



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JULY 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

**SYTG Ltd**

## SUMMARY

SYTG Ltd provides satisfactory training in foundation for work. Trainees benefit from a high degree of pastoral support as well as many initiatives designed to help them overcome their barriers to employment. SYTG Ltd operates an effective open-door recruitment policy and trainees, who have very diverse training needs, are treated equally and fairly. At the first inspection, there was poor communication among staff. This has now improved. Staff understand and subscribe to the company's values. However, effective targets are not routinely set for staff or trainees, and the need for them is not well understood within the company. At the first inspection, quality assurance arrangements were not sufficient to achieve continuous improvement. There is now a comprehensive system for the collection of feedback from trainees on the quality of training given. Quality assurance is now satisfactory, although some quality assurance processes have not been fully established. Self-assessment is not used as a tool for continuous improvement.

**As a result of the reinspection of SYTG Ltd, the original published report text for management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	5

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ particularly strong pastoral support
- ◆ good range of appropriate workplaces
- ◆ creative learning opportunities for developing basic skills
- ◆ sensitive selection of work placements for trainees
- ◆ thorough system for gathering feedback from trainees



### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ poor planning of work-based training and assessment
- ◆ poor use and understanding of targets
- ◆ some unestablished quality assurance procedures
- ◆ lack of ongoing self-assessment

## INTRODUCTION

1. SYTG Ltd (SYTG) is a privately owned, limited liability company based in Sheffield. The company was set up 10 years ago, and has established itself as an organisation which specialises in working with trainees who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. SYTG offers training and assessment for young people on work-based training programmes, and provides the opportunity, where appropriate, for trainees to gain national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in warehousing, retailing and hospitality. It also offers work-based training to adults, and supplies training in health and safety on a commercial basis. A subcontracted training provider carried out basic employability and prevocational training at the time of the first inspection. This arrangement had ended when the reinspection took place.

2. The company has contracts with Sheffield Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide basic employability training, work-based training for adults, and work-based training programmes for young people, known locally as careerships. It also has New Deal contracts with the Employment Service for 18 to 24 year olds and people aged over 25, but as yet has no clients. There were 87 trainees during the first inspection. This number had fallen to 49 by the time of the reinspection.

3. In the year between the inspection and the reinspection, there were changes to the company's premises and staffing. The training centre, formerly housed in a two-storey building in the inner-city area, was moved to smaller but more modern premises in a different part of the inner city. One of the three directors resigned. He was replaced by two basic skills tutors, making a staff team of four tutor/assessors (including the two directors who have some training responsibilities), two administrators and a work-placement co-ordinator.

4. In 1998, the unemployment rate in the Sheffield area was 7.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent, and there were 20,889 people claiming the job seeker's allowance. By August 2000, just before the reinspection, the number of people registered as unemployed had fallen to 13, 806, a rate of 5.4 per cent. This is higher than the national rate of 3.5 per cent. Of the school pupils aged 16 in 1998, some 58.5 per cent stayed on in full-time education, 19 per cent went into government-funded training, and 9 per cent entered employment. The remaining 13.5 per cent became unemployed. In 1999-2000, the proportion of year-11 school pupils choosing to stay on in full-time education had fallen slightly to 56 per cent, with a further 18 per cent opting for a government-funded training programme, and 10 per cent entering employment. Sixteen per cent became unemployed. At the time of the first inspection, the proportion of minority ethnic residents in the community was 4.3 per cent. This had risen to 5 per cent by the time of the reinspection.

5. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 37.2 per



cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above had risen slightly to 37.6 per cent, but was still lower than the national average of 47.9 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. In June 1999, one of the directors of SYTG produced the company's self-assessment report in preparation for its first Training Standards Council (TSC) inspection. Despite two members of staff attending seven training sessions on self-assessment, provided by the TEC and a consultant, the director did not consult any other members of staff or trainees when compiling the report. The report broadly followed the guidelines set out in *Raising the Standard*, but failed to address many of the quality statements within it. For the reinspection, the managing director, in conjunction with the training director, prepared a short report which outlined the progress made in the areas which had originally been graded as less than satisfactory. SYTG's staff were consulted in the writing of this report. The original self-assessment report was not updated. The TEC was consulted frequently in the months before reinspection, and the TEC's contract manager attended SYTG's team meetings to offer advice.

7. For the first inspection, four inspectors spent a total of 14 days with SYTG in July 1999. Inspectors interviewed 47 trainees, visited 19 workplaces, and met with 15 supervisors and employers. They also conducted 10 interviews with managers from the training centre, 11 with staff from the training centre and two with off-the-job training staff. Inspectors reviewed 29 trainees' files and 11 portfolios, and examined other documents, including TEC contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance and operating manuals, minutes of meetings, and marketing materials. They also observed and graded two training sessions, which were awarded a grade 2, and two assessments.

8. For the reinspection, a team of two inspectors spent a total of four days with SYTG. They visited three work placements, and interviewed five work-based supervisors and eight trainees. Seven interviews were held with members of SYTG's staff. The inspectors examined a range of documents, including policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, action plans, and internal and external verification records.

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Foundation for work

### Grade 3

9. Of the trainees, 60 per cent have previously been on training programmes. Over 90 per cent need training in numeracy and literacy, and 90 per cent have been endorsed by the careers service as requiring additional support to complete their qualifications. Of these, around half have some form of specific learning difficulty, which is most often dyslexia. Three trainees are working towards an NVQ in hospitality, and 10 trainees in distributive operations, retail operations, and distribution and warehousing, up to NVQ level 2. There are 36 full-time, trainees based at the centre pursuing an entry-level qualification called 'profile of

achievement', one of the core-area options being 'dyslexia awareness'. Two trainees are working towards wordpower and numberpower qualifications at entry level.

10. The training centre's accommodation is old, poorly ventilated and trainees and staff find it cold in winter. In July, inspectors found it to be hot and stuffy. Parts of it are in a poor state of repair and in need of redecoration. A fully equipped kitchen and canteen is used by staff and trainees for tea and lunch breaks. This facility is approved as a realistic working environment by an awarding body and is used for training in hospitality and health and safety. Two rooms are devoted to basic skills training, and one contains computers with up-to-date software. There are 50 trainees out on work placement for at least some of their training time. For hospitality trainees, placements include small cafés, residential homes, speciality restaurants and hotels. For retail trainees, the placements are mostly charity shops and larger discount stores and supermarkets. Trainees are usually visited weekly at their placement. Reviews take place at the workplace and in the training centre. Retail trainees usually spend one full day or half-a-day if they are on placement. At the centre, trainees concentrate on portfolio-building and/or development of basic skills. All staff are occupationally experienced, one has a certificate of education, two have certificates for teaching adults with dyslexia and for teaching basic skills, and one director has a diploma in health and safety. However, some staff are not qualified to assess or verify internally. The subcontracted training provider is based at a local centre for minority ethnic groups. Trainees are offered training in the following qualifications: wordpower and numberpower at foundation and levels 1 and 2, computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), fork-truck driving and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) at levels 1 to 4. At the time of inspection, 10 trainees were pursuing CLAIT and fork-truck driving, four were on the ESOL programme, and five were taking wordpower and numberpower. None of these trainees are on a work placement. Of 54 leavers in the last year, 11 (20 per cent) found jobs. Retention is generally good, with 60 per cent staying longer than three months, and 50 per cent staying longer than nine months. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice, and some strengths and weaknesses identified for this area are generic rather than relating to this occupational area. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses, resulting in the same grade being awarded as that cited in the self-assessment report.

Location	Programme	Number of trainees
SYTG centre	Adult training	19
SYTG centre	Mixed adult & youth	13
SYTG centre	Basic employability/prevocational training/careership (youth training)	36
Subcontractor	Basic employability/prevocational training	19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ creative learning opportunities to develop basic and personal skills
- ◆ highly individualised training
- ◆ highly qualified and experienced staff for basic skills training
- ◆ effective team relationship between trainers, work-based supervisors and trainees

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor planning of work-based training
- ◆ no consultation with trainees about the effectiveness of training
- ◆ poor assessment practice

11. The development of trainees' basic skills and personal attributes, such as confidence and self-esteem, self-presentation and ability to work with others, is achieved through well-designed projects which seek to exploit broad opportunities for learning. These projects engage the interest of trainees and lead to tangible benefits. The current project is the decoration of the trainees' base room. Trainees are involved in group discussions, negotiation, planning, costing, making notes, risk assessments for health and safety, researching, and visiting retail outlets. Trainers help and support trainees at all stages, but encourage them to take responsibility for the project and its outcomes. An earlier project was the installation of a tropical fish tank in the trainees' room. The fish tank is now looked after by trainees, and is a continuing and rich source of opportunities for basic skills development by, for example, checking water temperature and plotting it on a graph. Some trainees work in the centre's kitchen, and undertake menu-planning, costing, purchasing, cooking and serving.

12. Trainees' different needs, and the various forms and severity of any learning difficulties they may have, are recognised, and the programmes are shaped to fulfil



these needs. This specific and personal approach is demonstrated by individual programmes of basic skills development, and tailored programmes to help those with dyslexia. The personalised approach also extends to the type of placement trainees are given, the number of days each week on placement, timing of the placement, and the pace at which a qualification is followed. Placements offer opportunities for trainees to gain skills in real working environments. Employers often have standard, in-house training procedures in which trainees participate with other employees. These include certification for operating equipment and powered hand tools, customer care packages and security. Trainees are also offered training for extra qualifications if required, in for example, certificates in basic food hygiene, first aid and health and safety.

13. Trainees go into a placement only when they and the provider agree they are ready. Staff ensure that trainees are placed in an appropriate establishment and that, prior to their arriving at the placement, work-based supervisors are fully informed of their needs and requirements. These needs are met and reviewed as trainees progress. Regular contact among staff, supervisors and trainees ensures that trainees are fully supported in the workplace. Supervisors are invited to give feedback on trainees' progress, both informally at weekly visits, and formally at monthly reviews. The trainers for basic skills are well qualified for their role and also have additional qualifications, including assessor awards and teaching adults with specific learning difficulties. These highly skilled trainers build effective working relationships with trainees, and demonstrate excellent coaching skills.

14. Opportunities are missed to plan training and assessment to meet the requirements of the qualifications. Individual training plans do not cover in any detail the nature of the training to be given by employers at work placements. Many trainees' progress is very slow. There is no plan to make sure that placements structure training and arrange learning opportunities which would ensure an appropriate rate of progression towards completing the individual training plan.

15. Despite the regularity and frequency of contact with trainees in their workplaces, reviews lack detail. Formal reviews are not the main vehicle for eliciting feedback from trainees; there is a heavy reliance on informal and unrecorded methods as staff check on trainees' progress and welfare verbally and communicate this back to employers and colleagues in the same way. Little attempt is made to collect formal feedback from trainees, other than through a recent questionnaire distributed to some trainees at the end of their programme to elicit trainees' views on their programmes and progress. This exercise was unsuccessful because of the poor design of the questionnaire.

16. Opportunities are missed to use work-based evidence and work-placement assessors. Formal assessment plans for observation in the workplace are not used, and observations are not recorded when they do occur. Direct feedback on performance is sporadic and unstructured. Trainees are not clear about where they are up to in their qualification, or how much more they need to cover. Evidence collected by trainees is kept and organised by assessors. Trainees have little

responsibility for their portfolios, the content of which is occasionally inadequate. Some portfolios contain far more material than is necessary. Wordpower and numberpower portfolios compiled by trainees at the subcontractor's premises are almost completely based on exercises, and show little individuality or occupational context. There is, at present, no occupationally experienced internal verifier for hospitality.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 3**

17. The provider has an equal opportunities policy, and there are no barriers to acceptance onto the schemes offered. Recruitment of trainees is dependent only on whether the provider can offer a training and development programme suitable for their needs. The company recruits a high proportion of trainees with diverse learning difficulties and disabilities; many trainees have attended previous training programmes with SYTG or other local providers. The training centre does not have easy access for those using wheelchairs. Of the 87 trainees, 20 per cent are women and 80 per cent are men. Data on ethnicity and disability show that 83 per cent are white 16.5 per cent are from minority ethnic groups and 8.8 per cent of trainees are disabled. The staff comprise three women and five men. A subcontractor runs an ESOL programme, and has a member of staff who offers interpretation services to Urdu and Punjabi speakers. Placement providers and employers are contracted to comply with SYTG's equal opportunities policy in addition to their own, should they have one. The self-assessment report gives an accurate reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of SYTG's equal opportunity culture, but fails to award a grade.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide variety of learning needs met by training programmes
- ◆ all placement providers embrace SYTG's equal opportunities policy
- ◆ trainees' confident in the protection given by the policy
- ◆ effective links with external agencies

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ all relevant legislation not included in equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no promotion of equality of opportunity in marketing materials
- ◆ lack of understanding of complaints or appeals procedures by some trainees

18. The company offers training programmes to a range of people who are severely disadvantaged, and whose needs are not met by other local training

organisations. The provider has active links with external services, including occupational psychologists, rape counsellors, probation services, social services and housing authorities, to help trainees whose requirements cannot be addressed internally.

19. The company has a network of placement providers for work-based training, many of which are suitable for those using wheelchairs. However, SYTG's premises have steps, narrow doorways and inadequate lavatory facilities for those with impaired mobility, and are not adapted for people with physical disabilities.

20. Trainees' motivation and self-esteem increase as they develop new skills in a non-threatening environment. Regular and careful vetting of placements by SYTG ensures the continuity of these conditions for trainees. Complaints are investigated impartially, and the welfare of each trainee is of primary concern to the provider. Trainees know that harassment, bullying and discrimination of any kind are unacceptable. Placement providers are required to implement SYTG's equal opportunities policy, and placements successfully reflect a real culture of equality. Employers place the same high value on each individual person as do the staff at the training centre.

21. The company's equal opportunities policy statement does not refer to current legislation, for example, the *Disability Discrimination Act, 1995* and the *Young Persons at Work Regulations, 1997*. Although it is the company's policy not to manage or promote equality of opportunity, it consistently and easily achieves TEC contractual targets. The company deliberately monitors and analyses recruitment and achievement statistics in relation to equality of opportunity. SYTG does not target under-represented groups on the programme, although many current trainees are from minority and excluded groups, and it has no plans to do so. Printed materials do not indicate to those outside the company that SYTG supports equality of opportunity, although equality is very clearly promoted by example within SYTG.

22. Staff recruitment procedures do not guarantee equality of opportunity, as SYTG relies on hiring from an informal network of candidates, albeit appropriately experienced and qualified, rather than on open methods. However, the staff selected are committed to implementing absolute equality in their daily duties. Company staff have attended equal opportunities awareness-raising events organised by Sheffield TEC.

23. Systematic procedures for ensuring equality of opportunity are not fully established, nor are the procedures easy for trainees to use. Beyond induction, no further efforts are made to explain to trainees how they might complain about their treatment, or appeal against assessment findings. Inspectors found some cases where trainees had experienced poor progress, and a few instances of conflicts or misunderstandings, which had not been reported by trainees, who have been reluctant or unable to do so. This has resulted in transfers between placements and the training centre, and disrupted progress.

## Trainee support

## Grade 2

24. One member of staff has overall responsibility for supporting trainees, but all staff see themselves as having an important role in this area. Potential trainees are referred from the careers service, job centre or through word-of-mouth recommendation by former trainees. Training in basic skills and personal effectiveness is available on the first floor at the training centre, for those trainees who request it or are assessed as needing it. The ground floor restaurant is used out of meal times for those who cannot access training on the first floor. As soon as trainees have acquired acceptable employability skills, they apply for a work placement, which can be either part-time or full-time. Trainees can continue with literacy and numeracy training until they achieve a personal profile certificate, or wordpower or numberpower qualifications. They are then able to work towards an NVQ which is achievable within their working environment. The self-assessment report states as a strength that staff are aware of their twin roles as facilitators and mentors; inspectors agreed with this statement. A number of other weaknesses are described in the self-assessment report. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded a grade higher than that given by the provider.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ very strong pastoral support
- ◆ broad range of support strategies
- ◆ frequent contact with trainees in the workplace
- ◆ sensitive approach to discovering trainees' needs

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ irregular induction practices
- ◆ insufficiently challenging targets set for some trainees

25. Trainees at SYTG have a very wide range of social, educational, physical and psychological problems, and require a great deal of support. The provider gives this support in a range of ways, including easy and flexible access to the training centre while trainees are on placement, supportive and qualified staff, and learning programmes structured and provided according to the requirements of trainees. Employers are equally supportive, and trainees are encouraged into placements where there is more than a probability of continued employment beyond the end of their programme. SYTG also endeavours to place trainees in high-quality or prestigious working environments, in recognition that such workplaces will have a positive motivational effect on trainees. These workplaces include a major supermarket chain and nationally known charity shops. SYTG is also taking advantage of the recent high media profile of the catering industry to encourage trainees to take up this occupation. Those trainees who require close guidance and supervision are placed with one of 10 companies which have long-established links with SYTG, and can provide a supportive and sheltered working environment.

26. Recruitment of trainees and interviews are carefully and sensitively managed to minimise intimidation and maximise the amount of information gleaned. SYTG is adept at learning about each trainee, as much from what they do not say as what they do say. Sensitive questioning and discussion effectively build up a picture of trainees' backgrounds, skills and ambitions. Interviews are informal, but are designed to elicit pertinent information about trainees. The initial assessment process establishes what support trainees get from other people and agencies, for example, social workers or the probation service. A trainee's need to attend other meetings with such agencies is taken into account when the training plan is devised. The provider also carries out the Basic Skills Agency's tests on all trainees who are not deemed suitable for immediate placement with an employer.

27. The company is very active in initiating or participating in new programmes whose primary purpose is to give trainees more and better support. Examples include the development of a 'cyberschool' programme using distance-learning methods, and the use of multimedia techniques to help learners with dyslexia. In consultation with an occupational psychologist from a local university, SYTG has established that over 50 per cent of its trainees have dyslexia-related problems, which is a figure comparable to prison populations.

28. SYTG frequently gives trainees effective advice and practical help with domestic and pastoral matters, ranging from moving home to locating needle-exchange schemes. The purpose and effect of these practices is to retain trainees on the programmes. Retention is higher than the national average for these types of programmes, with 60 per cent staying longer than three months and 50 per cent staying longer than nine months.

29. Although all trainees receive an induction to both the provider and their work placement, the induction programme is not always recorded, and the content and effectiveness are very variable. The company inducts every trainee individually, rather than in batches. While this personal attention is laudable, the result is that some trainees do not benefit from, or recall having, a systematic and all-embracing induction.

30. The company's cautious approach to introducing trainees to the world of work and learning occasionally results in some trainees being insufficiently challenged. There are several examples of trainees wishing to take qualifications and not doing so, and a few cases where trainees believed they were taking a qualification when they were not.

## Management of training

## Grade 3

31. The company is a non-hierarchical organisation with an emphasis on each member of staff having their own areas of expertise and responsibility. Since the first inspection, one of the three directors and an administrative assistant have left

the company. Of the remaining two directors, one is responsible for internal management and the other for external links. There are four other members of staff, two of whom have been appointed over the past year. Two of the staff are basic skills tutors, one is responsible for administration and for quality monitoring, and the other manages work placements. There are now no subcontracted training providers. Policies and procedures exist to cover most aspects of the company's work, including staff induction and development. All employees have a staff-development plan. Staff are recruited by word of mouth and through selection from networks in the training community. The company did not update its self-assessment report for reinspection, but provided an update detailing the actions which had been taken to address weaknesses identified during the initial inspection, and giving revised grades for the areas to be reinspected.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no formal staff-appraisal system in operation
- ◆ poor cohesion of business goals at senior level
- ◆ poor formal communication

32. SYTG has retained its strengths noted at the first inspection. All three weaknesses have been addressed by the company since the first inspection. However, inspectors found a new weakness and awarded the same grade as that given in the company's progress report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good involvement by staff in communicating company's values
- ◆ sensitive selection of work placements for trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor use and understanding of targets by all staff

33. The focus of SYTG is clearly on the individual trainee, and the company's commitment is to re-engage disaffected trainees in education, training and employment. Staff share this commitment, and understand their roles. They all demonstrate a flexible approach in response to the changing needs of disadvantaged trainees. Recent developments have included the introduction of short courses in basic health and safety and food handling. The availability of these courses is good because it widens the scope for accreditation for trainees. All staff are experienced and well qualified. The directors work alongside the staff as an effective team.

34. Staff spend considerable time and effort visiting and attracting new employers to provide suitable work placements. The emphasis is on seeking work placements which will lead to employment. A central register of work placements is kept, and

there are currently over 20 potential work-placement providers. Trainees are only matched to vacancies where work placements are judged to meet all aspects of trainees' needs. Work placements are discontinued if employers do not provide the requisite structured learning environment and necessary levels of support. Work placements are all of a high quality, and are sensitively matched to trainees. Staff give careful thought to the possibilities each work placement offers, and its contribution to the trainee's overall experience. For example, each catering work placement has been considered with regard to the NVQs trainees are taking, to ensure that the best use can be made of assessment opportunities. This has worked well. Some work placements offer good employment prospects for trainees. One work placement has already employed six previous trainees and another has employed four.

35. At the time of the first inspection, SYTG had developed a staff-appraisal system, but not implemented it. The scheme is now in operation, and is working effectively. Employees are appraised annually by one of the directors. The appraisal involves a detailed discussion about the individual's progress and performance. Previously, the company had a staff-development plan which merely prescribed desirable qualifications without setting out any strategy for achieving these. Staff's development needs are now discussed during staff appraisals. However, at present, the training needs discussed focus on personal objectives rather than those of the company.

36. Formal communication within the company was judged to be poor during the first inspection. There were instances where information needed by staff for the efficient running of the company did not get passed on. Meetings between the three directors at that time were infrequent and there were no formal staff meetings. Formal, minuted staff meetings have been held each month for the past six months. This ensures that all staff are involved in the discussion of the company's issues and decisions. These meetings have fostered effective sharing of ideas and good practice. Staff value the meetings and make effective use of the opportunity provided to contribute ideas and suggestions.

37. The directors and staff have a poor understanding of target setting. This is unchanged since the last inspection when inspectors noted that the company is deliberately opposed to setting targets in any areas of its operation, whether related to staff development or trainees' achievements. The business plan lacks clear strategies to address the main issues identified and is not useful in improving the company's management of training. There has been an improvement in the setting of individual targets for trainees, during regular tutorials. This has enabled the company to monitor trainees' achievements more closely. Overall, however, SYTG's resistance to the setting of clear and coherent targets hinders its ability to look objectively at its performance over time, and to effect improvements.



## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

38. The company has a quality assurance policy, and recorded procedures, many of which were updated following the first inspection. There is a named member of staff responsible for co-ordinating quality assurance. The company is subject to external audit from its TEC, and from awarding bodies. Feedback is gathered from trainees and employers. The self-assessment report was not updated in preparation for reinspection, although a short report was written which described the changes made in the two areas to be reinspected.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor self-assessment process and report
- ◆ many staff unaware of quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ quality assurance policies and procedures not used by all staff
- ◆ no target-setting
- ◆ little sharing of good practice

39. On reinspection, it was found that the company has addressed the second, third and fifth of these weaknesses, and has turned them into areas of strength. The lack of target setting is not yet resolved, but was considered on reinspection to have become an issue under management of training. The first weakness remains problematic. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the progress report written for reinspection.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough system for gathering feedback from trainees
- ◆ attainment of a basic skills quality mark
- ◆ effective involvement of staff in development of new quality assurance policies
- ◆ systematic sharing of good practice

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ unestablished quality assurance procedures
- ◆ little formal monitoring of quality of training
- ◆ lack of ongoing self-assessment

40. When the first inspection took place, the company relied to a great extent on reviews and informal feedback from trainees and employers to gauge its performance. Reviews are very frequent, and day-to-day contact with trainees and employers allows SYTG to assess their satisfaction accurately in the short term. Since then, the company has reinforced this informal approach, and adopted a system endorsed by its TEC to gather data from trainees in a methodical and



structured way. Using a series of well-designed questionnaires, SYTG collects information from trainees at the start of their programme, three months into it, and just before they leave. This is collated, displayed in the form of bar charts, and analysed. Areas about which trainees show dissatisfaction or a lack of understanding are discussed by staff, and appropriate amendments to the company's practice are made. For example, the results from one set of questionnaires showed that trainees did not consider that their short-term targets were being recorded in a way which was helpful to them. SYTG has now changed the process through which trainees' individual training plans are updated to improve the recording of targets. The system for collecting feedback from trainees is now well structured and very comprehensive.

41. Attainment of a basic skills quality mark is subject to audit every three years, and gives trainees entitlement to 12 quality standards relating to such areas as fair recruitment, minimum hours of direct tuition, ratios of trainers to trainees, and negotiated learning plans. The company adheres to all the standards required by the award.

42. The quality assurance policy and procedures used at the time of the first inspection had been drawn up more in the spirit of contractual compliance than as tools for improving performance. Many staff were unaware of the existence of the policy and procedures, which were neither monitored nor reviewed. Few of SYTG's employees associated quality assurance with trainees' performance, and none associated it with continuous improvement. Over the past year, many existing procedures have been updated and improved. The training director has re-written the company's health and safety procedures, and has devised straightforward and appropriate new procedures and recording systems for NVQ training and assessment. The new procedures have been written in consultation with the rest of the staff, drawing on their experience and ways of working. The staff are now familiar with the procedures and documents; they understand how to use them, and value the fact that they were involved in the re-writing process. They have a much better understanding of quality assurance, and of their role within it.

43. However, although greatly improved, SYTG's new quality assurance system is not fully established. Not all procedures have been revised and updated. The newly written quality assurance procedures are not all dated, and the company does not have a schedule for their ongoing review. This means that there is no way of establishing whether the procedures are effective and suited to SYTG's needs. The managing director plans to introduce a system for the internal audit of the quality assurance procedures, but this system is not yet used. There is, therefore, no system to ensure that staff are complying with the new procedures, and completing paperwork to the required standard. The company has recently taken some effective steps to make its approach to internal verification more systematic, by employing a consultant as the lead internal verifier. She has worked closely with the training manager to introduce clear, well-designed documents for the recording of internal verification decisions. However, the company has only recently had trainees working towards NVQs, and has not yet been able to test the effectiveness of the new internal verification system.

44. Opportunities for staff to share good practice are now readily available and effectively used. Staff share their approaches to different aspects of training and assessment, and discuss their usefulness during team meetings. Where appropriate, ideas which have worked well in one area are introduced elsewhere. For example, a form used in the hospitality work placements to record the NVQ units for which trainees can provide evidence has been found effective, and has spread to other occupational areas. The recent addition of two new members of staff, both previously employed in other local training providers, has enabled the introduction of wide experience, and fresh ideas. The internal verifier employed from outside the company has offered suggestions about the development of assessment and verification practice which have been enthusiastically received by SYTG.

45. Two new trainers have been employed by SYTG within the last few months, and new procedures and paperwork have demanded changes in the way in which existing staff approach and manage training. The training centre is compact, and classroom doors are usually left open. This makes it possible for the training director and the managing director to observe training and assessment in an informal and unstructured way, and to provide some verbal feedback to staff on their performance. However, this is not a planned activity. There is no system to ensure that all trainers are regularly observed, and that they receive feedback which is sufficiently detailed to help them improve their performance. There is an absence of a formal monitoring mechanism by which consistency of trainers' performance can be ensured.

46. The self-assessment report prepared for the first inspection was compiled solely by one director without reference to colleagues, trainees, employers or subcontractors. Most of the company's employees had not seen it by the time of the first inspection. The report did not demonstrate an analytical or self-critical approach to SYTG's own practices and performance. The company did not update its self-assessment report in preparation for reinspection, providing instead a short report on progress since the first inspection. This is largely narrative in style. It offers little in the way of critical analysis, does not give grades, and focuses only on the two subject areas to reinspection. Although SYTG's approach to action planning has been thorough and well organised, and has involved all members of staff, the company has not undertaken a rigorous or objective self-evaluation against the quality statements in *Raising the Standard*. It does not yet use self-assessment as a means to develop continuous improvement.