



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 2000

SIGTA Ltd

SUMMARY

SIGTA Ltd obtains good-quality work placements and effectively matches employment opportunities to trainees' aspirations and ability. Knowledgeable and experienced training officers provide good support to trainees. SIGTA Ltd has taken action to improve training as a result of the self-assessment process. A high proportion of trainees does not complete their programmes and no action has been taken to remedy this. Little assessment by direct observation is carried out and most assessment takes place at the end of the programme. SIGTA Ltd does not monitor equal opportunities data and has taken no action to address the under-representation of women and people from minority ethnic groups. Communications with employers are poor.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective matching of employment opportunities to trainees' aspirations and ability
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ effective recruitment and induction
- ◆ highly knowledgeable and experienced training officers
- ◆ positive action as a result of self-assessment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low completion rates
- ◆ little assessment by direct observation
- ◆ lack of continuous assessment
- ◆ poor monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no action to address under-representation
- ◆ poor communications with employers
- ◆ no action to address low retention and achievement rates
- ◆ incomplete and out-of-date individual training plans



INTRODUCTION

1. SIGTA Ltd is a private training provider and a registered charity which specialises in engineering training. It has contracts with Sussex Enterprise CTE and Surrey TEC to provide youth and adult training, and also provides commercial training. The company has recently opened an open-learning centre as part of the engineering learning link, an initiative of the Engineering and Marine Training Association (EMTA), as a project for the University for Industry's training network. SIGTA Ltd has 196 trainees. Of these, 96 are modern apprentices, 20 are national trainees, 78 are following other youth programmes and two are adult trainees. All trainees are employed by their placement companies. Training is provided by the employers and at nearby colleges.

2. SIGTA Ltd is based in Portslade near Brighton. It employs 18 staff. Trainees are placed in companies across Sussex and Surrey. The 1991 census identified that 1.3 per cent of the population in East Sussex and 2.8 per cent of the population in Surrey are from a minority ethnic group. In April 2000, the unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent in East Sussex and 0.9 per cent in Surrey, compared with a national average of 3.8 per cent. There are significant variations across the area served by SIGTA Ltd. For example, in Hastings the unemployment rate is 7.2 per cent. In 1999, 51 per cent of school leavers in Sussex and 56.5 per cent in Surrey achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades C and above. The national average was 46.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The chief executive and quality manager, supported by training staff, produced a self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. Inspectors found the self-assessment report difficult to follow. It did not adequately describe the provision and did not accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses for the occupational or generic areas.

4. Four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with the organisation in April 2000. They visited 18 employers and three colleges, interviewed 38 trainees, 21 workplace supervisors, and carried out 12 interviews with SIGTA Ltd staff. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' portfolios, internal and external verifiers' reports, and TEC documentation. One training session was observed.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		1				1
Total	0	1	0	0	0	1

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 4

5. SIGTA Ltd has 196 trainees on engineering programmes employed in over 70 companies. The companies are engaged in a wide variety of engineering, including the manufacture of pens and aircraft components, and the development of motor vehicle engines. Ninety-six trainees are modern apprentices, 20 are national trainees, 78 are following other youth programmes and two are adult trainees. All trainees are employed by their placement companies. Modern apprentices attend college full time for the first year to complete a foundation national vocational qualification (NVQ), and then attend on day release for an appropriate further education course. Other trainees receive all their training in the companies where they are placed. The company offers a wide range of engineering NVQs to meet the needs of employers and trainees. Training officers, employed by SIGTA Ltd, visit the employers to review trainees' progress and carry out assessment. A few employers have their own assessors. The organisation has seven staff, two of whom are involved in sales and the recruitment of trainees and five of whom monitor and assess trainees. One of these is responsible for co-ordinating the assessment centre. All staff have suitable experience in engineering, and are appropriately qualified in assessment. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths cited in the self-assessment report, but agreed with most of the weaknesses. They found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective matching of employment opportunities to trainees' aspirations and abilities
- ◆ good-quality work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low completion rates
- ◆ some ineffective planning and control of training
- ◆ little assessment by direct observation
- ◆ lack of continuous assessment
- ◆ late introduction and poor understanding of key skills

GOOD PRACTICE

The provider has developed a health and safety training module, incorporated in its trainee induction programme, which includes practice in risk assessment and control. This encourages trainees to be proactive in identifying actual and potential risks, and taking prompt and effective action to control them.

6. SIGTA Ltd has effective procedures to match prospective trainees with an appropriate employer. Staff visit the employer and produce a profile of the training opportunity. All prospective trainees undertake a career-assessment test, which identifies their suitability for engineering careers, and are interviewed. Trainees' aspirations and abilities are matched to vacancies and employers are given a shortlist of suitable trainees. The employer makes the final selection following an interview.

7. SIGTA Ltd has established a good network of employers. Most are able to provide experience in a wide range of engineering operations using various machines and techniques. If employers are unable to provide opportunities to develop all the skills required for the NVQ, additional college-based training and temporary placement with another employer are provided. All employers provide trainees with a mentor who is responsible for monitoring their training and well-being. Off-the-job training is of adequate quality. Although machines in colleges were less up to date than those in the workplace, they were nevertheless adequate for the purpose and did not disadvantage trainees.

8. A significant number of trainees leave without completing their training. In each of the last three years, over 65 per cent of trainees have left their training programmes without achieving the full range of qualifications included in their programmes. Over the same period, only around 50 per cent of trainees achieved a NVQ. The company's data are not always updated, and therefore it is difficult to identify exactly how many trainees have completed their programmes. TEC measures for NVQs per 100 leavers are distorted by the fact that a number of trainees achieve more than one NVQ. In 1998, 33.5 per cent of trainees left the programme within twelve months. This was partly because one large employer transferred its training to another training provider.

9. Some training was planned effectively with the employer, enabling trainees to develop their skills in a controlled way. However, in many cases, training was not effectively planned and the co-ordination of training needs and workplace

opportunities was left to chance. Some trainees had been left working in the same area doing the same work for too long, missing the opportunity to develop further skills and knowledge. Completion dates for a number of trainees had been extended as a result of poor planning and control. Some employers and trainees are involved in choosing appropriate optional units for NVQs, but many are not involved at all. SIGTA Ltd has recognised this weakness, and has recently developed a system to match training objectives to each production operation and record achievement. This system is being introduced for new trainees.

10. Assessment is carried out by SIGTA Ltd's training officers during their regular visits to review trainees' progress. As trainees complete tasks in the workplace they are encouraged to write about them in their portfolios and to obtain witness testimonies from their workplace supervisor. Trainees are not given guidance on who they can ask to provide a witness testimony. Assessments are too reliant on trainees' written logbook entries and witness testimonies. Very little assessment by direct observation takes place. The difference between review and assessment is not always clear to trainees. Assessment by direct observation is more common in a few large employers which have their own workplace assessors.

11. Most assessment takes place at the end of the trainee's programme, when all evidence for all units of the qualification has been collected. Training officers miss good opportunities during scheduled visits to carry out formative assessment. Unit certification is not provided.

12. Trainees' understanding and awareness of key skills is poor. Key skills are not integrated into training programmes. Some trainees who have completed their NVQ and training programme have only recently been introduced to the key skills units. One modern apprentice in the fourth year of training is still waiting to find out how the information technology unit will be covered. Other trainees have been told not to worry about key skills until they have completed their NVQ. This practice is hindering trainees' progress. The company is aware of this weakness, and is beginning to address it. New trainees have a higher awareness of key skills.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

13. SIGTA Ltd has a clearly written equal opportunities policy which is given to all staff and trainees. Overall responsibility for the policy lies with the chief executive. The policy is reviewed annually and presented to the board of directors in the company's management review. Advertisements for new staff include a statement of commitment but there is no written recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. Induction programmes for both staff and trainees cover equal opportunities issues. Two key members of staff have undertaken training in ensuring equality of opportunity. Data about gender, ethnic origin and disabilities of trainees is obtained and recorded. At the time of inspection, nine trainees were

female and two were from a minority ethnic group. There is no monitoring of equal opportunities within the workplace or the colleges. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report and found additional weaknesses and some strengths. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ centre accessible to trainees with disabilities
- ◆ key personnel trained in equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent understanding by trainees and employers
- ◆ poor monitoring
- ◆ no action to address under-representation

14. SIGTA Ltd has made a significant investment to ensure that the building is accessible to people with mobility difficulties. All training rooms and facilities have been moved to the ground floor where there is easy access for wheelchair users. Doors are sufficiently wide to accommodate wheelchairs and steps at the front of the building have been replaced with a slope. Toilet facilities for people with disabilities have been installed.

15. The chief executive and the recruitment officer have undertaken training in the provision and assurance of equality of opportunity.

16. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is not reviewed or reinforced after induction. Some trainees have little or no knowledge of the policy or its aims. Workplace supervisors are, in the main, unaware of the policy. Few employers are given a copy of SIGTA Ltd's equal opportunities policy and checks are not made on the existence or content of an employer's own policy. One company visited did not have an equal opportunities policy. Some of the smaller employers have a low awareness of equal opportunities.

17. SIGTA Ltd does not formally monitor the implementation of equality of opportunity at employers' premises or colleges. Some training officers ask trainees how they are being treated during reviews, but this is not common practice. One female trainee complained to inspectors that she was disadvantaged in some ways because of her gender. She felt her suggestions and comments to her employer were not taken seriously unless she directed them via a male colleague. A questionnaire relating to equal opportunities was sent out by the company in 1999. However, this was only sent to 25 per cent of employers. Data are collected and stored, regarding the gender, ethnicity and disability status of trainees, but are not systematically analysed. SIGTA Ltd does not take positive action to encourage applications from under-represented groups and has no plans to do so.

Trainee support

Grade 3

18. Prospective trainees undertake a career assessment test and are interviewed by the recruitment officer. The results of the test and interview are used to identify the most appropriate training programme and job. Interviews may take place at SIGTA's offices or somewhere more convenient for the trainee. Trainees are given a structured induction to their programme when they start work with an employer. Trainees are visited at their place of work at least every 12 weeks by a training officer from SIGTA Ltd. Training officers review progress and offer pastoral support. First-year apprentices are visited at college at least once every term by SIGTA Ltd's training officers. While at college, trainees have access to the additional learning support provided by the college. Inspectors did not agree with the weakness cited in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective recruitment and induction
- ◆ very supportive employers
- ◆ highly supportive training officers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of initial assessment
- ◆ inconsistent review process
- ◆ incomplete and out-of-date individual training plans

19. SIGTA Ltd's sales staff identify employers who are willing to offer training placements. A health and safety specialist checks that the employer meets the health and safety requirements. Training officers visit the employer to produce a profile of the training opportunity and identify appropriate qualifications and training programmes. SIGTA Ltd maintains a list of vacancies and publishes it on its web site. Prospective trainees take a career assessment test to identify the most suitable engineering programme for them and are interviewed by a career specialist. The potential trainees are then carefully matched to job requirements, location and trainees' aspirations. Groups of suitable clients are sent to the employer for interview and a selection is made. There is a comprehensive induction procedure with three distinct components. Initial induction is carried out by the employer and covers company-specific details. Additionally, a training officer from SIGTA Ltd gives each trainee an introduction to the NVQ, vocational education system and responsibilities at the employer's site. Finally, SIGTA Ltd provides group inductions in its own training centre covering health and safety, trainees' rights and risk assessment.

20. Employers provide good support to trainees. All employers visited gave trainees time to complete their portfolios. Employers allow trainees time to complete assignments for college and to cover additional skills for their NVQ. All employers provide a mentor for each trainee. Employers allow trainees to visit other companies to gain skills which they cannot provide themselves. For example, trainees have been allowed to visit foundries and heat treatment works to improve their background knowledge. One company, gave a set of tools to a trainee who had made a toolbox as part of his training.

21. SIGTA Ltd's training officers play a key role in supporting trainees and employers. They are effective in guiding supervisors on the requirements of awarding bodies, and the means by which skills may be acquired. They encourage employers to provide a broad range of experiences for trainees and are instrumental in arranging visits to other companies for trainees. Recruitment staff provide career assessment tests at more than one location to make it easy for trainees to attend and are flexible about where they interview prospective trainees. Training officers, where necessary, will carry out assessments to fit in with adult trainees' shift patterns.

22. The career assessment test used by SIGTA Ltd is designed to identify a potential trainee's aptitude for an engineering career. It includes tests of some numerical and verbal reasoning but is not designed as a basic skills test. It is not appropriate for trainees whose English is a second language. The company does not carry out any other initial assessment of basic skills. There is no initial assessment of key skills. However, a pilot scheme on their assessment has begun.

23. Trainees' reviews are inconsistent. In some cases, the employer is present and actively involved, in others, the employer is not involved at all. Many review forms are incomplete, and many lack short-term targets. Where targets are set, they are generally undemanding. Inspectors found a consistent lack of achievement with targets being allowed to drift from one review to the next. Some trainees lack commitment to furthering their own development, and attend review meetings without their portfolios and logbooks.

24. Many individual training plans do not identify any prior qualifications achieved and do not take account of the findings of the initial testing procedure. Many individual training plans are incomplete. Some do not include all of the requirements of the training programme being followed. Many individual training plans are not updated to reflect achievement and changes to the programme.

Management of training

Grade 4

25. The company is managed by a chief executive who reports to a board of non-executive directors. Non-executive directors are elected representatives of member companies. SIGTA Ltd employs 12 staff in addition to the chief executive. SIGTA Ltd has a business plan, which is reviewed each year. The chief executive

produces an annual management review and reports monthly to the directors. Staff have an annual appraisal on the anniversary of joining the organisation. A training plan for each member of staff is maintained on a computerised record system. Staff meetings are arranged as necessary by the chief executive. These include meetings for staff engaged in training and assessment. All trainees are employed by the company in which they are placed. SIGTA Ltd holds a list of vacancies and matches prospective trainees with an appropriate vacancy according to the results of a test and interview. Some employers recruit their own trainees and contract with SIGTA Ltd to manage the training and assessment process. SIGTA Ltd has a written agreement with each employer specifying responsibilities for providing training. Training officers visit employers to provide advice, review trainees' progress and assess trainees. Off-the-job training is either subcontracted to a college, or is undertaken by the employer. The self-assessment report did not describe how training was managed. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses identified but found further strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly knowledgeable and experienced training and recruitment officers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor communications with employers
- ◆ lack of co-ordination of training and assessment practices
- ◆ no action to address retention and achievement issues

26. Training officers visit each trainee regularly to review progress and carry out assessments. Training officers are qualified and experienced engineers. They are also experienced trainers and assessors. One member of staff is a specialist in health and safety, with responsibility for vetting all trainees' placements and providing health and safety training for trainees. The recruitment officer is an experienced careers advisor, and all training officers are licensed testers for the selection test. Training officers are highly regarded by employers for their understanding of the industry and respected by trainees.

27. Trainees can start on a programme with SIGTA Ltd at any time during the year. SIGTA Ltd maintains a list of vacancies and tries to match prospective trainees with the most appropriate vacancy. Staff produce a profile for each vacancy which includes the type of work carried out, the training available and prospects, if any, for progression. Prospective trainees sit a selection test which helps identify the most appropriate programme for them. Trainees are interviewed to ascertain their aspirations and interests, and this information is used to match them to appropriate vacancies. Trainees' details are sent to the employer, who will carry out interviews and make the final decision.

28. Although SIGTA Ltd's training officers are effective in guiding trainees and workplace supervisors concerning day-to-day training issues, employers are still confused about the different training programmes and lack information about key skills. Trainees and employers are not aware of the need for internal verification, or who the internal verifier is. Although employers have a contract with SIGTA Ltd to provide training, they are generally unaware of what is required. Employers are poorly informed about the requirements of training frameworks. Few work-based supervisors are aware that they can become assessors themselves and employers are generally unaware that they can carry out their own assessments if they had their own assessors. Employers find it difficult to obtain information from SIGTA Ltd. The company relies too much on the information given in contracts and on the information and advice given by the training officers. The information provided to employers about training frameworks by training officers is inconsistent, and in some cases, incorrect. Employers are ill-informed about the requirements for key skills. Many trainees do not know what NVQ they are working towards or what training programme they are on.

29. There is no system for co-ordinating the work of training officers and for sharing good practice. Training officers carry out their role in various ways. Planning of on-the-job training is not systematic and in some cases does not happen. A standard three-part form is used for recording training reviews but there is no agreed approach to the reviews themselves, which are carried out in various ways. One training officer has developed some good systems for planning reviews and assessments but these have not been shared with other staff. There are many examples of poor practice in planning, trainees' reviews, assessment and internal verification.

30. SIGTA Ltd has an annual business plan and has begun to introduce targets for improvements in the quality of training, but this target setting is, as yet, neither systematic nor comprehensive. No plans have been made or targets set to improve the low retention and achievement rates. No systematic analysis of retention and achievement is undertaken. There is no system for continuous monitoring of trainees' progress towards achievement of their programmes and for ensuring that action is taken when they encounter difficulties.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

31. It is SIGTA Ltd's policy to ensure that quality assurance arrangements cover all areas of its training operations, and the company has a quality manager. The quality policy statement and mission statement are well presented and displayed in the reception area. The organisation achieved the Investors in People standard in April 1999. The company has held the ISO 9002 quality assurance accreditation since 1991. Procedures for training and assessment activities follow lead-body guidelines. The policy and procedures are internally audited on a regular basis. Sussex Enterprise CCTE completed a quality audit in 1999 which found that contractual quality assurance requirements were met. A statistical analysis of

trainees' achievement data was completed in February 2000. SIGTA conducted its first self-assessment in May 1999, produced an updated version in September 1999, and completed a second updated version in February 2000. The chief executive and quality manager took responsibility for the report supported by members of the training team. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report and identified further weaknesses and strengths. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-maintained and distributed procedures
- ◆ focus groups on quality issues
- ◆ positive action as a result of self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic arrangements for gathering feedback on the quality of work-based training
- ◆ some poor internal verification practice

32. The policy and procedures for quality assurance within the company are well written and presented, closely linked to lead-body requirements, and well understood by staff. All relevant users hold copies. The company has enough staff who are trained in auditing techniques. They work to an annual schedule. Management and staff operate from a central location and are able to act swiftly to address quality problems as they occur. However, there are no quality assurance procedures for subcontractors.

33. Focus groups have been established to discuss the quality of training and development, and to identify and remedy any problems which arise within the company. Action taken as a result of these discussions includes improvements to the quality manual and the introduction of information technology systems to assist in the monitoring of training. Some improvements are in the early stages of development and have not yet been implemented across the training team. Some formal meetings are held and minuted, but much action is taken informally and not recorded.

34. The management and staff regard self-assessment as a useful way of identifying issues which could be a threat to the business and take the necessary action. Some improvements have been made, and others are being incorporated into systems over a longer period of time. For example, new documentation is being introduced to update the assessment processes. Senior management plan to sample 12.5 per cent of action plans and 25 per cent of reviews every month.

35. Trainees are invited to complete a satisfaction form at the end of their induction programme. Apart from this, SIGTA Ltd does not systematically seek the views of trainees on the quality of their training. There is an appeals procedure, but trainees

are not reminded that it is available. A questionnaire was issued to trainees in 1998. However, the questions asked were not well designed, the responses were not well analysed and no action was taken as a result of the questionnaire. The company does not seek the views of employers on the quality of training provided. Customer complaints are held on file and an analysis completed. All complaints are addressed and responses recorded.

36. Procedures for the internal verification of NVQs are not consistently applied. Internal verification visits to interview trainees during the NVQ programmes do not occur regularly enough. There are inconsistencies in the provision of feedback to assessors. Feedback records have not been completed in many cases. Assessors and verifiers tend to work to their own preferred methods and there is little sharing of good practice. Internal verification is left to the end of the programme in most cases. Most trainees interviewed were unaware of the verification process and did not know who was to act as their internal verifier.