



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 2000

Rochdale Training Association Limited

SUMMARY

Rochdale Training Association Limited provides satisfactory training in engineering. On-the-job training and training resources are good. Trainees' progress towards completing their individual training plans is slow and key skills training is inadequate. Business administration training is unsatisfactory. Administration assessments are badly planned and retention and achievement rates are low. The company's equal opportunities arrangements are weak. It has no equal opportunities policy and does not monitor employers to ensure that they have appropriate equal opportunities arrangements. Support arrangements are satisfactory. Trainees' basic and key skills are assessed on entry and individual support needs are quickly responded to. Trainees' progress reviews are not used to set realistic targets for progression. The company's management of training and quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. It does not adequately manage subcontractors and data are not used systematically to guide decision-making. There is inadequate management information, no co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training, and no system for making continuous improvements. Rochdale Training Association Limited exercises little influence over the co-ordination and quality of training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Business administration	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ effective assessment of trainees' additional learning needs
- ◆ good learning support for trainees

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards completion of individual training plans
- ◆ inadequate key skills training
- ◆ no structured assessment planning in business administration
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates in business administration
- ◆ no monitoring of employers or subcontractors' equal opportunities arrangements
- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ ineffective trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ poor use of data in making continuous improvements
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of the quality of training

INTRODUCTION

1. Rochdale Training Association Limited (RTA) was formed in 1984 by the merger of the Rochdale Engineering Group Training Association and the Roch Engineering Group Training Scheme. Both of these organisations were formed in 1967, as the result of the *Industrial Training Act 1964*. The original group training programmes provided engineering training for small and medium-sized engineering companies within the Rochdale area.

2. RTA works with approximately 175 local companies to provide employment or work experience for its youth and adult trainees. Of these 175 companies, 34 pay an annual subscription to be a member of the RTA. RTA contracts with Rochdale Borough Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) to provide modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other youth and adult training programmes. RTA provides government-funded training programmes in two areas: engineering and business administration. There are 191 trainees currently in training, of whom one has been identified as requiring additional learning support to achieve their qualification. Of the 50 engineering trainees who started in July 2000, 45 were identified as requiring support for key skills. Of the 191 trainees, 147 are employed.

3. RTA has a management board consisting of eight directors/trustees who are elected from the member companies. It has 16 full-time and four part-time members of staff comprising one chief executive, one secretary, one financial manager, one training manager, two training officers, one chief assessor/instructor, six assessor/trainers, two work placement/monitoring officers, three administrators and two domestic assistants. Engineering trainees spend their first year as full-time engineering foundation trainees in RTA's training centre in Rochdale. They are then placed with their employer or a sponsoring work-placement provider and attend one of two local colleges on a day- or block-release basis to complete their qualifications and engineering framework requirements. Engineering assessments are carried out either in RTA's training centre or at work. Business administration trainees attend day-release portfolio and key skills development sessions at RTA's training centre. Other training takes place at work and assessments are carried out at both work and at RTA's training centre.

4. Rochdale forms one of the 10 districts of Greater Manchester. The borough has a total population of 208,000 and comprises four townships: Rochdale with a population of 95,000, Littleborough with a population of 33,000, Heywood with a population of 33,000 and Middleton with a population of 47,000 (1991 census data). The working population of the borough is approximately 96,000. In 1996, those aged 15 and over in the borough were estimated at 162,000 and expected to grow by 1.6 per cent in the five years up to 2001, with a further 3 per cent growth between 2001 and 2006. The largest projected population growth in the borough is

for 45 to 66 year olds. This group is expected to grow by 14 per cent over the same period, indicating an ageing population trend for the borough.

5. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Rochdale is 7 per cent, most of whom live in the inner wards of the borough. Current unemployment rates in the borough are 5.7 per cent compared to the national average of 5.2 per cent. Unemployment is expected to rise over the next 12 months as a result of the decline in local manufacturing. The textile, engineering and manufacturing sectors have dominated the local economy. During the 1980s, employment levels in these industries dropped and an increase was seen in the service and distributive sectors during the same period. This increase in jobs in the service sector has lagged behind the national average. Typically Rochdale experienced a 9 per cent growth as opposed to the national rate of 16 per cent.

6. Sixty per cent of school leavers stay in full-time education. Ten per cent started training while unemployed, 14 per cent started training in employment, 5 per cent were registered as unemployed and seeking work or training and 11 per cent were unknown. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 39.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. RTA's self-assessment report was produced in May 2000. The CCTE provided training sessions and support to help RTA to prepare for inspection. The manager and the chief executive attended one of the Training Standards Council's training sessions. Employers and trainees were not fully consulted or included in the self-assessment process. Little use was made during self-assessment of data and statistics to show comparative year-on-year trends. Inspectors did not agree with a significant number of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report.

8. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at RTA during October 2000. They interviewed 16 per cent of the trainees. They examined assessment procedures, subcontracting agreements, trainees' files and portfolios, staff's qualifications and quality assurance and management arrangements. Inspectors interviewed 14 employers, five of RTA's tutors and 30 trainees. Eleven managers were interviewed and 14 work placements were visited. Five trainees' reviews and one assessment was observed and eight lessons were observed. Two of RTA's assessors in business administration and one subcontracted college engineering course leader were interviewed. The grades awarded to these sessions are shown below.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		7	1			8
Total	0	7	1	0	0	8

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

9. RTA offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training in engineering production, engineering maintenance, fabrication and welding, electrical engineering and engineering design. There are 163 trainees. Ninety are modern apprentices of whom three are on the new advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Forty-nine trainees are national trainees, nine of whom are foundation modern apprentices, and 24 are on other training. RTA is based in a purpose-built training centre near the centre of Rochdale. The centre has an engineering workshop, a number of lecture rooms, computer training rooms and administration offices. The engineering workshop has facilities for training in milling, turning, fabrication and welding, fitting, electrical engineering and electronics. The workshop also has an area for training in spring manufacture, still an important local industry. There are five instructors in the workshop. All have training qualifications and are qualified as assessors. The chief instructor and two

of the training officers are qualified internal verifiers. Most trainees spend the first year of their training at the training centre working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering foundation at level 2. The remaining trainees attend RTA's centre on a day-release or block-release basis. All training and assessment at level 2 takes place at the training centre. After the first year, trainees complete their training with their employer or with a work-placement provider, working towards the remaining qualifications on their individual training plan.

10. Employers or work-placement providers are responsible for on-the-job training. Modern apprentices also attend one of two local colleges to work towards a national or higher national certificate in an appropriate engineering discipline. During their second and subsequent years, qualified training officers from RTA assess trainees at work. The training officers are also responsible for trainees' six-weekly progress reviews. RTA has qualified internal verifiers in engineering but chooses to subcontract internal verification to a qualified, self-employed verifier. Of those trainees who have started training since April 1996, 53 per cent are still in training, 14 per cent have left having completed their training and 33 per cent have left before completing their training. Eighty-six per cent of modern apprentices remain on the programme and the average retention rate including all other programmes is 63 per cent. No trainees have yet completed a modern apprenticeship or national traineeship. Forty-six per cent of trainees leaving other training programmes have completed their training. Fifty per cent of all trainees who start training with RTA achieve an NVQ at level 2. Fifty-six per cent of trainees starting on other training programmes get a job during or on completion of their training. The self-assessment report included a number of strengths, most of which represented no more than normal practice or related to generic aspects of the training. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and many of the weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given by RTA in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ good portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards completion of individual training plans
- ◆ insufficient assessment of trainees in the workplace
- ◆ inadequate key skills training

11. There is good on-the-job training at employers and work-placement providers. The training is well planned to meet both the requirements of the trainees' NVQs and the needs of employers. Skilled and experienced engineers train trainees, and many have a good grasp of the NVQ's requirements. Trainees receive a good variety of training which extends beyond that necessary to achieve their NVQ. For

example, some trainees spend time working in one or more of their employers' purchasing, sales, and estimating or design departments. Trainees practice a good variety of appropriate skills. Trainees' progress in their planned on-the-job training is rigorously monitored by most employers. Off-the-job training in the training centre is good. It is well planned to meet trainees' individual requirements. RTA's trainers hold training and assessment qualifications. Trainees find working in the training centre stimulating and interesting. The training centre is well laid out with a wide range of up-to-date equipment which allows trainees to develop the necessary engineering skills appropriate to their jobs. The standard of tidiness and cleanliness in the training centre is excellent. The resources for training at employers and the subcontracting colleges are also good. Trainees' portfolios are well presented and trainees are encouraged to maintain a high standard of portfolio evidence by RTA's tutors and their employers. However, little evidence is added to trainees' portfolios between progress reviews. Some trainees have not added any evidence to their portfolio for many months. Some trainees have little NVQ-related evidence in their portfolios and yet believe that they are close to completing their NVQ.

12. Trainees make slow progress towards completing their training plans. They are not set demanding targets at progress reviews. There is insufficient assessment of trainees in the workplace. Level 3 trainees are not assessed until they have been in training for some time, usually around two to three years, even though they regularly produce valid evidence of NVQ-related competencies. RTA's assessors frequently visit trainees at work, but they do not take the opportunity to observe and assess trainees while at work. Assessors rely mainly on the witness testimony of workplace supervisors.

13. Key skills training is inadequate. Many modern apprentices, who have been on their training programmes for over three years, have no key skills evidence for assessment purposes. Key skills are not systematically integrated with the NVQ training. RTA has recognised this as a major problem in respect of trainees completing their individual training plans. New trainees now have a key skills training schedule designed to enable them to complete three of the five mandatory key skills units during their first year, as part of their college course. RTA is investigating contingency measures to ensure that the other trainees catch up with the key skills requirements and complete their training plans. These plans include extra tuition which will, in some cases, extend beyond the trainees' training period. These plans have been discussed and agreed with the employers and trainees concerned.

Business administration

Grade 4

14. There are 28 business administration trainees. Fifteen are modern apprentices, of whom three are following level 3 accountancy qualifications. There are 12 national trainees and one youth trainee. Most of RTA's trainees are recruited after being referred by the careers service, while others apply direct to RTA. RTA employs a business administration placement officer who is responsible for finding

suitable employment and work placements for the trainees. All current trainees are in full-time employment and have the opportunity to attend RTA's training centre on a day-release basis for portfolio building and assessment sessions. Assessment for all but two trainees takes place in the training centre. RTA employs two qualified and occupationally experienced assessors for business administration. One assessor is part time and works two days a week. RTA is currently seeking to appoint another full-time assessor/tutor. The work-placement officer reviews trainees' progress every four to six weeks. Internal verification is subcontracted and is carried out each month. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered to be no more than normal practice. A number of additional weaknesses were identified during inspection and inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by RTA in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement of relevant additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak assessment arrangements
- ◆ no integration of key skills with vocational training
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

15. Employers and RTA's staff encourage trainees to gain additional relevant qualifications to increase their skills and improve their employability. Most trainees have completed additional training courses in first aid, telephone techniques, manual handling, reception work and computer literacy and information technology skills. Trainees have access to a good standard of modern, well-serviced industry-standard equipment and training resources at both RTA's training centre and at work. Workplace supervisors are very supportive of trainees, and most employers are keenly interested in the trainees' training.

16. RTA has, until recently, employed two qualified assessors for business administration. Only one of the assessors has been actively engaged in assessments. The other assessor has concentrated on setting up work placements and undertaking trainees' reviews. The active assessor has recently been away from work for personal reasons. RTA has appointed another assessor on a temporary part-time contract. These interim arrangements have taken over three months to organise and some trainees' assessments are overdue, with many having large amounts of relevant portfolio evidence awaiting assessment. RTA has not fully utilised the other assessor during this period.

17. Assessments are not well planned. No training or assessment schedules have been developed to clearly show that each trainee will complete the training and assessment requirements for the qualification. Trainees simply request an assessment when they feel they are ready. Two trainees are unable to attend RTA's training centre and no arrangements have been established for assessing these

POOR PRACTICE

Some employers prevent their trainees from attending the RTA training centre when work pressure is high and the progress of individual trainees is impeded.

trainees. Witness statements on employers or supervisors' observations of trainees at work are not always signed or authenticated by the employer. Trainees' progress is not clearly detailed in their individual training plans and it is difficult to progress towards the NVQ.

18. Between March and June 2000, internal verification was carried out on a monthly basis, but before this only one internal verification of assessment practices was carried out. The internal verifier does not observe or sample work-based assessments for verification purposes.

19. Key skills training is a separate process from vocational training. Trainees' key skills are not assessed until trainees have completed their NVQ and trainees make slow progress towards completing their individual training plans. Trainees complete their NVQs, but not key skills. Upon completion of the NVQ, trainees' portfolio evidence is used retrospectively to cross-reference the key skills requirements for assessment purposes. Trainees do not have a clear understanding of how key skills are an integral part of their development.

20. Trainees' attendance at off-the-job training sessions is poor. The average attendance rate during the year 2000 is 20 per cent. RTA has made little attempt to find out why trainees are not attending. Over the last four years, only 6 per cent of the 32 trainees starting on modern apprenticeships have completed their individual training plans. On average only 29 per cent of all business administration trainees remained on their programmes in the last four years.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

21. RTA attends schools careers conventions and employment trade fairs in Rochdale each year. In two of the schools visited, 90 per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. RTA has been involved in careers projects in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities and projects promoting women in engineering. Equal opportunities issues are included as part of trainees' induction at RTA. Its equal opportunities statement is included in the trainees' handbook and posted in all of its workshops and in the reception area. Equal opportunities is an agenda item at monthly staff meetings, particularly in terms of recruitment of women and minority ethnic groups into engineering. RTA has no equal opportunities policy and there are no procedures for the promotion of equal opportunities issues. There are no recruitment targets or strategic aims for equal opportunities. Some statements on equal opportunities are included in the quality assurance handbook but procedures and guidelines for the implementation and monitoring of equal opportunities are not included. Equal opportunities was last reviewed in February 1998. RTA has a website but it does not include any information on equal opportunities. 168 trainees are men, and 23 are women. Two have a disability. Three trainees are from minority ethnic groups. People from

minority ethnic groups in the borough make up 7 per cent of the population. The self-assessment for this area was not self-critical. RTA did not identify the lack of an equal opportunities policy, the lack of any procedures and insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity. It correctly identified the lack of targeting of under-represented groups. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by RTA in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good awareness by trainees of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no equal opportunities policy
- ◆ little promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ no monitoring of employers or subcontractors' equal opportunities arrangements
- ◆ no use of equal opportunities data

22. Trainees have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues. They are able to discuss openly and clearly issues such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. They are introduced to equal opportunities during their induction to RTA. This is reinforced for engineering trainees at their induction to their college course. Trainees are aware of RTA's equal opportunities statement which is prominently displayed in the training centre's workshop and reception area. Equal opportunities have become a regular agenda item at staff meetings. There is good access and good facilities at the training centre for people with mobility difficulties.

23. RTA does not have an equal opportunities policy. It does not have any effective strategies to widen participation in work-based training. It used to have established links with local minority ethnic groups, but these links have ceased and it has done little to promote its training opportunities to minority ethnic groups or women since 1999. The minutes from RTA's management board meetings include targets to address the needs of young people who have underachieved or are disaffected at school, but no progress has been made towards meeting these targets. RTA has no procedures or literature available for applicants with language difficulties.

24. All trainees are issued with induction packs, which include a handbook. The handbook does not contain any guidance on equal opportunities issues or a clear explanation of RTA's position on providing and promoting equal opportunities. Grievance procedures in the handbook refer only to engineers and do not include business administration training. There is no reference to the *Protection from Harassment Act 1997*. Issues relating to sexual orientation, drugs awareness, counselling and guidance are not addressed. Equal opportunities issues and

questions about general treatment at work are not part of trainees' progress reviews. Applicants with learning difficulties are referred back to the careers office. None of RTA's staff have counselling or guidance expertise. One member of RTA's staff has undertaken some staff training in equal opportunities issues and two staff members have attended a course on drugs awareness. However, this training has not been shared with other RTA members of staff. RTA's staff have a poor understanding of equal opportunities in general and are unclear about their role, the role of RTA and the role of employers regarding the promotion of equal opportunities. The most recently appointed member of RTA's staff has had no induction relating to equal opportunities.

25. RTA does not systematically collect or analyse equal opportunities data regarding the applications it receives for training places, the trainees it recruits or the success and retention rates of trainees who start and complete training. It does not evaluate the effectiveness of its recruitment procedures, nor does it set any targets for the recruitment of trainees from under-represented or non-traditional groups. RTA's equal opportunities arrangements are not reviewed annually. It has no strategic aims for the promotion of equal opportunities within the organisation and no action plan for making improvements. Employers and subcontractors are not monitored to ensure that they have appropriate equal opportunities arrangements. Some employers do not have an equal opportunities policy. One employer has a policy which does not allow employees to register grievances or complaints during their first three months of employment. RTA does not routinely pick up these issues.

Trainee support

Grade 3

26. RTA's staff visit schools and careers events as well as holding open days to promote work-based training to young people in the local community. Trainees are recruited either by RTA or directly by employers. Some employers advertise for trainees themselves and call on RTA to help with the selection process. All applicants for business administration training undertake the adult basic skills test to identify their literacy and numeracy levels. The results of the test, together with the application form, are used to select applicants for interview. Usually, a member of RTA's staff and an employer interviews applicants. All new trainees also undertake a key skills assessment. Individuals selected for engineering programmes take three additional tests, two to identify their aptitude for mathematics and mechanical reasoning and a third to assess their general intelligence. All trainees have an individual training plan. RTA has staff who are qualified to accredit prior learning and achievements. Trainees' previous achievements are taken into account when their training plans are devised. Trainees receive an induction to RTA. This includes details of their training programme, health and safety and equal opportunities. A half-day introduction to key skills is now included in the induction programme. Trainees also receive an induction when they start their course at college and at their employer or work

placement. They receive a pack of information which includes the trainees' handbook. This handbook contains the company's complaints procedure. Trainees' progress is reviewed, on average, every six weeks throughout their training. Staff's responsibilities for trainee support are identified in their job descriptions. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and one of the two weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They awarded the same grade as given by RTA in its assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective assessment of trainees' additional learning needs
- ◆ good learning support for trainees
- ◆ supportive employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective progress reviews
- ◆ lack of awareness by trainees of some rights and responsibilities

27. RTA assesses all trainees' basic and key skills at the start of their training. Engineering applicants who pass the initial basic skills assessment and interview stage take three further tests for mathematics, general intelligence and mechanical reasoning. The results of the assessments are used to draw up trainees' individual training plans and identify any additional training that may be required. The assessment results are analysed and compared with those from earlier intakes to identify trends in applicants' profiles. This provides information for recruitment campaigns. Two of RTA's staff are qualified in psychometric testing. One trainee had a particularly low aptitude for mathematics. The results from the aptitude test allowed a programme of additional support to be developed which targeted the specific issues identified from the test. This trainee has now completed the additional support training and has moved onto a modern apprenticeship programme.

28. RTA responds well to individual trainees' support needs. Those trainees who are not employed receive substantial support to help them to find employment. RTA helps them to prepare application letters and statements of their skills and achievements. These statements are also used as evidence for key skills if appropriate. A member of the local careers service visits the training centre regularly to talk to trainees about employment opportunities and bring details of available jobs. RTA's training officers continually encourage its network of employers to consider trainees for employment and RTA's trainees frequently fill these vacancies. Unemployed trainees also receive regular careers reviews. Trainees with disabilities are well supported. For example, one trainee has a severe hearing difficulty. RTA and the CCTE have provided the trainee's instructor with a radio microphone. The trainee wears an earpiece which receives and amplifies the signals from the microphone. This allows the trainee to hear the instructor clearly even though the instructor may be some distance away.

29. Trainees' employers give good support to their trainees. Many employers send trainees on a variety of training courses in addition to those specified on their individual training plans. Many engineering trainees attend courses on first aid, health and safety, manual handling and information technology. Some trainees have been trained in computer-aided design, electrical installation, electrical portable appliance testing, power presses, abrasive wheels, pneumatics and hydraulics. Business administration trainees have had additional training including information technology, health and safety, first aid, telephone techniques and customer service. For most trainees, time is allowed during working hours for them to work on their portfolios. Most workplace supervisors are knowledgeable about NVQs and help trainees to identify appropriate evidence for assessment and portfolio-building purposes. Some employers are members of RTA and take an active interest in its management and many employers offer a number of training places each year. Employers also offer the opportunity for applicants for national traineeships and foundation modern apprenticeships to gain work experience through a two-week 'work trail' in their companies.

30. Trainees' progress reviews are ineffective. There is little detailed discussion of trainees' work between RTA's staff, the employer/supervisor and trainees. At reviews, RTA's staff do not use the training plans to identify learning opportunities for the future or to set targets for the next review. Targets which are set are undemanding. There is no mention of equal opportunities issues at reviews. Reviews are recorded, but the records contain few specific action points and are confined to general statements of intent. Employers usually make some written comments when recording the review. Reviews are not used to give trainees a clear indication of how they can improve their progress. Trainees are not aware of their right to appeal against assessment decisions or how to communicate other complaints or grievances. Many trainees are unaware of who their assessor or internal verifier is. Trainees are given a copy of the assessment appeals procedure at induction. These are kept in files held at the training centre, not with the trainee. Many trainees do not know who to contact at RTA should they have a complaint or grievance. Trainees are reluctant to approach RTA's staff with problems although they are prepared to take a problem to their employer. The employment agreement between one trainee and their employer contains a clause preventing the trainee from complaining in the first three months of employment.

Management of training

Grade 4

31. RTA is organised and managed by the chief executive and the training manager. They are supported by two training officers, who are responsible for assessment and internal verification, a chief instructor who looks after all off-the-job engineering training, six assessor/instructors and two work-placement/monitoring officers. RTA's chief executive prepares a quarterly report for RTA's board of management. The other meeting is the monthly team meeting which includes most of RTA's staff. RTA does not have a strategic plan, but does produce an annual business plan and a business plan summary sheet which lists its

key plans and some targets. RTA has policies and procedures for most of its activities. Some policies have not been updated and some are new.

32. RTA subcontracts some engineering training and assessment to two local colleges. All of RTA's instructors are vocationally qualified for their area of responsibility and are qualified assessors. Internal verification requirements are subcontracted for both engineering and business administration. The main role of the work-placement/monitoring officer is to conduct trainees' progress reviews, to be the first contact for welfare support, and to liaise with employers and college tutors. Some of the work-placement/monitoring officers assess trainees in the workplace. Nearly all trainees are employed or placed with an employer for work experience. Engineering trainees, after the foundation training year, attend off-the-job training for one day each week throughout the college's academic year. There are written procedures for staff recruitment and staff reviews. RTA achieved the Investors in People Standard in September 1999. Its performance relating to the CCTE's contractual requirements is closely on a monthly basis.

33. In its self-assessment report, RTA failed to recognise a number of significant weaknesses linked to weak co-ordination of training and poor subcontracting arrangements. The report was based mainly on comments from RTA's staff and failed to fully engage trainees and employers in the self-assessment process. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by RTA in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ open and effective management style
- ◆

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no routine use of data to guide management decisions
- ◆ weak subcontracting arrangements
- ◆ key policies not fully understood by all employers
- ◆ no strategic planning

34. Job roles and RTA's organisational structure are clearly defined. All of RTA's staff have job descriptions and are aware of their individual roles and responsibilities. All staff have their occupational development needs reviewed on an annual basis. The review, however, does not include an analysis of any direct observations of staff performing their duties and does not take into account any feedback from trainees or employers. Internal communications are effective. RTA has a monthly team meeting, involving senior managers, the financial manager and

representatives from engineering and business administration. The engineers and administration staff do not meet on a planned basis as vocational teams or as a group of tutors. Any meetings which are held are not minuted and no action plans are prepared. RTA's management style is open and effective. The two members of the senior management team can frequently be found in the workplace and are readily available to all staff and trainees. Emphasis is placed on teamwork at all levels of the organisation. RTA's staff are enthusiastic and well motivated, and staff turnover is low.

35. Trainees are either employed or placed with work-placement providers. Much of the work-based training lacks structure and planning. There are few training and assessment plans and employers are not fully involved in training and assessment. RTA's co-ordination of off-the-job training and the training provided by employers at work is ineffective. There are many opportunities to link the knowledge and understanding gained in the workplace with the skills and competencies practiced and assessed off the job, but these opportunities are not exploited.

36. Management information is not used systematically to guide action planning by staff and decision making by managers. RTA has well-developed arrangements for monitoring NVQ achievement rates for the TEC's contractual purposes. It prepares monthly reports showing actual NVQ achievement against the TEC's targets for achievement. It routinely meets these targets. RTA's analysis of data is confined to summative reports for management board members and to fulfil the TEC's contractual requirements. Targets are not set to improve retention and achievement rates or the number of trainees completing their individual training plans.

37. Employers sign an agreement for the training programme. However, RTA has no arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of these agreements with employers or the service-level agreements with colleges. Employers are unclear about their roles regarding the promotion of equal opportunities or how they participate in and develop work-based training. The employers' agreement does not include any procedures to enable RTA to monitor and manage on-the-job training and assessment. Some employers are not aware of RTA's key procedures relating to equal opportunities, NVQ assessment and self-assessment. RTA's business plan includes financial forecasts and a range of business objectives. However, it does not include a clear, overarching strategic plan for RTA's work-based training programmes. Beyond an intention to work towards contractual targets there are few long-term plans showing how the training programmes will be developed and improved. Some development work, such as that relating to key skills is delayed and some trainees are having significant problems in completing their individual training plans.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

38. The chief executive has overall responsibility for ensuring that RTA has adequate policies and procedures and that all staff follow standard procedures for providing training and assessment. The training manager has responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of quality assurance systems. RTA has made a written commitment to prepare quality assurance arrangements for all areas of its work, including work-based training. A policy statement and mission statement are included in the quality assurance manual. Each section of RTA has a copy of the latest manual which only contains current procedures and guidance notes. Any changes to procedures or documents are tightly controlled and all of the manuals are changed at the same time. RTA uses the ISO 9000 quality standard as a model for its quality assurance arrangements. Its procedures cover training and assessment activities follow awarding body's guidelines. External consultants are used to develop and record any changes to the quality assurance systems on an ongoing basis and to provide RTA with additional support as required. Rochdale Borough CCTE completed an audit in 1999 and contractual quality assurance requirements were met, subject to certain criteria being achieved. The previous two audits raised a number of important action points requiring further attention. The engineering and business administration awarding bodies have also completed external audits, and these audits report a satisfactory standard of training.

39. RTA conducted its first self-assessment in 1999 and completed its self-assessment prior to inspection in May 2000. The chief executive and quality assurance manager took responsibility for the report supported by members of the management team. The self-assessment report was prepared by the management team and did not include all members of staff. The self-assessment report contains an action plan. This action plan only addresses the weaknesses and is not used to build upon or improve any strengths. There is no designated responsibility for the completion of some action points in the plan. The self-assessment report did not include some significant weaknesses in quality assurance and inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by RTA.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of meetings to identify areas for improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor use of feedback from trainees and employers
- ◆ poor use of achievement and destination data in making continuous improvements
- ◆ slow response to recommendations from external audits
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of the quality of training

40. The quality assurance manual and procedural documents are clear. The

procedures are well written. Staff understand the procedures and their role in implementing them. All relevant staff hold copies. Four members of staff are trained in auditing techniques and work to an annual planned schedule of auditing the quality assurance arrangements. Implementation of the procedures in the manual has led to some improvements. Monthly staff meetings and improvement-group meetings have been established to identify and deal with issues about the quality of training and development. Specific developments emerging from the groups include improvements to the quality assurance manual, the introduction of information technology systems to help trainees with key skills work and a new review document for trainees. Meetings are arranged where more important changes are identified, these meetings are recorded and the minutes are circulated. Other examples of longer-term improvements include the improvement of the quality of technical drawing skills and the equipment used for drawing practice, and improved systems for monitoring trainees' progress towards their NVQs. Internal verification routinely meets awarding body's requirements. Internal verification in both occupational areas is subcontracted. RTA's staff visit subcontractors to discuss trainees' progress and achievements on average every six weeks. These visits are used to address a range of issues but the visits are rarely recorded. One member of RTA's staff has observed training sessions at one subcontracted college.

41. RTA has no effective measures to obtain the views of employers and trainees on the quality of training. Employers have not been involved in commenting on and contributing to improving the training or in making contributions to the self-assessment process. Trainees have had few opportunities to state their views about any aspects of the training or assessment provided in RTA's training centre, the workplace or by subcontracted colleges. A questionnaire was last issued to trainees by the careers service in 1999. Trainees' responses to the questionnaire have not been analysed by RTA. Self-assessment does not include the views and comments of employers, workplace supervisors or trainees.

42. RTA has no reliable data on trainees' achievements and destinations. It does not sufficiently investigate why trainees' achievements and retention rates are higher in some occupational areas than others. RTA has responded slowly to the recommendations for improvement issued after the last two audits by the TEC. Recommendations included improving the quality of trainees' reviews, improving trainee-related documents including review records, improving the content of individual training plans and increasing the input from trainees and work-based supervisors during the review process. Trainees' reviews still lack clear and achievable targets for trainees. Some documents are incomplete, and are missing dates, signatures and commentary from all parties, and details about key skills are not listed on some training plans.

43. RTA does not have a system for monitoring the quality of work-based training and assessment. It is unable to systematically identify areas for action or make appropriate improvements.