



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION DECEMBER 2000

Stockport Engineering Training Association Limited

SUMMARY

Stockport Engineering Training Association Limited provides good training in engineering. It has extensive training resources and experienced training staff. Trainees achieve valuable additional qualifications. However, they do not start collecting workplace evidence towards their NVQs until a late stage in their training. The company does not promote equal opportunities. The support given to trainees during their training is good. Their progress is reviewed frequently and effectively, particularly in the first year of their training programmes. The management of the training is satisfactory, with good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. However, there is no central monitoring of trainees' progress in the workplace. Quality assurance arrangements were less than satisfactory during the first inspection. Improvements have been made to the quality assurance of training, and this is now satisfactory. The company has designed and implemented some comprehensive, new quality assurance systems, although for some of these it is too soon to evaluate their effectiveness.

As a result of the reinspection of Stockport Engineering Training Association Limited, the original published report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text, which makes reference to the previous inspection findings.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 published form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ experienced and knowledgeable staff
- ◆ good number of trainees following additional qualifications
- ◆ clear initial information and guidance for trainees and parents
- ◆ effective and frequent reviews
- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ effective external quality assurance of new courses



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ delayed start of NVQ at level 3
- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment
- ◆ insufficient staff training on equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous management of subcontractors
- ◆ poor quality assurance of off-the-job training

INTRODUCTION

1. Stockport Engineering Training Association Limited (SETA) was formed in 1966 to provide a training service for companies in the engineering sector within the Stockport and south Manchester area. The current membership is over 100 companies. At the time of the first inspection, SETA had 120 members. The number of members fluctuates as some leave and new companies join. Government funding contributes towards the training of young people in engineering and key skills. There are 16 staff involved in government-funded training. SETA also offers training on a commercial basis to local companies in engineering skills and in health and safety. At the time of the first inspection, this commercial training accounted for 70 per cent of SETA's turnover, and is now approximately 60 per cent. Trainees are employed by both member and non-member companies. The employers are mainly engineering companies lying within a 30-mile radius of Stockport. SETA has two training centres in Stockport, which are located half a mile apart.

2. SETA contracts with Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Stockport and High Peak TEC and South and East Cheshire TEC to provide foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in engineering. During the first inspection, training was offered to modern apprentices, national trainees and trainees on other work-based training programmes taking engineering. Manchester TEC co-ordinated the arrangements on behalf of the other TECs for the purposes of both inspections. At the time of the first inspection, there were 196 modern apprentices and 10 trainees on other training programmes. There were no national trainees. There are now 207 advanced modern apprentices and seven foundation modern apprentices. Trainees receive foundation level training in SETA's engineering workshops. They are then trained in their employers' workplaces. At the same time, the trainees attend a further education college for one day each week to acquire the knowledge to support their training and to gain additional qualifications. SETA uses a workplace engineering training scheme to certify craftsmanship, and to develop trainees' skills to the levels necessary to achieve their NVQs. The standards for NVQs at level 3 are used to assess trainees' competence in the later stages of their training.

3. Stockport lies to the south of Manchester. SETA's premises are a mile and a half from the centre of Stockport and a similar distance from the Manchester city boundary. The population of the Manchester area is over three million. The transport links are excellent. In 1998, the unemployment rate in Stockport was 3.3 per cent. This was below both the regional average of 4.5 per cent and the national average of 4.1 per cent. In December 2000, the unemployment rate in Stockport stood at 2.4 per cent, which is still below the national figure of 3.3 per cent and the regional figure of 3.4 per cent. Although 70 per cent of people are employed in the service sector, the area retains a strong and vibrant industrial and manufacturing sector employing over 30,000 people. There has been a decline in recent years in



the number of large engineering and manufacturing companies but they have been replaced by new, smaller enterprises. SETA was established to meet the engineering training needs of the small and medium-sized companies without their own resources to train apprentices. Increasingly, the larger companies have closed their training departments and contract with SETA instead. However, the number of applicants to SETA has declined from 400 to 300 over the past three years. Attracting able trainees presents the greatest problem to SETA and employers. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers in Stockport achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 50.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In Manchester, it was lower, at 28.7 per cent. In 2000, the proportion was 50.1 per cent in Stockport, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Minority ethnic groups make up 2.4 per cent of the population of Stockport (Census, 1991). In neighbouring areas of Manchester, the minority ethnic groups form a higher proportion of the population.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. SETA produced its first self-assessment report in May 1999, and staff were involved in the self-assessment process by means of a series of staff meetings. The system for obtaining feedback from trainees did not contribute to the self-assessment process. Employers and subcontractors were fully involved. The report accurately identified some strengths and weaknesses but failed to identify others. The self-assessment process resulted in a large number of improvements being made. However, the action plan contained in the first self-assessment report was not used as a mechanism for managing the improvements. An updated action plan was produced in May 2000 in time for reinspection, concentrating on quality assurance. This was compiled following consultation with staff and employers, and using feedback given by trainees.

5. At the first inspection, a team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at SETA during September 1999. A total of 55 trainees were interviewed. Inspectors visited 17 employers and interviewed 14 workplace supervisors. Twenty-six interviews were conducted with the staff and managers of SETA. Five training sessions and a number of assessments were observed. A range of documents was inspected, including trainees' records, portfolios, the awarding body's reports and written policies. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) had inspected the subcontracted further education colleges within the previous six months. The findings of these inspections formed part of the evidence for the first inspection of SETA.

6. During reinspection, a team of two inspectors spent a total of four days at SETA during December 2000. Three employers were visited, and four trainees and three workplace supervisors were interviewed. One local college involved in providing off-the-job training was visited, and one member of staff from the college was interviewed. All key training staff and managers of SETA were interviewed, and relevant quality assurance paperwork was inspected. This included internal and external verification reports and documents, internal audit reports, the quality assurance policy and its related procedures, and minutes of meetings.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at first inspection

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

7. There are 206 engineering trainees. One hundred and ninety-six are modern apprentices. The remaining 10 are on other youth training programmes. Ninety-six per cent of the trainees are employed by companies before they are enrolled with SETA. All trainees work towards the NVQs at foundation level 2 in engineering in the first year. Trainees are also able to gain additional qualifications during the first year in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and fabrication which are beyond the requirements of the NVQ and the modern apprenticeship framework. The trainees follow a programme which takes them through seven areas of the workshop in rotation. After their NVQ level 2 is complete, most trainees work towards an intermediate qualification, the Certificate of Craftmanship, which is not based on NVQ standards. It is a recognised qualification in the engineering industry and it provides a structure for on-the-job training. Trainees start their NVQ level 3 in engineering when they have completed the Certificate of Craftmanship. The achievement rate was 98.5 per cent in the year to March 1999. The rate has increased over the three years to that date. SETA failed to identify some of the strengths and all of the weaknesses identified by inspectors, but inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ experienced and knowledgeable staff
- ◆ comprehensive off-the-job training
- ◆ trainees able to gain additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace assessment
- ◆ delayed start of the NVQ at level 3

POOR PRACTICE

This is an example of poor practice in the assessment of trainees. One trainee who completed the NVQ level 2 engineering foundation two years ago has not had a single assessment for his NVQ level 3.

8. The workshop resources at SETA are very good. The machines and equipment are situated on the two sites with sufficient space. The machines are similar to those that trainees use in the workplace and include a computer-controlled machine tool. The seven skill areas of engineering in the workshops provide trainees with a comprehensive range of training opportunities. Trainees are able to choose appropriate options and they are able to develop a wide range of skills. The training staff are all very experienced engineers with a minimum of 10 years' practical experience in the sector. They are well qualified in NVQ assessment and verification as well as in engineering. Expertise is brought in to supplement the skills of the permanent staff. For example, part of the internal verification is subcontracted in order to provide greater independence in the checking of assessments and in developing good assessment practice. Trainees achieve a high

level of competence in the workplace. The training in many of the companies is well structured, although it is not always formally planned.

9. Trainees have an understanding of the NVQ and methods of assessment from the outset of their training. However, they are not encouraged to collect evidence or to be assessed for the NVQ level 3 until a late stage in their training. SETA regards the certificate of craftsmanship as the primary method of structuring the on-the-job training. The NVQ is used as a system of final assessment rather than as a structure for on-the-job training. There is a delay of about two years between trainees completing their NVQ level 2 in foundation engineering and starting to assemble an NVQ level 3 portfolio of evidence. The total duration of the modern apprenticeship is unnecessarily long, often taking five years. Opportunities to collect evidence of competence at an earlier stage are missed. Trainees are not encouraged to work on both the NVQ level 3 and the certificate of craftsmanship in parallel or to use the same evidence for both qualifications.

10. The development and assessment of key skills has, until this year, been introduced at a late stage of the training programme. Trainees reaching the end of their training programme have done little towards their key skills qualifications until six months before completion. Changes have been introduced for the September 1999 intake of trainees, to develop and assess key skills at an early stage of the training. Information technology was identified as an important skill that trainees need to develop at an early stage. All trainees are given a high standard of information technology training as an integral module within their foundation off-the-job training.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

11. SETA has an equal opportunities policy, which is issued to trainees at induction. A series of questions used to monitor their understanding of induction includes one on equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy is reviewed annually by a designated group of staff. Equal opportunities is an agenda item on the biannual management review meetings. Three trainees, or 1 per cent of the total, are women. None of the trainees are from minority ethnic groups. Two trainees have a declared disability; one of them has impaired hearing and the other has dyslexia. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report. They awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good understanding of equal opportunities policy by recent trainees
- ◆ emphasis on equality in selection procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring of employers' responsibilities in equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient staff training on equality issues

12. SETA's equal opportunities policy meets TEC requirements and current legislation. It is reviewed annually by an internal panel. It is promoted to trainees and their parents at a pre-induction evening and is then repeated during the formal induction to the training programme. There is a copy printed in the handbooks which are issued on both occasions. Recent trainees entering the programme have a good recollection of the policy.

13. There is a complaints procedure, although trainees and staff rarely use it since the majority of issues are dealt with at an early informal stage.

14. Data on both staff and trainees' ethnicity and gender have been collected since September 1999, but they are not used to inform recruitment targets or strategies. There are no target figures set. Recruitment activities are not monitored or evaluated. One building used by trainees does not have wheelchair access, but the other one does. The most recent form of agreement signed by employers requires them to accept and comply with SETA's equal opportunities policy. However, there is no monitoring of their compliance other than when the training advisor asks trainees if they have any problems during routine visits. Staff have not undertaken training in equal opportunities. SETA uses the promotional materials of the awarding body. There is no special literature produced for particular community groups. Attempts have been made over a long period to recruit under-represented groups but with little success. For example, staff have attended single-gender schools to participate in careers events, carrying out mock interviews and teaching mathematics classes. Existing trainees are used as positive role models. Staff are unclear about the distinction between the positive action needed to encourage wider participation in its programmes and illegal positive discrimination.

Trainee support

Grade 2

15. Trainees are referred to SETA by the careers service, by schools or by employers. Trainees are selected by SETA following assessment and an interview in which personal qualities, mathematical ability, comprehension and engineering aptitude are taken into account. The assessment is for selection only. Trainees' basic skills are assessed on the basis of their GCSE grades in English language, mathematics and science. SETA requires a grade C or above in each subject. SETA then matches suitably qualified trainees to employers with vacancies. Employers then select trainees by interviewing those identified by SETA. Ninety-six per cent of trainees are employed once they are on the programme.

16. All trainees receive an induction at the training centre. They are given written guidance on procedures, policies and the NVQ system. A series of written questions are used to monitor trainees' understanding of induction. College-based training one day each week gives trainees access to the support services at the college. Trainees have an opportunity every month to discuss their progress with training staff, in addition to quarterly progress reviews. A new system has been introduced for recording the results of the discussions and the actions agreed on. SETA uses specialist expertise, such as national institutes, to meet trainees' needs when appropriate. Over the last three years an average of 3 per cent of trainees on the programme left without any qualifications. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses which had not been identified by SETA in its self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by SETA.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear initial information and guidance for trainees and parents
- ◆ rigorous interview and selection process
- ◆ thorough induction to the NVQ system
- ◆ effective and frequent reviews with trainees
- ◆ substantial help for trainees with identified additional learning or support needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no system established for the initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ lack of recording of support for trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

When a trainee with a severe hearing impairment was recruited, SETA contacted his individual advisor. She was invited into the training centre to advise all staff on how to train and support him.

17. Prospective trainees and their parents are invited to an assessment evening where clear, comprehensive information is given about the routes and options available for employment in the engineering industry. Information is also given about the expectations and responsibilities of all parties in the training process, including trainees and parents. Three assessment papers are used as part of a rigorous selection procedure. They are a mechanical ability test, a test for comprehension and a mathematics test (designed by SETA in conjunction with a local college). The interview follows a standard format and a method is provided for prospective trainees to identify their own learning needs and disabilities. Trainees also take a colour deficiency test. Trainees with identified needs are fully supported. For example, trainees with dyslexia are given the use of computers for all written work and a reader, if required. A trainee who is profoundly deaf is being given one-to-one tutoring. A trained specialist explained to all the staff how best to work with this trainee. The assessments are followed by a personal interview with SETA, following a standard format, and at least one more interview with each prospective employer. A variety of sources of information about the candidate are used in the selection process. All trainees are very clear about the NVQ system and assessment methods. The information given at induction about the NVQ level 2 is comprehensive. It is reinforced with written material and a short assessment to ensure that trainees understand the terminology. A second

induction is given at the start of the NVQ level 3, often in the presence of the workplace supervisor.

18. Each trainee is allocated a training advisor at an early stage in the programme who maintains contact by monthly visits throughout the training period. The purpose of the visits is to review trainees' progress, to check for any problems with both the on- and off-the-job training and to set achievable targets. The visits are recorded in triplicate, with a copy each for the trainee, training advisor and employer. During the foundation training period, trainees are reviewed on a weekly basis by the workshop tutor, in addition to the monthly meeting with the training advisor. The record form has only recently been introduced after considerable consultation and trials. All these reviews are additional to the contractual requirement for a formal review every third month. Success is celebrated each year with an award ceremony when prizes are presented to trainees in several categories.

19. Trainees who do not complete the programme are not formally asked to identify their reasons for leaving or their destinations. Initial assessment is used as a tool for selection rather than to identify any training needs. There is no assessment of trainees' basic skills. However, if learning needs are identified during the programme, such as during progress reviews, additional support arrangements are made with the local colleges. The additional support that is provided is not systematically recorded on trainees' personal training plans or in their files to enable another member of staff to continue the support for a trainee. Initial assessment of trainees' key skills has been introduced for the September 1999 intake of trainees. It is comprehensive but uses jargon. There is no formal end-of-training interview for trainees. Most remain in employment. Help is given to find appropriate work for those few trainees whose employment is not continued.

Management of training

Grade 3

20. SETA is managed by a board of seven non-executive directors drawn from the member companies. The board meets every six months to decide on business strategy and to monitor financial performance. Day-to-day responsibility for SETA's operation lies with a chief executive. Staff responsible for training are divided into two distinct groups. Off-the-job training is provided by instructors in the workshops in the two training centres. Training advisors are responsible for monitoring and assessing the trainees in the workplace. They also co-ordinate the on-the-job training and the off-the-job training in SETA's workshops and in the further education colleges. SETA has a business development plan for the year to September 1999. A draft plan for the following year is with the board for approval. Staff development procedures specify a performance appraisal annually. Training and development actions are agreed on to support the individual and business needs. Individual targets are also established. Individual training plans are incorporated into the business plan. The progress of trainees in SETA's training

centre towards their off-the-job qualifications is monitored by the training co-ordinator. The progress of trainees in the workplace is monitored at progress review meetings and held in each trainee's file. Staff meetings are held every four weeks. All staff attend and minutes are recorded. Formal service level agreements with subcontracted further education colleges were introduced in September 1999. SETA achieved recognition as an Investor in People in 1996 and was re-accredited in 1998. Inspectors identified additional strengths and agreed with the weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good staff development programme
- ◆ well-planned and well-monitored training in the training centres

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no central monitoring of trainees' progress in the workplace
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous management of subcontractors

GOOD PRACTICE

The training centre co-ordinator has developed a computer-based system to monitor the progress of trainees during their off-the-job training. The system can readily highlight any trainee who has not completed a unit of the NVQ level 2 as well as displaying all relevant information about the trainees' work and college courses. The tracking system is accessible to all other staff to read via a computer network.

21. The directors of SETA have a strong interest, as employers of the trainees, in the training provided by SETA. However, they do not become sufficiently involved in the training strategy. Board discussions concentrate on financial performance and administration of the organisation. The business plan sets clear training targets but contains little about how they are to be achieved. The management structure changed in the month prior to inspection. All staff involved in government-funded training are now based in the same building. Communication between instructors and advisors who visit the workplace has improved. There is good co-ordination between on-the-job training and that off-the-job training which takes place in the centre and the college.

22. There is a strong commitment by SETA to staff development. Annual staff appraisals are used to identify any training needs. The staff training plans are clear. They include evaluation criteria. However, they are recorded as an appendix to the business plan rather than separately for each member of staff. They are not recorded in a format which enables them to be regularly updated.

23. The progress of trainees during the early stages of their training is planned and monitored very effectively. The workshop training programme is planned so that they spend a period in each of the seven areas. Their progress is monitored centrally by the centre's training co-ordinator. If a trainee does not successfully complete the assessment in each area this is easily identified and can be corrected at a later stage. Progress towards the college qualification is also monitored.

24. Trainees' progress in the workplace is not centrally monitored. Advisors record progress when they visit the trainees, but the record is held on individual

trainees' files. Communication between SETA and employers is effective in relation to individual trainees, but there is little communication between managers and employers about the overall training programme. Internal communication is maintained through the regular staff meetings.

25. Service-level agreements with subcontractors have all been signed in the last month. There were no earlier agreements. There are no formal reviews of the subcontracted training. Unsatisfactory practice by one subcontractor has been challenged following complaints by trainees. Management of the subcontractors has been unsatisfactory in the past and it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

26. SETA has a recorded quality assurance system which meets the requirements of the three TECs and which is certified as meeting the ISO 9002 quality standard. The company was originally awarded the quality standard ISO 9002 in 1994, and was re-assessed successfully in November 2000. The quality assurance system includes the policy statement, a series of operating procedures, work instructions and forms. External specialists are subcontracted for both the audit of the quality assurance system and the internal verification of training for the NVQ at level 2. The independent internal verifier carries out quality assurance checks of new courses at the design stage. He monitors the course design, including the preparation of training materials and individual lesson plans. Before the first inspection, the self-assessment process results had been the starting point for a large number of changes to SETA's training systems, with the intention of improving the standard of training and support given to trainees. These included the systems for trainees' progress reviews, for managing subcontractors and for the initial assessment of trainees. Potential improvements are discussed at staff meetings. A system, based on questionnaires, of obtaining feedback from trainees, employers and staff was introduced following the self-assessment process.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no analysis of feedback records
- ◆ little use of data to inform improvement
- ◆ no systematic management or evaluation of continuous improvement

27. SETA has made progress in addressing all of these weaknesses, although the newness of some measures means that their effects cannot be properly evaluated. SETA did not produce a revised self-assessment report for reinspection, as it is scheduled to start the self-assessment process again in January. However, it produced a detailed action plan to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses identified during the first inspection, and so updated its progress on this for the reinspection. SETA did not award itself a grade for quality assurance before the reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective external quality assurance of new courses
- ◆ all staff involved in continuously improving training
- ◆ good use of employers and trainees' feedback

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assurance of off-the-job training
- ◆ some of some established quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ no formal planning of internal verification for NVQs at level 3

28. At the first inspection, inspectors identified that the use of an independent internal verifier has improved the quality assurance of the development of new programmes. The involvement of the internal verifier in the development of the information technology course added greatly to the effectiveness of its design. The development process itself was planned in advance to include people independent of the development who would evaluate it. Ongoing evaluation by the internal verifier in the first year of this course has led to further improvements.

29. All staff have access to quality assurance policies and procedures, which are updated on a regular basis. Key members of training staff have complete copies of policies and procedures kept in quality assurance manuals. Since the first inspection, SETA has developed a quality assurance programme which is displayed in staff's offices. This identifies the dates for key quality assurance meetings, and for some established processes such as the evaluation of trainees' performance and the collection of feedback. Staff attend meetings regularly. All staff are aware of the importance of quality assurance, and are involved in ensuring the high quality of training and its ongoing improvement. Targets and objectives are communicated to all staff during training and development workshops.

30. SETA undertakes internal audits of its quality assurance procedures every six months. An independent external consultant carries this out thoroughly. The content of the audit has recently been expanded to include a collection of feedback from employers and trainees. The analysis of this feedback has identified issues which are currently being addressed.

31. SETA has good, open areas for off-the-job training at its training centre, which is used for engineering foundation training for the NVQ at level 2. Staff observe training in these areas informally, although they do not record the verdicts of their observations and give no formal feedback to the staff they are observing. The local colleges carry out some off-the-job training on behalf of SETA. The college inspected recently by the FEFC rigorously monitors this training and undertakes regular lesson observations. However, SETA does not ask for information regarding these observations, and does not carry out any of its own quality checks.

32. Since the first inspection, several areas of quality assurance have been identified as needing improvement. Some ideas for improvements, such as collecting trainees and employers' feedback, have been implemented, analysed and improved. However, other key areas, such as monitoring training given by colleges and observing staff at work, are at a far earlier stage. There have been no formal observations of staff so far in keeping with the procedures produced, and there has been only one minuted meeting with staff from a subcontracted college about monitoring the training. Although these improvements are clearly described by procedures, their effectiveness in practice cannot yet be evaluated. SETA uses self-assessment as an integrated part of its quality assurance system to identify areas for improvement, and this has become an annual process.

33. Internal verification for NVQs at level 2 is satisfactory. A subcontracted internal verifier who visits regularly to verify the effectiveness of the assessment process is responsible for this. For the NVQ at level 3, internal verification is not planned in advance. Observation of assessment is not carried out regularly. The internal verification of some trainees' evidence is only carried out on complete portfolios, giving trainees no time during their training to improve evidence verified as being inadequate.