



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

Steel Training

SUMMARY

At the time of the first inspection, Steel Training provided satisfactory training in engineering and manufacturing, and good training in business administration. The modern apprenticeships and other work-based training programmes provided by the company had been developed in close co-operation with the steel industry to meet the needs of its employers. Steel Training placed trainees in companies which offered a wide range of learning opportunities in a well-resourced environment. In some placements, mentors effectively supported trainees and worked closely with Steel Training to plan and carry out on-the-job training and assessment. In other placements, the training was not well managed and assessment opportunities were missed. Managers at Steel Training did not give sufficient attention to the quality of training provided by some of its subcontracted assessment centres. Trainees benefited from carefully planned training and assessment of the key skills components of their programmes. Equal opportunities arrangements were satisfactory, although recruitment of trainees from traditionally under-represented groups was low. Support for trainees and quality assurance arrangements were satisfactory. However, management of training was unsatisfactory. The management of the company's youth training programmes has since been restructured and managers have introduced a range of policies and supporting procedures to improve the management of training provided by the company and its subcontractors which is now good. A good management information system has been developed and trainees' progress and achievements are accurately monitored.

As a result of the reinspection of Steel Training, the original published report text for management of training has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. The summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced work placements offering good learning opportunities
- ◆ good achievement rates for business administration trainees
- ◆ carefully planned and delivered key skills training
- ◆ good support for trainees from mentors in some placements



- ◆ training programmes designed to meet the needs of the industry
- ◆ good management control of subcontracted training and assessment
- ◆ good use made of management information

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ too few opportunities for work-based assessment in some placements
- ◆ low recruitment of women and trainees from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ slow response to addressing some identified issues
- ◆ poor quality assurance of subcontracted assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Steel Training is a limited company owned by the steel industry employers. Member companies are engaged in a range of steel industry processes, including steel making, hot and cold rolling, casting, forging, steel stockholding and metal recycling. In 1997, Steel Training, in partnership with British Steel, achieved recognition by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) as the national training organisation for the steel industry.

2. The company's government-funded training is provided through the youth programmes team, managed by the youth programmes manager, who reports to the manager of the company's services division. The youth programmes team is comprised of the programmes manager and three full-time training co-ordinators. The team provides training for young people in the vocational areas of engineering, manufacturing and business administration to member, and non-member, companies in the steel industry. Off-the-job training is mainly subcontracted to local further education colleges. Some off-the-job training and some work-based assessment is subcontracted to several companies in the Sheffield and Sandwell areas who use peripatetic assessors. The steel industry modern apprenticeship and the steel industry national traineeship were designed specifically to meet the needs of the industry and are the main programmes offered by Steel Training. At the first inspection, the team operated from two centres, at Tipton and Sheffield, to provide training funded through Sandwell Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Sheffield TEC. At the time of inspection, there were 91 trainees following national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 to 3 in engineering, manufacturing and business administration.

3. The company's offices are centrally located in the two manufacturing areas of South Yorkshire and West Midlands, in which they deliver training. Around 20 per cent of Sheffield's population of 501,202 are employed in manufacturing. Unemployment is high at 7.9 per cent, and has been rising in recent years. Over the last 20 years, the steel industry has been reducing the number of people it employs, as processing has become more automated and efficient. The job losses have been predominantly among craft and semi-skilled workers. Employers are now finding it difficult to fill vacancies for professional, skilled and managerial staff. Approximately 5 per cent of the population of Sheffield is made up of people from minority ethnic groups. There are 59 per cent of school leavers in Sheffield going on to further education, with only 29 per cent going into employment and training.

4. Sandwell's population of 294,800 is decreasing, as there is a steady migration from the area, especially among the economically active younger people. Over half of those leaving are aged between 15 and 34. The predicted fall of 3.3 per cent in economically active males by 2006 is contrasted with the expected increase of 5.9 per cent in economically active females over the same period. Sandwell has the third highest percentage of the population with minority ethnic backgrounds in the West Midlands. On the basis of current trends, the TEC predicts that 22.5 per cent



of the local population will be from minority ethnic groups by 2011. The proportion of Sandwell's school leavers failing to achieve any passes at GCSE rose in 1997 to 13 per cent, compared with 8 per cent nationally. Over recent years the number of school leavers continuing full-time education has risen to 58 per cent, while those entering employment and training has fallen to 28 per cent. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 28.7 per cent for Sandwell and 38 per cent for Sheffield, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The figures for 1999 are 29.7 per cent, 37.7 per cent and 47.9 per cent respectively.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Steel Training produced its first self-assessment report in November 1998 for inspection. The self-assessment process involved all members of the training staff and examined all aspects of their work. The youth programmes manager wrote the self-assessment report, using *Raising the Standard*. The report included many of the strengths and weaknesses subsequently identified by inspectors. The grades given in the self-assessment report for manufacturing and engineering, equal opportunities, trainee support and quality assurance, were agreed on by inspectors. Inspectors awarded a higher grade for business administration and a lower grade for management of training than that given in the self-assessment report.

6. The company produced a self-assessment report and updated action plan for the reinspection. The report was completed in February 2000 and focused mainly on the changes made to the training and its management since the first inspection. Much of the report was concerned with progress made in implementing the action plan and no revised grades were given.

7. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at Steel Training during March 1999. Inspectors examined documents at the company's training centres and in subcontracted assessment centres. They met managers and staff from the company, subcontractors, employers, and representatives of the TEC and local government office. They examined assessment records, trainees' practical and written work and portfolios. They visited 16 employers, interviewed 31 trainees and observed trainees' progress reviews, assessments and training sessions in the workplace and training centres. Inspectors gave one instruction session a grade 1, one a grade 2 and three a grade 3.

8. Steel Training was reinspected in May 2000 by a team of two inspectors over a total of four days. Inspectors visited six work placements and the company's offices in West Bromwich and Sheffield. They interviewed 14 trainees, six workplace supervisors, five workplace assessors, two internal verifiers and two subcontractors. Meetings were held with managers and staff at both of the company's offices and in the companies where trainees are placed. Inspectors observed a trainee's progress review, and examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios, records of trainees' reviews, trainees' files, internal and external verification records and other documents associated with the training and its management.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

9. There are 38 trainees presently following engineering programmes. At Sheffield, nine are modern apprentices and 10 are in other programmes of work-

based training for young people. In Sandwell, 10 are modern apprentices and nine are on other programmes of work-based training. Engineering modern apprentices undertake a programme of training leading to the achievement of an NVQ at level 3, key skills at levels 2 and 3 and an additional qualification such as a national certificate or its equivalent. Those on other training programmes are working towards achievement of an NVQ at level 2, key skills at levels 1 and 2 and the steel industry awareness certificate. Modern apprentices attend local further education colleges on a day-release basis and all trainees undertake specific off-the-job training sessions in classrooms at the provider's offices, for example, in steel industry awareness and key skills. The training is well planned and delivered, although the provider lacks good facilities to deliver the training in the Sandwell offices. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good workplace learning opportunities
- ◆ high standard of trainees' practical and written work
- ◆ well designed and taught key skills
- ◆ good workplace mentoring and assessment in some placements
- ◆ extensive progression routes for most trainees
- ◆ well-planned training in some placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of learning resources to support some off-the-job training
- ◆ low NVQ achievement rate in the midlands
- ◆ insufficient opportunities for assessment in some work placements
- ◆ lack of understanding of NVQ processes by some workplace supervisors
- ◆ poorly structured training plans in some companies

10. Trainees are employed in a wide range of local engineering companies, not always connected with the steel industry, which provide a well-resourced environment in which to learn about engineering and achieve the necessary competence in the workplace. Steel Training arranges for trainees to visit several companies in the steel industry as part of their programme of raising trainees' awareness of the career prospects offered by the industry. The practical work carried out by trainees is of a high standard and employers value their contribution to the work of the company. The portfolios of evidence for assessment produced by the trainees are carefully indexed and contain well-presented and appropriate evidence. In some work placements the employers' staff provide effective mentoring for the trainees and encourage and support their progress towards achievement of the NVQ. For most trainees, assessment of their vocational competence is carried out in the workplace when they are ready to demonstrate

competence and when appropriate work is being undertaken. The training is well planned in these placements to ensure that trainees have frequent opportunities to gain experience across the range of skills necessary for completion of the NVQ. Reviews are carried out more frequently than contractually required. In a few placements, there are insufficient opportunities for assessment and trainees' progress towards achievement of the NVQ is slow. In these placements, training plans are not sufficiently well structured to ensure that trainees work on appropriate jobs for optimum progress towards achieving the NVQ. Despite the information that Steel Training provides, employers' staff in a few companies have a poor understanding of the requirements of the NVQ and its assessment.

11. Trainees have a good understanding of the key skills requirements of their programmes. The company has planned the delivery of key skills training and assessment well. Trainees have regular opportunities to develop their key skills and are keen to identify opportunities for claiming competence. Resources at Steel Training to support some aspects of off-the-job training are poor, for example, at Sandwell there is limited teaching space and at Sheffield there is an insufficient number of rooms and few learning materials have been developed to support trainees in gaining theoretical knowledge. The company works well with employers to encourage trainees to progress to the best of their ability, and many have gone on to achieve higher qualifications than those required by their training programmes. Steel Training produced the first two successful modern apprentices in the steel industry. In 1996-97, 66 per cent of the engineering trainees at Sheffield achieved their intended qualification and secured employment in the steel industry. In the midlands, there has been a steady decline in achievements over the last three years, and only a third of the engineering trainees who have left had achieved the NVQ in 1997-98.

Manufacturing

Grade 3

12. Steel Training, together with the steel industry's national training organisation (NTO), has developed an NVQ at level 3 in steel industry operations, and a modern apprenticeship framework to meet the requirements of the industry. There are 28 manufacturing trainees. Of these, 24 are modern apprentices and four are on other programmes of work-based training for young people. All the trainees are employed in the steel industry. The modern apprentices undertake a programme of workplace and off-the-job training leading to the achievement of a steel industry operations NVQ at levels 2 and 3, key skills units at levels 2 and 3 and, for some, a national certificate in engineering. Those on other programmes of training are working towards achievement of an NVQ at level 2, and key skills units at levels 1 and 2. All trainees undertake a course leading to the achievement of a steel industry awareness certificate. The course provides trainees with an overview of the steel industry and includes visits to a range of companies operating within the industry.

13. The competence of trainees in achieving their NVQs is assessed in the workplace, usually by company employees qualified as assessors. Eleven of the 35 companies who work with Steel Training have their own qualified assessors and a further two companies have assessment centre status. Key skills training is done through a combination of work-based projects and off-the-job support. Steel Training staff, qualified to assess key skills, regularly visit trainees in the workplace to provide frequent opportunities for achieving the key skills.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements offering occupationally relevant experience
- ◆ high standard of work produced by trainees
- ◆ good progress in key skills
- ◆ well-developed work-based assessment in some placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ declining NVQ achievement rate at Sandwell
- ◆ insufficient assessment opportunities for some trainees
- ◆ ineffectively planned training in some placements

14. Steel Training makes good use of its strong links with the steel industry and all the trainees benefit from work placements in good companies offering a wide range of learning opportunities, for example, from small individually machined, engineering components to large scale steel wire production. The training programmes are designed to provide trainees with the opportunity to gain experience across the breadth of the industry. Several different routes are available allowing trainees to qualify in, for example, production or inspection and testing on programmes designed to suit the need of their particular branch of manufacturing. Trainees value the off-the-job training received in steel industry awareness and the knowledge they gain about the industry. The company has developed an effective range of work-based projects which take trainees through the planning, designing, ordering and production parts of a job, such that they are able to demonstrate their competence in several areas of the key skills of application of number, communicating with others and information technology. Trainees undertake about four days a year of off-the-job training in key skills and are given additional sessions when necessary. Progress towards the achievement of key skills is generally rapid, and trainees have a good understanding of the key skills requirements of their programmes and how they will be assessed. The trainees are able and well motivated and produce practical and written work to a high standard. Many employers are keen to be involved in the training and, together with Steel Training, have made good progress in establishing qualified workplace assessors.

15. In many of the companies where work-based assessors have been developed, training and assessment are good. However, in some companies, the assessment process is not operating efficiently and trainees have too few opportunities to have their competence assessed. For these trainees progress towards achieving their NVQ is slow. Some companies employ subcontracted peripatetic assessors to assess the trainees' competence in the workplace. Steel Training does not have its own assessors and the support it has been able to give work-based assessors through the internal verification process has not been sufficient to ensure effective assessment is available to all trainees. In some placements, the training and assessment are planned and delivered to a high standard. However, in a few placements there is a lack of structure in terms of job role analysis and planned individual training programmes.

16. Trainees also attend a one-week residential training programme, which provides a rich range of personal and social development opportunities and encourages teamwork. Off-the-job training is provided, for some trainees, through day-release at college and for others on a variety of attendance patterns by one of the subcontracted companies who offer training and assessment.

17. Of the current 28 manufacturing trainees, 23 are based at the provider's Sandwell centre and five in Sheffield. Although details of trainees' achievements were included in the self-assessment report, they were not broken down and expressed in terms of each separate training programme. The general trend in achievements at Sheffield has been steadily upwards over the last three years, but at Sandwell the percentage of trainees leaving with their intended qualification has fallen from 93 per cent in 1995-96 to 42 per cent in 1997-98. Further analysis during the inspection identified that this downward trend applied to the NVQ achievement rates for manufacturing trainees.

Business administration

Grade 2

18. There are 25 business administration trainees, all placed with local companies, 80 per cent of them being employed. One is a modern apprentice based in Sheffield and the remainder are on other programmes of work-based training for young people, seven based in Sheffield and 17 at Sandwell. The trainees are working towards achievement of an NVQ at levels 2 and 3 in administration or customer service, together with a GNVQ or national certificate. The company's self-assessment report did not detail strengths and weaknesses specific to the occupational area, but tended to draw on those which were common to the other occupational areas. Inspectors found the provision of training in this occupational area to be good and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced work placements for all trainees
- ◆ good achievement rates
- ◆ frequent workplace assessment opportunities
- ◆ trainees' participation in assessment-planning
- ◆ effective key skills teaching

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of planned off-the-job training for some trainees
- ◆ no internal verification until completion of customer service programme
- ◆ unstructured on-the-job training in a few placements

19. At the start of training, Steel Training places all the trainees with local employers who are able to offer the range of resources necessary for trainees to achieve their qualifications. Most trainees are employed from the start of their training programmes. Employers have a high regard both for the performance of their trainees and for their strong working relationship with Steel Training. For most trainees, training in the workplace is well delivered, but in a few placements the on-the-job training lacks formal structure and trainees are unable to identify it as training. Most trainees attend local colleges of further education on a day-release basis to undertake training towards achievement of additional qualifications and for the underpinning knowledge component of their NVQ as well as the assessment of some competencies towards their NVQ. For some trainees, subcontracted peripatetic assessors regularly visit the workplace to carry out all NVQ assessments. Following the recent change of one subcontractor, some trainees are not receiving adequately planned off-the-job training.

20. The trainees are well motivated and have a clear understanding of the requirements of their programme and its assessment. They participate in the planning of their assessments and negotiate targets and achievement dates with their assessors. The assessors visit the workplace frequently, sometimes fortnightly, to ensure trainees have sufficient opportunities for assessment when they are appropriate. Steel Training's staff carry out effective progress reviews for trainees in the workplace at least every 12 weeks, but often on request. They are also able to provide assessment opportunities in addition to those provided by the subcontractors. On a customer service programme, the subcontractor carries out internal verification only at the end of the programme when trainees submit their portfolios for final assessment.

21. The training and assessment of key skills are thorough, though carried out separately from the NVQ units. Although some trainees do not see the relevance of some elements of key skills, progress towards their achievement is good. Over the last three years, few business administration trainees have failed to complete their training and the trainees at Sheffield completing with an NVQ at levels 2 or 3 rose from 92 per cent in 1996-97 to 95 per cent in 1997-98. Trainees are encouraged to

take further qualifications and some have gone on to complete higher education qualifications.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

22. Steel Training has a clearly written equal opportunities policy, which is subscribed to by all its employers. The youth programmes manager is responsible for the promotion of equality of opportunity by Steel Training and he involves other training staff in the development of new initiatives and improved procedures relating to equal opportunities. The company has recently taken part in a project sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), which has resulted in promotional material being produced which contains positive images of women trainees and trainees with minority ethnic backgrounds working in the steel industry. The company's self-assessment report did not identify all the main weaknesses in this aspect of provision. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths identified in the self-assessment report and agreed with the grade given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ action-planning from regular review of approach to equal opportunities
- ◆ data on trainees' ethnicity, gender and disability monitored and analysed
- ◆ training to raise staff awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ involvement with initiatives in the local community

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little success in recruiting trainees from under-represented groups
- ◆ barriers to recruitment not identified
- ◆ little promotion of equal opportunities to employers
- ◆ under-developed equal opportunities strategy

23. Steel Training has recently held several reviews of its approach to equal opportunities and the company has begun the process of positively promoting training in the steel industry to traditionally under-represented groups. Following analysis of the company's data on the ethnicity, gender and disability of trainees, an equal opportunity action plan has been developed and partly implemented. This has involved changes to promotional materials used by the company, and the involvement of training staff in awareness raising. Issues of equality of opportunity are a standing item at management review meetings. Staff have a good

understanding of many of the issues associated with equal opportunities and have taken part in many of the of the activities in the local community where they have an opportunity to promote the company to under-represented groups.

24. Despite the company's awareness of equal opportunities and promotional activities, they have had little success in increasing the numbers of trainees recruited from the groups identified as being under-represented: women, trainees with disabilities and trainees with minority ethnic backgrounds. The company has highlighted the need to identify the barriers to the recruitment of trainees from these groups, but has yet to do so. Although all employers sign up to the company's policy on equal opportunities, there is little promotion of the issues with employers, and Steel Training takes a passive approach to the subject in the workplace. After an initial check, little mention is made of equal opportunities. The company has been active in the recent past, but the development of an equal opportunities strategy that will lead to sustained improvement is still at an early stage of development.

Trainee support

Grade 3

25. Trainees are effectively supported off the job by Steel Training's staff in conjunction with the colleges and subcontractors involved. The company's staff and workplace supervisors provide satisfactory support in the workplace. All trainees are interviewed prior to starting a training programme and are given advice on the most appropriate course for them. There is a staged induction process which helps trainees adjust to the demands of the workplace, college and the training programme. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the company's self-assessment report and found additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough induction process
- ◆ frequency of progress reviews in excess of contractual requirement
- ◆ availability of training co-ordinators to trainees and employers
- ◆ high level of pastoral support
- ◆ good support from mentors in some work placements
- ◆ trainees well-supported in key skills acquisition

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ short-term achievement targets not always used effectively in progress reviews
- ◆ lack of focus on NVQ achievement in some progress reviews
- ◆ referral procedure for additional learning support not adequately implemented
- ◆ lack of documents to support trainees' workplace training

26. Following interview, all trainees are initially assessed in terms of ability in number, literacy and key skills. The assessment of trainees' ability is ongoing throughout their training and at any point where the need for additional support is identified, training staff arrange for the appropriate support. Trainees have individual training plans which are updated as part of the review process. Steel Training has developed a comprehensive system for key skills training and assessment, and trainees are well supported in the acquisition of key skills. The company has a clearly stated procedure for the referral of trainees needing additional support, but staff do not always comply with the procedure and some additional support provided is not recorded. Once placed on a training programme, all trainees have a thorough induction, covering the main aspects of their programme, including health and safety, equal opportunities, complaints procedures, and the steel industry. The initial induction takes place at the company's offices and lasts for a week or, for large groups of trainees, it takes place in the offices of a subcontractor. All trainees then go on to a second induction in the workplace.

27. Trainees are visited in the workplace for assessment and progress reviews more frequently than the three-monthly contractual requirement. In addition to the scheduled visits, trainees and workplace supervisors are able to contact their training officer by telephone and arrange extra visits. Trainees and employers regard the high level of availability as a positive feature of support, and many have made use of the service. The effectiveness of the review visits varies, with some trainees being set clear short-term achievement targets which are monitored and reviewed, while others are given only vague guidance about the requirements for the next visit. Some progress reviews address trainees' progress in the workplace and at college, but do not have sufficient focus on progress towards achievement of the NVQ. The level of pastoral support for trainees is high and most regard their training officer as the first point of contact for any problems they are experiencing. When trainees have been made redundant during their training programme, Steel Training has been able to use its close links with employers to place the trainee with another company in order to complete their apprenticeship.

28. Every company used by Steel Training has a workplace supervisor or training officer and nearly half of the companies have workplace assessors. Those which do not, use peripatetic assessors who regularly visit the workplace. In some placements, trainees are well supported by their mentor or supervisor, and the company's training staff work closely with them to maintain trainees' progress. In a few placements, the demands of the workplace are such that mentors cannot spend sufficient time with the trainees, some assessment opportunities are missed and trainees' progress towards achieving the NVQ is slow, particularly where there are few learning materials available to support trainees in their on-the-job training.

Management of training

Grade 2

29. Since the first inspection, the company has made major changes. The commercial services manager, based at the Sandwell centre, has left the organisation and the management structure has been reorganised so that the training manager reports to the company's services manager. The work which was carried out at the Sandwell centre, has been moved to new premises in West Bromwich. The management systems have been extended, developed and implemented during the last 12 months. Additional features have been incorporated, such as additional procedures for the management of trainees' progress, and guidance notes for training in the workplace. Managers have made modifications to the management review procedures to incorporate a response to emerging issues and a complete review of quality assurance procedures. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, found some to be no more than normal practice, but identified additional strengths. The company's self-assessment report did not include a new grade for the management of training.

At the first inspection, the weaknesses identified were:

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of on- and off-the-job training and assessment in some companies
- ◆ ineffective staff deployment
- ◆ poor implementation of some procedures
- ◆ slow response to some identified significant issues
- ◆ lack of co-ordination of performance target-setting and monitoring

30. Since the first inspection, Steel Training has made significant changes to its operating structure. The training management team has been restructured and simplified, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. Steel Training moved its offices in the West Midlands and now operates from a modern building which it shares with another organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of training aims and objectives to employers
- ◆ clear and effective procedures for management of subcontractors
- ◆ effective use of management information to improve training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little monitoring of subcontracted internal verification process
- ◆ on-the-job training structure underdeveloped in some placements

31. Steel Training has a detailed business plan, the objectives of which are shared with all staff, and clear individual targets are set. Staff have an annual appraisal, during which training and development needs are identified in order to meet the objectives of the business plan. Frequent meetings are held between managers, senior staff and general staff. These are well recorded, action plans are produced, and the progress with the action plan is followed up at subsequent meetings. Internal audits are carried out regularly, their findings are analysed and followed up, and good practice is shared across the two training centres. The company has clear aims and objectives, and its mission statement is on view at strategic places within its premises, and even printed on its coffee cups. The objectives of the business plan are relayed to staff at the annual appraisal sessions and individual targets are agreed.

32. All staff have clear job descriptions, copies of which are given to them and are held in their own personal files. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and these are reviewed in response to any change in circumstances. For each subcontractor and employer involved in training there is a service agreement. In addition, there is a company-based file containing copies of employers' liability certificates, details of initial and regular health and safety audits and trainees' review details. However, there is a lack of monitoring by management of the internal verification procedures used by subcontractors. Steel Training's staff does not examine internal verification plans and sampling schedules. It is assumed that because a subcontractor is an accredited body, internal verification is being carried out effectively and that suitable sampling arrangements are implemented.

33. Other information regarding trainees and their progress is carefully recorded and held at the company's offices. A computerised database has been developed to ensure accurate monitoring of trainees' progress and the currency of information on training-related matters. The data on all aspects of recruitment, trainees' progress, and the reasons for trainees leaving the programme early are analysed and presented to managers in a graphical form, which enables them to review all aspects of their performance and make changes accordingly. A colour-coding system using red, green and amber is used to highlight the priority of action required for any trainee to maintain progress towards the agreed targets. The system is fully operational, and its effectiveness is monitored and subject to continuous improvement and development.

34. Although the weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training and assessment have been addressed, a few employers still do not clearly plan and carry out structured training at work. In some companies, although trained as assessors, workplace supervisors spend more time on collecting relevant evidence for portfolios than they do in structuring the training content. The managers at Steel Training have recognised this problem and are using a subcontracted internal verifier, together with their own training advisors, to improve this situation.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

35. Steel Training has a clearly documented youth programmes quality assurance system, which specifies the processes by which the organisation assures the quality of its training provision. The system was revised in 1998 and staff have undertaken a training programme to support them in the system's implementation. All the training staff were involved in the revision of the system. There is an internal audit process which involves staff in considering aspects of provision for which they do not have direct responsibility. The youth programmes manager has overall responsibility for quality assurance. The effectiveness of the system and plans for its improvement are discussed at regular meetings of the training team. In addition to the findings of their own self-assessment process, the company's self-assessment report listed the external audits and inspections to which the company has been subject and summarised the findings. The company was re-accredited as an assessment centre for a further three years following an accreditation review in 1998. Audits and reviews by the contracting TECs confirmed that the quality assurance systems were operating in compliance with contractual requirements. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses highlighted in the company's self-assessment report and awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-organised system covering the main elements of training
- ◆ open and critical approach to self-assessment
- ◆ full staff involvement in quality assurance development and review

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ internal audit procedure not implemented
- ◆ too few internal verifiers to support workplace assessment
- ◆ ineffective quality assurance of subcontracted assessment centres

36. The company's comprehensively documented quality assurance system details policy and procedures relating to all the main elements of the training programmes offered. There is a well-developed procedure for document control, which is carefully implemented. All training staff are involved in the regular reviews of the quality assurance system from which the procedures have been modified and developed. The self-assessment process has led to an open and critical review of quality assurance. A realistic action plan has already resulted in improvements to the quality of training.

37. Despite the company's systematic approach to quality assurance, there has not been a continuous improvement in the quality of training provided. Some procedures required to underpin quality improvement are not in place. For example, there is no effective review and development of practice in subcontracted assessment centres. Other procedures are specified but not implemented

effectively, such as the failure to take appropriate action to address the slow progress made by some trainees, which was identified through the trainees' reviews. Although an internal audit process forms part of the quality assurance system, it is not operating and no schedules for its operation are in place. The number of internal verifiers visiting the workplace are insufficient to adequately assure the quality of the considerable amount of trainees' assessments carried out in the workplace, particularly in the steel manufacturing operations programme. Although internal verification meets the awarding bodies' requirements, some trainees' progress is delayed while waiting for internal verification to be completed.

38. Achievement rates are closely monitored and analysed annually. Steel Training has statistics identifying trends in trainees' achievement over time, but has been slow to address the issues they raise. Employers' views are sought through the review process and through the various committees on which they are represented at the NTO. Staff views are formally sought at monthly team meetings. Trainees' views on the quality of training are sought at each review, but they are not collectively sought through questionnaires and there is no analysis of their views collectively. Each issue raised is individually addressed, thus patterns or trends are not identifiable.

39. Having identified many of the issues of quality assurance through self-assessment, the provider has moved to address them but some actions are at too early a stage of implementation for their effectiveness to be judged.