

Sandwell Training Association

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		16–20 February 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- too many adult apprentices do not achieve their qualifications within the planned timescales
- trainers do not take the results of initial assessments sufficiently into account when planning teaching, to ensure that lessons meet the needs of all apprentices, particularly in developing their English and mathematical skills
- written feedback following assessment and reviews does not identify clearly what apprentices need to do to improve, resulting in too many of them making slow progress
- staff do not promote equality and diversity in lessons and reviews sufficiently well
- management information managers use about apprentices' progress and the standards they achieve to monitor and improve the provision is neither timely nor comprehensive
- self-assessment and improvement planning are not sufficiently self-critical or rigorous
- managers have not implemented fully the recommendations for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

This provider has the following strengths:

- outcomes for the high number of intermediate apprentices aged 16 to 18 are good
- trainers provide good, flexible support for apprentices
- staff provide good initial information, advice and guidance for apprentices that support their career aspirations well
- Sandwell Training Association (STA) has particularly strong partnership arrangements with its members and other employers that increases learners' opportunities to gain an apprenticeship with high quality employers
- STA's curriculum offer aligns well with the priorities of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and meets the needs of local and regional employers well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of adult apprentices who complete all parts of their programme within the planned duration by providing more timely assessments in the workplace.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all trainers plan interesting and demanding learning activities, including the use of online learning resources, which are personalised to, and take account of, apprentices’ needs.
- Ensure good development of apprentices’ English and mathematics skills through the better use of initial assessment information to set stretching targets for all apprentices, particularly those who have the ability to undertake functional skills at a higher level than that specified in the apprenticeship framework.
- Ensure that trainers give apprentices detailed and accurate written and verbal feedback on assessments that identifies what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Regularly update learning plans to record apprentices’ progress and use them to set challenging short- and medium-term targets. Accurately and frequently monitor apprentices’ progress towards meeting their targets and take swift action where it is too slow.
- Rapidly improve information systems and ensure that managers use data effectively to monitor the performance of programmes and groups of apprentices, and intervene promptly to secure improvements in apprentices’ progress and achievements.
- Improve the rigour of the self-assessment process by taking a more sharply focused and self-critical view of the provision to ensure the accurate identification of strengths and areas for improvement.
- Ensure that leaders develop a detailed quality improvement plan that focuses on improving teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for apprentices. Ensure that the Council of Management monitors progress towards the plan frequently and holds senior leaders and managers to account for improvement.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- STA has 199 apprentices. The majority of apprentices are working at intermediate level in engineering and manufacturing technologies, with some working at advanced level. Other apprentices are studying programmes in health and social care, administration, business management and customer services. Just over a third of the total number of apprentices undertake their training with the sole subcontractor in administration, business management and health and social care.
- Although the large majority of apprentices achieved their qualifications, since the previous inspection the proportion that completed within the expected time has declined to around the national rate and requires improvement in order to be good. Apprentices undertaking their training with the subcontractor achieve well.
- Outcomes for apprentices aged 16 to 18, most of whom study at intermediate and advanced level in engineering and manufacturing technologies, are good. Although success rates are high for older apprentices, including those studying in other vocational areas, the proportion that achieved their qualifications within the expected timescale has declined to below the rate of other similar providers and is too low.

- The small minority of female apprentices perform much better than their male counterparts at intermediate level, but less well at advanced level. Both groups achieve better than their respective peer groups nationally. The few apprentices with additional support needs achieve well. However, the very small minority of non-white British apprentices perform less well than other apprentices, and this requires improvement.
- Few apprentices undertake functional skills qualifications at a higher level than required by their apprenticeship framework, even where initial assessment results indicate that they could benefit from doing so. As a result, not all apprentices achieve their full potential. In addition, trainers do not always reinforce with apprentices the importance of demonstrating high standards in English and mathematics in their work.
- Most apprentices develop good employability skills that help them become valued employees. For example, at the Engineering Training Centre apprentices are required to record their daily attendance using an electronic monitoring system that replicates 'clocking-in' systems found in the workplace. A few apprentices complete additional qualifications such as first aid, manual handling and abrasive wheels training that enable them to perform a wider range of duties at work.
- STA has good links with a wide range of employers, particularly in the engineering sector, many of whom will only work through the Association. As a result, learners seeking employment benefit from accessing apprenticeship opportunities in a wide variety of workplaces. Most apprentices secure permanent employment when they complete their apprenticeship, but the proportion that progress on to further study is low.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement, reflecting outcomes for learners. Not enough teaching is good or better, and staff expectations of apprentices are not high enough. As a result, the large majority of apprentices are not set work that is appropriately challenging. Employers provide high-quality, on-the-job training, and apprentices develop a wide range of vocational skills at work.
- The majority of theory sessions are uninspiring and slow paced without sufficient opportunity to broaden apprentices' knowledge by sharing information and ideas. Trainers do not personalise lessons sufficiently and apprentices all complete the same level of work, which does not go beyond the minimum requirements of the qualification.
- Apprentices receive good support throughout their learning programme from staff who are attentive, caring and approachable. Staff get to know their apprentices quickly and maintain frequent contact through learning sessions, assessment visits and email communications. They identify barriers to learning promptly, providing additional learning sessions when required. This motivates apprentices to continue with their programmes.
- Assessors have good knowledge of their vocational sectors and work closely with employers to plan skills training that best meets individual apprentices' needs. Most employers actively contribute to the selection of optional skills training modules and ensure that these link well to apprentices' roles at work; their ongoing support significantly supports the development of apprentices' skills in the workplace.
- Initial assessment requires improvement. Trainers do not give sufficient importance to the results of apprentices' prior knowledge and experience or to the promotion of functional skills beyond the minimum expectations of the apprenticeship programme.
- Assessment requires improvement. Although assessment is frequent and employs an appropriate range of assessment methods in the workplace, more able apprentices are not routinely encouraged to demonstrate their learning and skills development beyond meeting the minimum requirements of the qualification. Most trainers provide constructive oral feedback so

that apprentices are clear about what they do well and what they need to do to improve, but written feedback is often too brief.

- The use of short-term targets by trainers and assessors to monitor apprentices’ progress requires improvement. Although staff set appropriate long-term targets, they are less adept at setting meaningful, short-term targets for apprentices. Too often the targets set focus on completing units of the qualifications and do not emphasise wider personal skills such as confidence, communication or problem-solving skills.
- Apprentices’ English and mathematics skills development requires improvement. Most apprentices study at the minimum level of functional skills required for their apprenticeship programme, and few improve these skills beyond this initial level. Trainers do not promote high standards of functional skills; for example, many documents produced by staff for apprentices have spelling and grammatical errors.
- Apprentices benefit from a well-equipped training centre containing specialist engineering equipment replicating that found in the workplace. This enables them to hone their engineering skills and rapidly gain confidence in working to industry standards. However, trainers make minimum use of online technology to enliven and enhance learning during theory lessons.
- Staff provide good initial information, advice and guidance for apprentices before they start their programmes. This ensures their interests are well matched to both the qualification and the needs of the employer. However, once on programme, not all apprentices receive appropriate guidance to support the development of their higher-level functional skills capabilities. In addition, after they have achieved their qualification, most apprentices do not receive sufficient timely information regarding next step career opportunities.
- The promotion of equality and diversity during teaching and progress reviews requires improvement. Although trainers and assessors use an appropriate range of questions to explore apprentices’ understanding of fairness and respect for others, the extension of apprentices’ knowledge of these aspects is not routine. Apprentices have a good understanding of how to maintain their own and other’s safety; all wear suitable protective equipment at the training centre and in their work settings.

Health and social care	
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement

Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care require improvement because:

- apprentices, especially at advanced level, do not receive sufficient challenge to explore further current issues for the care sector such as the aging population, many of whom have complex care needs; apprentices’ targets focus on the completion of work and do not address personal and career development needs or adequately stretch and challenge those who are more able
- staff do not routinely encourage apprentices to research widely and provide sufficient detail in their written work to demonstrate broad and deep understanding according to their potential; professional discussions confirm apprentices’ basic understanding but assessors do not always encourage them to explain fully their comments or actions
- written feedback is insufficiently detailed to enable apprentices to understand fully their achievements and to identify areas to develop further; assessors do not reinforce sufficiently the importance for apprentices to maintain well-written service user records using correct spelling and grammar

- staff do not encourage apprentices to undertake functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics beyond the framework requirements; apprentices do not appreciate fully the application of functional skills for their work in the care sector
- staff do not reinforce equality and diversity sufficiently well during coaching sessions and reviews to ensure that apprentices understand fully the importance of these aspects for their professional practice and in their personal lives.

In health and social care the provider has the following strengths:

- outcomes for apprentices are good, and the very large majority achieve their qualifications within the planned timescale; most progress to a more advanced level of study or gain promotion at work
- very effective partnerships between employers and assessors support and enhance learning well; employers provide a wide range of additional training such as end-of-life care and dementia awareness, which complement the apprenticeship programme and improve apprentices' employability
- apprentices quickly gain confidence and make good use of increased knowledge and skills to inform their practice and improve the quality of care they provide; they have a good understanding of person-centred care and safe working practices
- assessors plan one-to-one coaching sessions well to meet the needs of both the apprentice and employer; apprentices are encouraged to think creatively and develop efficient problem-solving skills to review and meet successfully the needs of their service users.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

Teaching, learning and assessment in engineering and manufacturing technologies require improvement because:

- apprentices make insufficient progress in theory lessons; the pace of learning is often too slow, teaching is not sufficiently challenging and does not meet the needs and potential of all learners
- planning for learning is not consistently good; trainers routinely place engineering apprentices onto programmes of a standard duration of time regardless of their prior skills and knowledge; not all apprentices, particularly the more able, are set ambitious learning targets to go beyond the expected levels of competence of the framework, despite having the ability to benefit from additional training to extend their technical skills
- staff do not monitor apprentices' progress across all aspects of the programme in sufficient detail at progress reviews; they cover some topics, such as the promotion of equality and diversity too cursorily and do not use reviews well enough to plan future activities
- trainers' expectations for the development of apprentices' English skills are not high enough; trainers do not mark written work rigorously so that apprentices can learn from their mistakes
- apprentices do not receive sufficient challenge to work at a level of functional skill that is above their current attainment; the development of apprentices' use of technical terminology is insufficient
- staffing issues, such as sickness and a shortage of skilled trainers in electrical engineering, are having an adverse impact on apprentices' progress and impoverishing the learning experience.

In engineering and manufacturing technologies the provider has the following strengths:

- outcomes for apprentices are good, as reflected in the large majority of apprentices who remain in learning, complete their programmes within their planned timescales and secure permanent employment upon completion of their apprenticeship
- assessment in the workplace is very thorough and flexible in meeting the needs of apprentices; assessors make good use of the wide range of engineering experiences offered by employers ensuring that apprentices gain confidence and competence in industry practice
- STA’s training staff pay close attention to health and safety in practical sessions, drawing well on their vocational experience and enabling apprentices to develop good engineering skills; employers are positive about the rapid progress apprentices make, improving their usefulness in the workplace.

Administration and business management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration and business management require improvement because:

- outcomes for apprentices are only around the national rate, and too few apprentices successfully complete their programmes within the expected timescales; few progress from intermediate to advanced level apprenticeships or to higher education
- trainers rarely encourage apprentices to set personal goals or to develop a wide range of transferable skills, for example, confidence in public speaking or how to deal assertively in a range of challenging business settings; as a result not all apprentices develop good employability skills
- staff do not encourage or set high expectations for apprentices; the few apprentices who join the programme with advanced-level qualifications are not sufficiently broadening their knowledge or further developing their skills, so that they can reach their full potential
- trainers do not provide sufficiently detailed and informative written feedback that precisely identifies what apprentices need to do to improve the quality of their work; for example, apprentices produced attractive marketing leaflets but these were not to an appropriate professional standard
- trainers do not challenge apprentices to develop their mathematical, English and ICT skills beyond the basic requirements of the programme or help them to reflect on their learning
- trainers pay insufficient attention to the importance of setting high standards for apprentices in the correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar; apprentices are not encouraged to proof-read their work to ensure the high level of accuracy required for a commercial office environment.

In administration and business management the provider has the following strengths:

- apprentices produce work of a good standard and quickly gain a useful range of administration and management skills; apprentices grow in confidence and confidently apply these new skills at work

- trainers provide good support for apprentices through very frequent workplace visits which are scheduled to suit apprentices' varied shift patterns; trainers encourage apprentices to remain motivated and complete the programme
- trainers use a wide range of good-quality resources, including electronic and paper-based workbooks to support apprentices so that they quickly acquire relevant technical knowledge at an early stage of their programme; this allows apprentices to take responsibility for their learning early and motivates them to succeed
- apprentices are made well aware of the implications of equality and diversity policies beyond the immediate workplace; for example, an employee was reprimanded for placing inappropriate messages on a social media site that caused offence to colleagues; the importance of inclusivity and tolerance was discussed well.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Over the last 18 months, STA has experienced a period of significant change; senior managers have been slow to implement the recommendations made at the previous inspection. Members of the Council of Management make valuable contributions to ensure that STA's provision meets local employment and training needs. However, the Council is not involved sufficiently in setting and monitoring key performance indicators, particularly those that relate to apprentices' performance and the quality of provision.
- Managers recognise that the arrangements to collect and analyse data and information require rapid improvement. The information managers use is not always reliable or readily available to help inform decision making.
- Partnership working with the subcontractor has broadened the type of apprenticeships available to meet local employer demand in the health and social care and business sectors. STA communicates well with the subcontractor, and some examples of good teaching, learning and assessment practices have been shared.
- Performance management and staff development arrangements require improvement. The quality management of teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently rigorous to improve the performance of trainers and assessors. Although managers routinely appraise staff, current arrangements do not set high enough standards for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, STA has an insufficiently evaluative view as to the overall standard of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers provide staff with appropriate continual professional development so that they maintain currency in their sector. Teaching staff are appropriately experienced in their industry and use this expertise to develop apprentices' skills effectively which they use well in the workplace.
- Self-assessment requires improvement. Managers have ensured that the quality review process is inclusive and provides an opportunity for all staff and the subcontractor to contribute. However, the report is not detailed enough and does not identify all areas for improvement. In addition, the accompanying action plan is not sufficiently precise or aspirational. Senior managers have already identified this as an area for further development.
- The planning and management of the curriculum to meet the needs of apprentices and employers are good. The range of apprenticeships offered by STA meets the needs of apprentices, employers and the community very well, especially in welding and mechanical engineering. STA is working to strengthen links with organisations such as the LEP to understand better how its programmes can help further to address local and regional skills priorities. Managers have not ensured that learning programmes develop the English and mathematical skills of apprentices effectively.

- Equality of opportunity and respect underpin much of STA's work. Staff implement appropriate policies and procedures effectively to deal with any issues of harassment, bullying or discrimination. However, managers have not paid sufficient attention to the importance of developing apprentices' awareness of wider equality and diversity issues. Staff are currently undertaking training so that they fully understand their responsibilities with regard to equality and diversity and develop increased confidence to explore such issues with apprentices more successfully. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this training. Achievement gaps are narrowing over time but success rates for the few minority ethnic apprentices remain lower than those for other groups.
- Safeguarding arrangements require improvement. Although STA has a clear strategy for safeguarding all apprentices, the policy has yet to be updated to fully reflect how the Association's arrangements protect those who may be vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices feel safe and staff promote appropriate standards of health and safety in the training centre and the workplace. Apprentices also receive appropriate guidance about internet safety and the risks associated with social media.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Sandwell Training Association

Inspection grades are based on a provider’s performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3						3		
Outcomes for learners	3						3		
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3						3		
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3						3		

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and Social Care	3
Engineering	3
Manufacturing Technologies	3
Administration	3
Business Management	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	454							
Principal/CEO	Mr David Moss							
Date of previous inspection	November 2011							
Website address	www.sandwelltraining.com							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	64	59	36	40	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LJM Consultancy Limited. 							

Contextual information

Sandwell Training Association is an engineering group training company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity. The Association is managed by a Council of Management, elected from its member employers, most of whom are located in the Black Country. The borough of Sandwell is characterised by high levels of deprivation. The proportion of school pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, although improving, remains well below the West Midlands and the national averages. A higher proportion of the local population is economically inactive when compared to both the West Midlands and England. The main categories of employment in Sandwell are in low-skilled occupations, followed by administrative and secretarial work and skilled trades; collectively these account for approximately 42% of total employment within the borough. About 25% of the borough's population is from a minority ethnic group.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Victor Reid HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), an Ofsted associate inspector and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Quality and Curriculum Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012, Part 2*:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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