

Sandwell Training Association

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

5–8 April 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Managers and training consultants do not support apprentices to complete their qualifications; the proportion of apprentices who complete within the planned times has declined and is now very low.
- Apprentices have a weak understanding of fundamental British values, diversity and the potential for extremism and radicalisation. Therefore they are not adequately prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The planning of training is weak. Training consultants do not check apprentices' knowledge and understanding and therefore do not identify those apprentices who may need extra support in order to be successful.
- Managers and training consultants do not provide apprentices with opportunities to complete additional qualifications or further training that will help them become more employable and prepared for further promotion or training.
- Members of the council of management, leaders and managers have not ensured that staff are aware of the priorities of the business, contributing to poor outcomes for apprentices.
- Quality improvement actions undertaken by leaders to address the recommendations from the previous inspection have been ineffective.
- Training consultants do not routinely encourage or support apprentices to improve their English skills throughout their programme; apprentices make very limited progress unless they are in a specific functional skills session.
- Apprentices make slow progress towards completing their programmes, as training consultants do not sufficiently use the results of initial assessment, skills scans or diagnostic assessments to identify apprentices' initial starting points and individual needs. All apprentices are on a standard programme for completion of units regardless of ability or prior experience.
- The feedback that apprentices receive does not help them progress or improve.
- Apprentices receive inadequate information, advice and guidance. Too many leave the programme early and the proportion moving into sustained employment is low.
- Leaders and managers do not use data effectively. Managers were unaware of the number of apprentices leaving early or not completing their qualification.
- The council of management has not held leaders and managers to good account to secure rapid improvement.

The provider has the following strengths

- Most employers support apprentices well and provide good on-the-job training that develop

apprentices' practical skills well.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Sandwell Training Association (STA) is an engineering group training company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity. The company is governed by a council of management, elected from its member employers, most of whom are located in the Black Country. Sandwell Training Association offers apprenticeships predominantly in engineering.
- 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.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that managers monitor rigorously and systematically apprentices' progress. Develop a system that managers and other staff can use to ensure that apprentices complete within the planned time and so that staff are aware of those apprentices who fall behind in their work and can support them.
- Prioritise urgently the development of a strategy for English and mathematics that sets out how leaders and managers will ensure that they can support all apprentices to develop their confidence and skills in these essential areas beyond their initial starting points.
- Implement quickly robust arrangements to ensure the extension and reinforcement of apprentices' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity and of fundamental British values.
- Ensure that training consultants make better use of the initial assessment undertaken by apprentices at the start of their programme to tailor teaching and assessment to meet the needs of the individual apprentices, so that they may make good progress in their learning.
- Provide training to enable training consultants to engage and inspire apprentices in both practical and theory sessions and to ensure that they check apprentices' learning regularly.
- Ensure that training consultants give apprentices comprehensive feedback on their work, both written and practical, to enable them to improve further.
- Managers and training consultants should develop a suite of additional qualifications or training for apprentices to improve their chances of gaining sustainable employment, further education or promotion and keep accurate records of the achievements of apprentices.
- Managers and training consultants must improve apprentices' understanding of what an apprenticeship entails before they start their qualification to ensure that they are on the right level of apprenticeship, that they complete the qualification and that they are aware of opportunities to progress further.
- Leaders must ensure that they provide the council of management with comprehensive information so that council members may hold leaders to account and provide effective oversight of the provision.
- Leaders and managers must swiftly prioritise the completion of all outstanding appraisals. Leaders and managers must set all staff challenging expectations using performance targets linked to strategic plans, self-assessment and quality improvement goals.
- Improve the reliability and use of data, by developing the ability of all staff to use the management information system to enable them to manage and monitor learning programmes effectively. Managers must use this data to identify gaps in achievement and put swift actions in place to reduce them.
- Develop a more accurate and evaluative self-assessment and quality improvement process to tackle urgently, rigorously and systematically the long-standing areas for improvement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Senior leaders and managers have not taken effective or swift action to address the recommendations of the previous inspection. They have not taken prompt action to establish why an increasing number of apprentices leave the programme early, or to ensure that all remaining apprentices are on target to complete within the planned time. Since the previous inspection, both outcomes for apprentices and the quality of provision have declined significantly.
- The chief executive officer does not provide adequate information to the council of management to enable them to have an accurate view of STA's performance and standards. As a result, they have not been able to hold leaders and managers to sharp account and are unaware of the significant decline in outcomes.
- Communication and dissemination of information within the organisation are poor. Leaders and managers spend too much time dealing with everyday operational matters and do not evaluate accurately the impact of the actions they have taken. Staff feel that their views and opinions are undervalued and their morale is poor.
- Managers' use of data to monitor apprentices' progress, inform operational planning and assess performance against strategic business priorities is perfunctory. While STA has management information systems that can provide monthly management reports on apprentices' progress, numbers of leavers and attendance, the information held within these systems is not reliable or readily available. The reports provided to managers focus almost exclusively on financial performance. They do not provide a wider range of information about different aspects of the provision or detail the progress apprentices are making towards their learning targets. Managers' use of data to manage learning programmes and inform the setting of challenging improvement targets, including those related to the narrowing of achievement gaps between different groups of apprentices, is weak.
- The response of all staff to the previous inspection recommendations has been poor. Managers do not use apprentices' views well enough to inform improvements or share the analysis of apprentices' questionnaires with training consultants to help them develop and improve the apprenticeship programme. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently critical and fails to evaluate the provision, resulting in an inaccurate assessment of performance and the quality of the apprenticeship programme. The quality improvement action plan implemented by leaders has not led to sharply focused actions. Leaders and managers have made too little progress in addressing the areas of improvement reported at the previous inspection.
- The range of apprenticeships offered by STA meets appropriately the needs of learners, employers and the local community, especially in welding and mechanical engineering. Employers value the flexible provision that promotes good development of practical engineering skills that meet industry needs. STA has maintained effective links with the Black Country local enterprise partnership to ensure that its range of training programmes meet local and regional skills priorities.
- Leaders and the council of management have not given sufficiently high priority to the development of apprentices' skills and knowledge in English and mathematics. Managers and staff have not ensured that learning programmes develop apprentices' English and mathematical skills beyond their initial starting points or prepare them well for the next steps in their careers. Training consultants ensure that apprentices have enough mathematical and English skills to complete their qualification but do not extend their learning beyond this.
- Leaders have not ensured that the annual appraisal process provides a robust and developmental framework for raising levels of staff performance. Appraisals fail to set clear targets for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment expected of training consultants and do not enable the accurate evaluation of individual staff contributions towards business targets, aims and objectives. Managers have made improvements to the teaching and learning observation process recently, but these have not had an impact on the quality of the apprentices' experiences in the training centre. While most staff have had an appraisal, the large majority of senior managers have yet to be formally appraised. Managers do not recognise underperformance soon enough and therefore they do not take swift action to eliminate it.
- All staff at STA promote a strong ethos of respect and inclusion between apprentices. Staff have very recently participated in equality and diversity training that has increased their confidence in exploring relevant topics with apprentices. Apprentices' knowledge of themes associated with fundamental British values is superficial.

■ The governance of the provider

- Governance is inadequate. The members of the council of management have not challenged sufficiently the chief executive officer or members of the senior leadership team to ensure that they receive accurate and timely information to enable them to carry out their responsibilities; council members have not closely scrutinised those management reports presented by asking appropriately challenging questions of leaders.
- The council of management has increased the frequency of meetings, but members have not addressed key weaknesses in leadership. They have failed to tackle the underperformance of staff, including that of leaders.
- Members of the council of management do not understand the extent of the weaknesses and the significant decline in outcomes and in teaching and learning. They have not held leaders to account for failing to secure improvements in these areas.
- The council of management has not closely scrutinised the self-assessment report or the accompanying quality improvement action plan presented to them by leaders. As a result, they have an inaccurate picture of the key strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Arrangements for safeguarding apprentices meet statutory requirements; managers have updated policies to reflect and comply with the 'Prevent' duty. Managers check the suitability of staff appropriately during recruitment. Staff have undertaken appropriate training in safeguarding.
- Apprentices feel safe. They follow industry-recognised safe working practices when undertaking a range of complex and challenging engineering tasks. Staff carry out appropriate risk assessments of apprentices' workplaces. Experienced workplace mentors closely monitor apprentices; these mentors ensure that they closely follow company health and safety procedures within the workplace.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate across all apprenticeship programmes, levels and age groups. Too many apprentices leave their programme early and fail to achieve their apprenticeship.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have not enabled the improvement of outcomes for apprentices. The majority of apprentices following engineering programmes benefit from some good practical teaching, but theory teaching is weak and fails to capture apprentices' imagination or to motivate them to learn. Not enough training consultants extend apprentices' understanding using deeper questioning and setting challenging extension activities beyond the immediate requirements of the qualification. As a result, too many apprentices, particularly the most able, become bored quickly and not enough apprentices reach their potential and excel.
- Training consultants in some practical lessons offer apprentices good verbal feedback on their work. However, they provide inadequate written feedback on assessed work that would be useful for apprentices' subsequent assessments. Training consultants' comments do not explain how apprentices can improve their work or advance their depth of understanding. The development of apprentices' use of English is inadequate. Training consultants do not identify or comment on spelling and grammatical errors or the quality of written work; consequently, apprentices frequently repeat the same mistakes or produce untidy work. Training consultants do not extend the apprentices' mathematical skills beyond what they need to complete their qualifications.
- Training consultants have good vocational experience and relevant qualifications which they use effectively to develop their apprentices' vocational and employability skills. However, too often, training consultants' planning of learning activities pays insufficient attention to ensuring that all apprentices are able to make good progress according to their potential. Training consultants do not use the information on apprentices' starting points to plan learning that challenges apprentices effectively.
- Training consultants do not do enough to ensure that employers are sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learning. Employers do not routinely participate in meetings to discuss apprentices' progress. As a result, skills development, behaviours and attitudes in the workplace seldom feature in improvement targets. A few employers are not fully aware of the requirements of the full apprenticeship programme and have only a vague understanding of the timescales involved.

- Target setting is weak and fails to ensure that apprentices make good progress. The large majority of targets relate to the completion of qualifications and do not identify areas of skills development that apprentices need to improve further. Timescales for the achievement of targets set during progress reviews are too long. The most-able apprentices often find their work too easy and training consultants do not provide them with additional activities to extend their learning. For example, some apprentices complete their knowledge questions very quickly but training consultants do not extend their learning or give them additional tasks until the next progress review. This lack of further targets limits their progress.
- Training consultants do not start the majority of assessments at level 3 early enough in the apprentices' programme. As a result, apprentices have only a short time to prove competence in their vocational area, and training consultants miss valuable opportunities for assessment and observation. Too many apprentices who complete their apprenticeship do so beyond the planned timescale.
- Employers provide good support for their apprentices. They provide good training opportunities in the workplace. Apprentices benefit from working in different departments or in different aspects of their industries. For example, some apprentices control advanced coordinate measuring machines and some manufacture and maintain heavy vehicle trailers to a high standard. Employers often select the units studied by their apprentices in order to develop fully the skills needed by their business
- Training consultants do not do enough to ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of equality and diversity. They do not use progress reviews consistently well to promote apprentices' understanding of differences such as those found in faith, culture and ethnicity. However, apprentices demonstrate respect for their peers and work colleagues.
- Training consultants prioritise safeguarding and ensure that apprentices remain safe and adopt safe working practices. However, apprentices do not have a thorough understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism, as training consultants do not discuss these with apprentices often enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are inadequate

- Managers and training consultants do not offer apprentices a varied curriculum. As a result, apprentices do not improve life skills sufficiently during their programmes. Managers have no way to record additional skills gained and they do not give apprentices credit for improving their chances to gain sustainable employment or further education or training.
- Advice and guidance fail to ensure that apprentices receive enough information on the requirements of their programme and potential progression opportunities. Too many apprentices have not received clear information about their future options. The majority of apprentices fail to progress to the next level of study or to sustained employment on completion of their programme.
- Employers provide focused support to their apprentices; however, feedback from training consultants contains insufficient detail to enable employers to link off-the-job training with workplace activities.
- Apprentices receive little information or guidance on how to keep themselves fit and healthy, either physically or emotionally.
- Training consultants and managers do not offer enough additional qualifications, training or skills to apprentices. Some employers ensure that their apprentices receive additional opportunities but training consultants do not record this or link it to the apprentice's qualification at progress meetings. As a result, apprentices' experience beyond that of their framework is limited.
- A small minority of apprentices are insufficiently prepared for the work environment when they complete their training programmes. They require further development of employability and life skills in order to make a useful contribution in the workplace.
- All apprentices say they feel safe. However, a small minority of apprentices are unaware of how to report any concerns that they may have about possible risk to themselves or to others. Apprentices' knowledge of these aspects is too variable and often superficial.
- During inspection, attendance was good at the training centre. However, long-term records are not available. Leaders and managers do not use records to check on attendance and therefore training consultants do not routinely challenge apprentices' poor attendance.
- Apprentices' behaviour is good and they show respect and tolerance for their fellow apprentices, training consultants and other employees.

Outcomes for learners

are inadequate

- Outcomes for apprentices are inadequate because the proportion of apprentices completing their programmes within the expected time is very low. Considerably fewer apprentices now complete their qualifications than in the most recent inspection. Managers have not put actions in place to improve this, as they were unaware of this rapid decline.
- The number of apprentices who leave their training programme before completion is too high. Training consultants do not conduct exit interviews with apprentices who leave early and, as a result, seem uncertain as to why they leave.
- Not enough apprentices are in sustained employment when they leave STA. Too few apprentices progress from intermediate to advanced level qualifications.
- Managers do not have accurate data to ensure that apprentices are making good progress on their programmes. Managers are unaware of those apprentices who are falling behind in their programme.
- Managers do not routinely use data to ensure that all apprentices are achieving and they are not identifying gaps in achievement. Female apprentices achieve better than males do. Those apprentices who have a special educational need or disability achieve their qualifications more often than those without. Managers do not have any actions in place to minimise these gaps.
- Engineering apprentices develop good practical skills in both their workplaces and within practical teaching sessions. Apprentices' work in business administration and customer services meets the requirements of the qualification and a small minority far exceeds expectations.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	184
Principal/CEO	Mr David Moss
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		
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	81	42	33	46	0	0			
	Number of traineeships		16-19		19+		Total		
	0		0		0				
	Number of learners aged 14–16		0						
Funding received from		Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:		None							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Tracey Zimmerman, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Victor Reid, assistant lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Robinson	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the quality, qualifications and curriculum manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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