

Sandwell Training Association

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 54271

Name of lead inspector: Derrick Spragg HMI

Last day of inspection: 14 October 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Sandwell Training Association (the Association) was established in 1963 as an engineering group training association. It has two training sites in the West Midlands. The Association contracts with the Skills Funding Agency and this forms 85% of its income. The Association provides training for apprentices of all ages in areas of learning including: engineering and manufacturing technologies; business administration and law; retail and commercial enterprise and health public services and care.
2. The Association is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is managed by a council of management who are elected annually from its member employers who are mainly in the West Midlands. It employs 20 full-time staff with a management team reporting to a chief executive.
3. The West Midlands has higher unemployment levels and a higher proportion of people from ethnic minority groups than the national average.
4. The following organisations provides training on behalf of the Association:
 - Wolverhampton College
 - Dudley College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	240 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	2

Overall effectiveness

- Sandwell Training Association provides good support for apprentices and employers. High proportions of the apprentices who go there succeed and gain the skills they need in employment. All those who stay on the programme gain a qualification. The apprentices are very positive about the training they get. They make good progress both in training and at work. The standard of work produced by apprentices is good and they are well supported by experienced and qualified staff. Learners gain skills, develop confidence and are very well prepared for work. Learners say they feel safe. The practical training is good and assessment is well planned and effective. The Association has many very good links with other partners that help apprentices progress and succeed. The range of programmes offered is good. Advice and support from staff are good.
- The Association has improved the success rates for apprentices over the past three years. The organisation is well managed. Staff are clear about what they do and create a good working atmosphere. The staff really care about what they do and work conscientiously to ensure the apprentices succeed. The Association works very well with the companies it uses for apprenticeship training and makes sure that safety and welfare have a high priority. Equality is promoted satisfactorily. Employers think very highly of the Association and are involved in planning and improving the provision.

Main findings

- Overall success rates are high and show significant improvement since the last inspection. In engineering success rates are high over the past three years. In 2009/10, for example, 90% of the learners following engineering manufacturing achieved the full framework. This is well above the national average.
- Learners enjoy their training and make good progress with a small minority completing late. Apprentices gain good skills and increase their employability. Employers recognise and value the good standards reached by apprentices.
- Apprentices feel safe. Accident rates are very low. The learners' response to the strong emphasis on health and safety is good. The Association gives safeguarding a high priority.
- Practical training is good. Assessment is well planned. Co-ordination of both on and off-the-job training and assessment is good. Teaching is satisfactory overall.
- Partnership working is outstanding and particularly strong with employers. Apprentices' needs are addressed effectively through the range of programmes and workplaces in which they operate.
- Apprentices benefit from the highly motivational support from staff who understand their needs and the challenges facing them.
- Strong leadership and management have improved the performance of the Association significantly since the last inspection. Staff are highly motivated. Reporting on strategic rates are very low.
- The Association promotes equality and tackles unfair discrimination. Promotion of equality and diversity is more effective with learners in some programmes than in others.
- The Association involves users in planning and improving the training programme. Apprentice views are collected and analysed. Employers' contribute very effectively to the planning and development of training programmes.
- Self-assessment is effective and used to improve the provision. Senior managers do not monitor closely the effectiveness of strategies to improve teaching and learning.
- The Association provides good value for money. Apprentices make good progress and success rates are high. The management of resources is good.

What does Sandwell Training Association need to do to improve further?

- Monitor progress closely and tackle the cause of slow progress in order to increase the number of apprentices who achieve within their planned end date.
- Improve satisfactory teaching sessions by identifying and using best practices internal and external sources.

- Identify and measure performance at a strategic level by using more quantifiable objectives and a range of key indicators.
- Strengthen the impact of the internal promotion of equality and diversity with apprentices by building on the good practices in the programmes where it is most effective.
- Establish a management process for improving teaching, training and learning overall by bringing together the current sector based arrangements and introducing a reporting system that enables the Association to monitor and measure improvement over time.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What apprentices like:

- the good help and support
- good trainers, good equipment, and good premises
- the speed of the match to an appropriate company for training
- learning new skills in a friendly working environment
- staff making things easy to understand
- the good extensive help from teachers
- the mix of practical work and class work.

What apprentices would like to see improved:

- the quality of some of the training resources
- the storage of equipment and security of the lockers
- dinner hour - not half an hour
- the tea and coffee facilities.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- their understanding of the business is good
- the excellent work orientated learning for students across a range of subject areas
- excellent training for fork lift truck operations
- the availability of support and quick response to queries.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the organisation of a few of the visits.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. The overall success rate for all apprentices has improved significantly since the last inspection. In 2010 the rate was over 25 percentage points higher than it was three years previously and 14 percentage points above the national average. Leaders and managers motivate staff and apprentices. The Association has a good record of improving the training provision.
8. Self-assessment is used effectively to identify and take action on areas for improvement. Investment in staff and resources contribute to overall improvements and provide good value for money. Employers think highly of the Association and contribute very effectively to the development of the provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

9. Overall success rates are high and show significant improvement since the last inspection. In engineering success rates over the past three years average over 80%. The success rate for information and communication technology apprentices in 2010 was 90%. In business administration success rates are above the national average for the past two years. Overall the majority of learners achieve within their planned end date. There are no significant differences in performance between different groups of learners.
10. Apprentices enjoy their learning, gain good workplace skills and develop their confidence. They become highly professional and articulate. They understand the need to be both qualified and skilled to ensure their economic well-being and appreciate that qualifications increase their employability. Apprentices develop a good work ethic and show respect to colleagues and customers. Employers value highly their contribution to their businesses. Many apprentices take on additional responsibility and progress to higher-level work roles.
11. Apprentices feel safe. The Association promotes high standards of health and safety. Apprentices have a good understanding of their responsibilities for their own safety and the safety of the others. They demonstrate a sensible approach to all health and safety matters and benefit from regular reinforcement of health and safety working practices in the training centres and in their work places. Apprentices are fully aware of their rights at work and their responsibilities.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

12. Training and assessment are good. Practical training in the engineering centre is good and well organised. During the early part of the programme apprentices have lots of practice and quickly learn basic engineering skills using a range of appropriate tools and machines. They get constructive and regular feedback from the Association's experienced staff and they learn work disciplines and safe practices. In all programmes apprentices benefit from good on-the-job training in the workplace with frequent and regular visits by staff to monitor progress and plan further training with employers. Assessment is carried out effectively and is well planned. Teaching is satisfactory overall. In good sessions learners engage enthusiastically with the subject but a small minority of sessions lack pace and some learners lose interest.
13. The training programmes meets the needs of the apprentices and employers very effectively. Apprentices particularly enjoy the practical elements of the programme and the chance to demonstrate their competence at work. They value the experienced and qualified staff who are good role models for apprentices. The Association provides a good range of business administration and engineering programmes. Programmes meet the needs of employers very well. The Association has a good understanding of local employers' needs. Employers are actively involved in the development of programmes. They have a high regard for the quality of provision and its suitability for their business needs.
14. The Association has established an outstanding array of partnerships with employers, schools, other learning providers, local authorities and agencies in the voluntary sector that enrich and support apprentices' experiences. The Association works highly effectively in partnership with employers to plan and provide high standard quality learning experiences and employment. The Association works collaboratively with other providers to broaden the choices of training for learners and to share good practice. It has good partnerships with local providers to create progression routes into apprenticeships. School pupils benefit from taster programmes, careers advice and work experience. Apprentices participate in regional skills events. They benefit from highly effective collaborative work with Sandwell Primary Care Trust which provides on-site health and well-being programmes in smoking cessation, healthy eating and cooking, confidence and general well-being.
15. Care, guidance and support for apprentices are good. They value the motivational support from responsive and approachable staff who understand their needs and the challenges they face. Apprentices receive good support to enable them to deal with any barriers to learning. Good practical support for those with any specific learning needs are provided where necessary. Staff have good knowledge of apprentices' needs and take time to attend to their individual development. Information, advice and guidance for apprentices is provided effectively. They recognise and value this aspect of the provision.

They are able to make informed choices on suitable learning programmes and receive timely advice to support their progression.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

16. Strong leadership and management have improved the performance of the Association significantly since the last inspection. Staff respond well to meeting the high standards set. Staff are highly motivated and very clear about their roles and responsibilities with regard to learners, their progress and achievements. Internal communications and team working are effective. Staff are appropriately qualified, and have good relevant industrial experience. They are supported through a well resourced approach to continuous professional development that aligns with the company's goals and business priorities. Strategic direction is set and monitored by the board. Suitable governance arrangements are in place. Plans to strengthen and develop the Association's council have been made. Management reporting on measurable strategic objectives across a range of performance indicators is underdeveloped.
17. Safeguarding is given a high priority by the Association. Effective partnerships with other agencies with expertise support safeguarding arrangements. The Association's staff makes good use of training that reflects local safeguarding children board's recommendations. Managers are very well informed about the organisation's duties with regard to safeguarding. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective and meet current government requirements. Training sessions, reviews and good quality promotional materials are used effectively to inform and reinforce the apprentices' understanding of safeguarding. Managers and staff strongly emphasise health, safety and welfare during induction and reinforce these themes regularly. Accident rates are very low. Apprentices' demonstrate good awareness of health and safety, and their responsibility in ensuring their own and others' welfare.
18. The Association promotes equality and tackles unfair discrimination. The staff monitoring group successfully addresses any difference in performance between different groups of apprentices. There are none currently. Participation in training by under represented groups has increased over the past three years and is at a reasonable rate across the different areas in which the Association works. Work with schools, community groups and other partners supports the Association's activities to widen participation. Apprentices learn about respecting others and how they should be treated. Equality and diversity is effectively integrated into most of the Association's work with apprentices and employers especially through induction, training and reviews. The impact of promoting equality and diversity with apprentices is satisfactory overall, good in some programmes and less effective in others.
19. The Association effectively involves users in planning and improving the training programme. Apprentices' views are collected and analysed. Changes are made to training arrangements as a result. Employers' contribute regularly and very

effectively to the planning and development of training programmes. External partnerships are sustained successfully and promoted by the Association to ensure apprentices' needs are understood and met.

20. Self-assessment arrangements are good and used effectively to improve the provision. Accurate data and their analysis are used to support action planning. Managers and staff engage in the self-assessment process effectively and are clear about priorities to improve the apprentices' experience. The management arrangements for overseeing the process for improving teaching and training is underdeveloped. The quality improvement arrangements are managed at subject sector level and senior managers do not receive routine reports on areas for improvement or actions planned.
21. The training provision provides good value for money. Apprentices make good progress and success rates are high. Management of resources is good. The Association invests in the improvement of resources and takes account of the views of apprentices and employers.

Information about the inspection

22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's contracts manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Sandwell Training Association

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	240	240
Part-time learners	0	0
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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