cover the period the trainee spent with them. She also felt that the trainee should be regarded as a member of the firm rather than simply temporary staff.

In some cases, firms were unable to meet the above criteria for quality placements laid down by the ITeC and were rejected. However, over the last two years this strict criteria had been relaxed. The reasons for this were that

there had been a big rise in the number of employment agencies in the area, which had resulted in increased competition for young people seeking employment. As a result, there had been a gradual decrease in the number of employers providing the ITeC with work placements. For the ITeC, the response was that they had become less strict with their criteria, and had begun to acquire placements which in the past they would not have considered.

The participation of employers, and thus the ability of YTS to be delivered, depends on the willingness and ability of firms to supply appropriate placements. The potentially unstable nature of placements makes it necessary to understand the reasons behind a firm's decision to provide work-experience. Although many employers continue to be involved in YTS, the continued availability of placements cannot be assumed. This is important both for those involved in delivery of ITeC training and for policy-makers for whom on-the-job training is a central feature of YTS.

8.2 Work Placement Providers

I sent a questionnaire to the forty-five firms that provided work placements, and received forty-one replies. Of these, thirty-two gave 'for recruitment purposes', and nine firms gave 'insufficient resources', as their main reasons for providing placements. Three firms also identified 'social obligation' as part of their rationale for involvement with the ITeC (see appendix 5).

The questionnaire was sent as a pilot study, in order to get a brief overview of the level of involvement of employers providing placements. I visited twenty-two of the firms that replied, so as to explore in more depth the various reasons why employers became involved with the ITeC. My rationale for choosing this number of placements, was that they represented a cross-section of placements available at the ITeC. It was also a number I felt I could manage reasonably well, considering the time and financial constraints on the study. The firms included shops selling and servicing electrical and

electronic equipment. As well as commercial offices such as shipping agents, insurance brokers, travel firms and estate agents. During these interviews I spoke with the person responsible for liaising placements with the ITeC, which was usually the personnel manager or branch manager. From the interviews with employers it was possible to identify three main reasons for firms providing trainees with work-experience. They were 'recruitment of full-time staff', 'screening of prospective full-time staff' and 'insufficient resources to employ full-time staff'. These were not always identified individually, but were sometimes combined by employers in explaining their involvement.

I shall present them in the first place as organizational categories. However, I hope to show that the reasons employers gave for providing work placements were based on a variety of sometimes contradictory views, depending on the requirements of the company.

8.3 Recruitment of full-time staff

There were fourteen firms who gave the recruitment of full-time staff as their main reason for providing work placements. These can be divided into two groupings, those who recruited due to expansion and those who recruited to replace staff who had left. Of the latter, only two firms gave this as their reason for recruitment. All the firms had used the ITeC in the past and had employed trainees in a number of jobs, such as junior service engineers and secretarial staff. They had returned to the ITeC in search of new staff. A personnel manager in a large travel company who were in the process of expanding explained her reasons for taking on ITeC trainees:

> We had a couple of trainees here some time ago and they were first class, so when we decided we needed extra staff, it seemed the ideal place to go. We know we're likely to get someone with a mix of telephone and word-processing skills who's also well motivated.

In another case, the manager of a large chain of building suppliers had taken on two female trainees in their clerical

department. He explained his reasons for doing this:

> We find that ITeC youngsters have got a good idea of what office work is about and are glad of a job....To be honest a lot of the work can be pretty tedious, so we tend to get a high turnover of staff, but the youngsters we've had seem to stick it very well.

Another employer, the personnel manager of a large insurance company, said they also provided placements out of a concern for young people. She explained:

> I think young people need some direction to their lives. There's so many influences on them nowadays, I think they appreciate a bit of guidance. One reason we got involved was to give them a chance to grow up and develop in a caring environment.

The employers mentioned above had been involved with the ITeC over a number of years. They were happy with the type of trainee sent to them and were often employing them full-time within a few weeks of starting their placement. They were now using the ITeC as the youth labour market in the area.

8.4 Screening of prospective full-time staff

Five firms gave the screening of prospective full-time staff as their reason for providing placements. For three of the firms it was their first involvement with the ITeC; they were expanding and looking for additional junior staff. The personnel manager with an office equipment retailers explained his reasons for providing work placements:

> We needed someone with a basic knowledge of electronics to assist our engineers servicing photocopiers. We tried the Jobcentre, but some of the people they sent us hadn't got a clue, so we thought we'd give the ITeC a try. The two lads with us at the moment seem to have a good understanding of basic electronics, and they're really keen to learn. It's a bonus having them here for a few months, it gives us a chance to see how they'll fit in and get on with the rest of the lads.

The two other firms had used both the Jobcentre and advertised in local newspapers, and had been dissatisfied with the poor quality of young people who presented themselves for interviews. A personnel manager with one of the firms, a

computer retailers, felt that one of the benefits of the ITeC course was that, 'it knocked the rough edges off' trainees. He continued:

> It gives them some idea of discipline and helps them understand the importance of personal appearance and punctuality to employers.

The three firms identified above were in an economic position to recruit trainees full-time during their placement, providing they proved themselves satisfactory workers. The two remaining firms in this category had been involved with the ITeC for a number of years, during which they had employed trainees full-time. However, they were not in an economic position at the present time to offer trainees full-time employment. They said the main reason they provided placements was to assess prospective junior staff for the future. The personnel manager with a large vehicle distributor explained his involvement with the ITeC this way:

> If they make an impression with us....I have a little chat with them before they leave just to show that we appreciate their time spent with us....I usually ask them to give me a ring in six months, by that time there's always a chance we'll be recruiting again.

In this category, two similar strands can be identified. First, employers who are in an economic position to recruit junior staff during the course of their placement. Second, employers who are not in an economic position to do so, but who are willing to employ trainees full-time when the firm's position improved.

8.5 Insufficient resources to employ full-time staff

Three firms gave the above as their reason for providing work placements. These firms had been involved with the ITeC for five years and had provided trainees with work-experience throughout this period. They said the main reason for getting involved with the ITeC was because of the short-term benefits they would gain.

The manager of a computer shop explained his reasons for providing work placements:

> The lads we've had from the ITeC are self-starters who don't require much supervision, which is fine for us. We're only a two man business and there's times when we need an extra pair of hands like at weekends and when I'm on deliveries. It's a pity we don't have enough work to justify taking on more staff as some of the lads we've had here were excellent.

The manager of a small shipping freight company explained his firms involvement with the ITeC:

> From our previous experience of trainees, we know we're likely to get youngsters who don't need spoon-feeding and are presentable.

Analysis

From an analysis of the data, a number of points can be identified from the various reasons give by employers for their involvement with the ITeC. First, those firms from the three categories who had been involved with the ITeC for a number of years were satisfied with the 'type' of trainee sent to them. This was expressed in terms of a concern with both the technical skills of trainees and their personal characteristics.

Secondly, those employers who were using the ITeC for the first time, had experienced difficulty recruiting the right 'type' of junior staff from the local Jobcentre and had turned to the ITeC. Here again, both the practical skills and personal characteristics of trainees were seen as important attributes by employers.

Thirdly, those firms who provided placements for the short-term benefits they would gain from the trainee's labour during their placement were concerned with providing work-experience which required minimum supervision.

The reasons given above for firms providing placements, mainly concerned their needs to recruit junior staff who possessed a combination of both practical skills and personal characteristics such as 'motivation' and 'versatility'. However, the seventeen firms who continued to provide placements were in an economic position to do so during the time the trainees spent with them. This was not the case with

two firms. This economic factor is a significant one, which requires further consideration when looking at the quality and quantity of work placements.

8.6 Economic Factors

Companies conduct their business within a market economy and as such are influenced by the workings of that economy. During the 1980s, periods of recession have forced many organisations to close down and/or restructure their operations. These economic pressures can affect the provision of work placements in various ways. For example, companies can go out of business and they can cut back on staff, resulting in the loss and/or the withdrawal of placements.

On the other hand, during periods of economic prosperity companies can expand creating the need to increase their workforce. During the mid-1980s this was the case for many employers in the commercial field such as estate agents, insurance brokers and financial services, as well as for many shops dealing in electronic goods. These types of companies formed the greater part of firms providing work placements.

An economic upturn can affect the provision of placements in various ways. Many of the sixteen firms who said they were expanding and recruiting saw the possibility of increasing the number of work placements with their firms. The manager of an electronics shop said:

> We think it's important to take on youngsters and give them a chance to see how we operate. Over the last couple of months things have really started to move sales-wise, if they continue like this for the rest of the year we're going to be looking for staff in both our sales and servicing departments.

This optimism of an increase in business was also expressed by the manageress of a building society:

> At the moment we are enjoying a boost in savings and lendings, consequently we're opening more branches and employing more staff. There's every chance that we would consider increasing the number of work placements we offer.

The personnel manager of large insurance company was equally

optimistic:

> We pride ourselves on our commitment to providing youngsters with the opportunity to make something of themselves. Hopefully, the present expansion in the company should allow us to add a few more placements to our existing ones.

The results of an economic upturn enjoyed by companies such as those above, will of course vary. The geographical location, the size of the company, the type of market they are in and changes in the labour process of their staff are four variables which may influence employer's attitudes towards and their ability to continue to provide work placements. For example, an expansion by firms employing a large number of clerical staff may encourage them to extend their use of new technology, resulting in a cut back in staff and work placements. On the other hand, an increase in business may prompt some employers into an awareness of a lack of suitably qualified junior staff in the local labour market and encourage them to become involved with the ITeC.

Economic factors may also encourage some firms to increase their provision of placements, knowing they are likely to benefit from the productive labour of trainees. This was mentioned by two of the employers who said they had insufficent resources to employ full-time staff. The manager of a computer shop pointed out:

> To be blunt, we're in business to make a profit. We know that if we get a good lad we're set up for the year. They can be worth their weight in gold.

These examples show that economic factors may affect an organisation's attitude towards, and their ability to participate in the provision of, work placements. A further factor likely to influence employers' decisions to provide placements are their firms' experiences during their involvement with the ITeC. The continued provision of placements may depend on the advantages and disadvantages of providing placements, and whether a firm's rationale is confirmed as valid. Both of these become evident through the process of organizing and delivering placements.

8.7 Work Placement Experiences

When an employer becomes involved with the ITeC, it is likely they will build up a variety of views and impressions of those involved with it. These may not be accurate or representative; nevertheless, they can be important for decisions relating to their future involvement with the ITeC. The experiences that employers have with the ITeC may be seen as a relational position between their initial rationale for providing placements, and the economic factors which affect the extent of their participation. As we have seen from the initial responses from most of the twenty-two employers, the nature of their firm's experiences helped to shape the future provision of placements.

However, the experiences of providing placements must be seen within, rather than distinct from, the relationship it occupies with economic factors and an employer's initial rationale. For example, if a firm has had a negative experience with trainees, it may still continue to provide placements because of the short-term benefits it may gain from a trainee's productive labour. In this case, the economic factors impose limits on employers' experiences and initial rationale. However, both rationale and experience may mediate a variety of other economic factors. This process can be demonstrated through an examination of those encounters employers have had with trainees and ITeC staff.

8.8 Encounters with Trainees

Nineteen firms in my sample of twenty-two had been involved with the ITeC for a number of years. All of these had formed general opinions regarding ITeC trainees, many of which were the basis for judgements which determined their continued involvement with the ITeC. For the majority, their experience of encounters with trainees had strengthened their decisions to continue providing placements.

Seventeen of these firms stressed the importance of taking on trainees with skills. However, fifteen of these placed equal or more emphasis on trainees social skills, such

as 'motivation' and 'pride in work', than on their technical skills. This was expressed in various ways. The manager of an electronics showroom said:

> For the three years that we've been involved with ITeC, I feel that the quality of trainees has improved progressively. It's important to us that we have people with a nice appearance who we can rely on.

On this placement, the company were providing male and female trainees with work-experience as junior showroom managers.

For another employer in the travel business, her concern was also with the way in which trainee's presented themselves:

> When you are dealing with the public first impressions are very important. I've found over the years that our trainees have become much more aware of good communication and personal appearance.

On this placement female trainees were involved in reception and administrative duties.

Another employer providing a placement in which male trainees were often required to carry out repairs on customer's premises was equally concerned with trainee's social skills:

> Obviously you want someone who understands what their doing, but it's not very good for business if the engineer turns up late for the job and then makes a mess all over the place. Fortunately, we've found that trainees have a good idea of what punctuality and smartness is all about.

Perhaps the most stark example of a firm's concern with the personal characteristics of trainees was provided by the manager of a large financial services company in which male and female trainees were working as junior managers. He commented:

> Frankly, we like to train junior staff in our own way. The ITeC saves us the inconvenience of having to interview youngsters who we know nothing about. We've got a pretty good idea by now that most of the trainees we get are not going to need lessons in the social graces.

The implications of these attitudes are far reaching. The importance of trainee's personal characteristics to emloyers

often becomes clear to trainees during the early period of their ITeC training. This may happen in various ways, for example, from their contacts with other trainees who are already on placement and who return to continue their off-the-job training, as well as from the general ethos of the ITeC. Once employer's notion of 'employability' becomes generally known by trainees, it may encourage them to become less concerned with the practical skills they are being taught.

This may also have implications for staff involved in the delivery of YTS policy, which is concerned with a broad-based skill training rather than a narrow one. ITeC staff are obviously aware from their experience with employers of their emphasis on personal characteristics, yet understand the need to balance this with the YTS guidelines on broad-based training.

This tension between policy and practice may also arise because of the desire by some employers to train staff their own way. At least half of the firms said their main concern was that junior staff turned up regularly for work. If they did the company then considered it worth-while training them for a specific job.

8.9 Conclusion

The overall impression of the employer's view of placements revealed by the data was that the ITeC served as a more effective 'filter' than other agencies in providing firms with junior staff. The majority of employers provided work placements as a way of recruiting full-time junior staff. Almost all of these firms were more concerned with the social rather than technical skills the trainee had acquired during their ITeC training.

CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Introduction

ITeCs were intended to improve the technological skills and job prospects of young people through a programme of vocational training and work experience. In this study I have shown that for jobs, the social skills acquired by trainees during their training were seen as more important than technological skills by prospective employers and suited the needs of many of the trainees themselves. In this final chapter I will summarize and discuss briefly the details of the findings in relation to the main theme of ITeC training as described in Chapter 2 viz. it's vocational significance, from the perspective of the three groups involved in the study.

9.2 The ITeC Staff

The perspectives adopted by the staff towards the course identified in Chapter 5 as 'developmental' and 'instrumental', reflected their differing views towards the course. Those holding the former view emphasised the notion of self-development within trainees and identified the wider social influences on their role as trainers and on trainees themselves. Those holding the latter view were primarily concerned with getting trainees into the habit of work. Despite these obvious differences towards the course in general, all the staff emphasised their role in job preparation and were concerned that trainees leaving the ITeC should be entering full-time jobs. As such, all of them saw the type and quality of work placement as a major factor in determining the job prospects of trainees. The staff knew from experience that many of the trainees were likely to be given full-time employment with work placement employers, for this reason once an employer identified a gap in the training provided by the ITeC, staff tried to incorporate any suggestion into the curriculum.

From my discussions with all the staff it was clear they saw their job satisfaction with the course closely related to many of their own perceptions of issues such as 'professionalism', but perhaps more interestingly, they saw the vocational significance of the course closely related to the overall quality of work placements.

9.3 The trainees

For all the trainees the vocational significance of the course was mainly determined by whether or not they obtained a full-time job at the end of it. As described in Chapter 6, most of the trainees felt that a combination of both practical and social skills would provide them with the necessary qualifications with which to obtain a full-time job. Many young people are acutely aware of the high unemployment rate among unqualified youngsters, so it was no surprise that most of them said they joined the course through their knowledge of the high number of trainees who had completed the course and moved directly into full-time employment. For this reason it is easy to see why many of them felt that the ITeC was likely to provide them with a foot on the ladder of the job market.

Once they were on work placement most of the trainees quickly discovered whether or not they were likely to be taken on as full-time staff during or after the course. Those who were, sometimes put up with what they felt to be unsatisfactory training as they knew the placement carried the offer of a job. Those trainees whe felt they had no chance of a job on their placement often obtained jobs through the contacts they made on the placenment.

9.4 The employers

For those firms who provided work placements, the vocational significance of the course mainly related to their notion of 'employability'. The majority of employers wanted trainees who they could rely on to turn up regularly for work and in many cases trainees who they could train for a specific job.

APPENDIX 1

ITeC staff interview schedule

Personal

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Length of time in job
5. Qualifications held
6. Previous jobs

Current work

7. Job title
8. Main duties
   a) tasks
   b) range of tasks
   c) knowledge required
9. Why do you do this type of job? (probe)
10. How do you see your role as a trainer of young people? (probe)
11. How would you describe the type of young people you train? (probe)
12. How much discretion do you have in the job? (probe)

YTS and the role of the ITeC

13. What do you feel about YTS in general? (probe)
14. How do you see the ITeC within YTS? (probe)

APPENDIX 2

Trainee's interview schedule

Personal

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Month of leaving school

Education

5. What did you think of school?
6. Where you given any advice on what to do before you left?
7. Do you think qualifications are important?
8. What do your parents think of school?

The ITeC

9. How did you hear about the ITeC?
10. Do you think it is important to know about new technology? (probe)
11. Has the ITeC lived up to your expectations? (probe)
12. When you started, did you expect it to lead to a permanent job with your work placement? (probe)
13. What do your parents think of the ITeC/YTS?

Employment

14. What do you consider most important in a job: pay/conditions/friendship/job satisfaction/careeer prospects? (probe)
15. What type of job are you aiming for now?
16. Is there any job you would not do?
17. Have you ever thought about working for yourself?

Unemployment

18. What would your family/friends think if you were unemployed?
19. What are the main disadvantages of being unemployed? Are there any advantages?

Past Jobs

20. What type of jobs have you had in the past?
21. How did you hear about this job?
22. Did you find the experience useful?
23. Why did you do work in the past?

Leisure and Family background

24. What do you do in your spare time?
25. Do you have a steady boy/girl friend with whom you go out regularly?
26. Do you talk about jobs with your friends?
27. Do you talk about jobs with your parents?
28. What do your parents do?
29. What do your parents want you to do?

APPENDIX 3

Trainee's work-placement interview schedule

Work

1. What type of work are you being trained for?
2. Main duties
   a) range of tasks
   b) knowledge required
3. Do you expect it to lead to a permanent job?
4. What training are you receiving? (probe)
5. Are you satisfied with this? (probe)
6. How do you get on with the people you work with? (probe)
7. Does the placement match the expectations you had of it before you moved from the ITeC? (probe)
8. Has the training you received at the ITeC been of use to you in this job? (probe)
9. Do you see the job as a career? (probe)

Family/Leisure

10. What do your friends think of the work you are doing now? (probe)
11. What do your parents think of it?

APPENDIX 4

Employer's interview schedule

The Company

1. Company name
2. Name of person interviewed
3. Position in company
4. Description of what the company does
5. Number of employees based on this site
6. Is the company part of a national/international group?
7. Are personnel decisions made on this site or elsewhere?

Recent changes

8. Has the company changed in the last five years, since 1982?
9. At present is the workforce growing, contracting, or stable?
10. In occupations where employment has increased, how has this been achieved?
11. In occupations where employment has declined, how has this been achieved?

Recruitment

12. What are your usual ways of recruiting 16-18 year olds?
13. What type of jobs are this group expected to do?
14. Can you give details about the labour turnover among this group in different occupations?

The ITeC

15. Why do you provide work placements? (probe)
16. What are some of the qualities you look for in trainees? (probe)
17. What type of training do you provide for trainees? (probe)
18. What type of relationship do you have with the ITeC staff? (probe)

APPENDIX 5

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of organisation

.....

Type of organisation

.....

Number of employees

.....

1. Please indicate your reasons for providing work placements.

   (Tick those which apply).

   a) Social/moral obligation

   b) For recruitment purposes

   c) Insufficient resources to employ full-time staff

   d) Other (please specify)

   .....

If you have ticked more than one, please indicate which was the most important (please circle letter)

a b c d e

2. Please rank in order of importance (1 being the most important), the <u>technical skills</u> you regard as desirable in a trainee(s).

(A) <u>Office Administration</u> (if applicable)

Typing .
Wordprocessing .
Computer Programming .
General Office duties
(eg. Photocopying, Telephone and
Reception techniques) .

B) <u>Electronics</u> (if applicable)

Servicing .
Maintenance .
Assembling and Testing .

3. Please rank in order of importance (1 being the most important), the personal characteristics you regard as desirable in a trainee(s).

Motivation .
Versatility .
Adaptability .
Pride in work .
Good personal relations .
Other (please specify) .
.....

4. Are a trainee's personal characteristics more or less important to your organisation than his/her technical skills?

More important .
Equally important .
Less important .

5. Does your organisation provide training facilities for permanent employees?

Yes . No .

If Yes please specify (eg. In-house, Day-release)

.....
.....
.....

6. Comments and suggestions on your involvement with the ITeC would be appreciated.

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