

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Southampton Engineering Training Association Limited**

24 September 2001



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

## Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

## SUMMARY

### The provider

The Southampton Engineering Training Association Limited is a company and a charity. It provides training in the occupational area of engineering, technology and manufacturing for its member companies and other organisations. It offers advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships and other programmes of work-based learning for young people.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Both work-based learning for young people and the company's leadership and management are satisfactory.

### Work-based learning for young people

There are 254 advanced modern apprentices, eight foundation modern apprentices and five young people on other programmes of work-based learning. Only a small proportion of learners leave their training early. A high proportion achieve national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2. The rates of achievement of vocational qualifications in basic engineering and electrical installation are also high. Learners are making satisfactory progress towards their NVQs at level 3. However, learners do not receive enough help with key skills. Assessment in the workplace is poor and training in the workplace is inadequately planned.

### Leadership and management

The company is making ongoing improvements to its training programmes. However, it does not assure the quality of all aspects of its training. Internal verification is weak. Self-assessment has failed to identify the company's strengths and weaknesses accurately. The company's promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory.

## GRADES

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

## KEY STRENGTHS

- low proportion of early leavers
- high rate of achievement of level 2 NVQs and vocational qualifications in basic engineering and electrical installation
- ongoing improvements to training

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate help with developing key skills
- poor assessment in the workplace
- inadequate planning of training in the workplace
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements

## THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. The main purpose of The Southampton Engineering Training Association Limited (SETA) is to train engineering apprentices in Southampton and the surrounding area. The company also offers other services on a commercial basis to its members and other organisations. These include training in engineering and advice on health and safety. SETA has a training centre in Southampton, comprising classrooms and engineering workshops. The company has 32 staff and 267 learners. SETA's staff carry out assessments and reviews of learners' progress at the training centre and in the workplace. They also provide practical training and training in theory at the training centre. SETA subcontracts some of its training to two local colleges of further education.
2. SETA has contracts with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The rate of unemployment in Southampton is 2.4 per cent, compared with a national average of 3 per cent. In Southampton, minority ethnic groups make up 4.9 per cent of the population, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Southampton who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 40 per cent, compared with a national average of 49.2 per cent.

## THE INSPECTION

3. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at SETA during September 2001. They interviewed 29 learners and carried out 14 interviews with SETA's staff. They also visited 15 work placements and interviewed 13 workplace supervisors. Inspectors observed and graded eight lessons. They examined learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, the company's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and the awarding body's reports. They also studied SETA's self-assessment report, which had been written in May 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	3	4	1	0	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	267	3

4. SETA has 254 advanced modern apprentices and eight foundation modern apprentices. In addition, there are five young people working towards NVQs on other programmes of work-based training. All the learners are following programmes in engineering. These include programmes in mechanical engineering, fabrication and welding, electronic engineering and electrical engineering. All the learners are employed. They work in various engineering and manufacturing occupations, ranging from domestic repairs to locomotive repairs and maintenance of post-sorting equipment. SETA recruits its learners through advertising in local and trade press and careers fairs at schools. In addition, some learners are referred to SETA by their employers. The company invites all those who apply for training to an aptitude test. It then asks employers to consider offering apprenticeships to successful applicants. Employers then decide whether to offer the applicants employment with training. Some applicants perform well in the aptitude test but do not obtain employment. SETA sponsors some of these applicants to attend a 19-week basic training course, during which it seeks to find them employment. At the start of their training, foundation and advanced modern apprentices attend SETA's training centre for up to 46 weeks. During this time, they work towards a level 2 NVQ in engineering and a vocational qualification in basic engineering or electrical installation. The precise length of this period of training for each learner, together with the learner's hours of attendance and NVQ units, is agreed with the employer. Once learners have achieved the level 2 NVQ and any additional NVQ units which they are taking, they start training in the workplace towards a level 3 NVQ. They also attend a further education college for one day each week to work towards a craft or national certificate. Foundation and advanced modern apprentices also work towards appropriate key skills awards throughout their training. Learners on other programmes of work-based learning take between two and three years to complete their NVQs. These learners' training takes place in the workplace throughout their training programmes. SETA's staff visit learners in the workplace to review their progress every four to eight weeks.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time



of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started			1		6		11		0	
Still in training			0	0	3	50	5	45	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			1	100	1	17	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			1	100	2	33	5	45	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started	56		62		66		66		64	
Still in training	33	59	44	71	53	80	60	91	64	100
AMA framework completed	12	21	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	43	77	47	76	53	80	44	67	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	16	29	9	15	0	0	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework	12	21	15	24	13	20	6	9	0	0

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started	3		8		3					
Still in training	0	0	3	38	2	67				
Individual learning plan completed	1	33	0	0	0	0				
Left without completing individual learning plan	2	67	2	25	0	0				
NVQ level 2 completed	2	67	4	50	1	33				

## STRENGTHS

- well-equipped training centre
- good pastoral support
- productive relationship with employers
- low proportion of early leavers
- high rate of achievement of level 2 NVQs and vocational qualifications in basic engineering and electrical installation

## **WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate help with developing key skills
- poor assessment in the workplace
- weak individual learning plans
- inadequate planning of training in the workplace

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more specific targets from progress reviews

5. SETA's training centre has a comprehensive range of equipment, which is kept in good working order. It has separate workshops for training in electrical engineering, electronics, instrumentation and mechanical maintenance. The training centre also has areas for turning, milling and fabrication, welding, and testing electrical installations. Learners have a good supply of hand tools. In addition, they can use measuring equipment and a computer room. The training centre also has an area for computer numerical control systems. This has a link to local schools for video conferencing.

6. SETA's staff provide good pastoral support for learners, both at the training centre and in the workplace. They visit learners in the workplace every four to eight weeks. Visits can take place more frequently if the learner requests or requires additional help. Learners appreciate the support they receive during the visits. They feel able to discuss personal difficulties with SETA's staff. Those who have raised personal difficulties have received good support. SETA's staff are sensitive to learners' individual needs. One learner, who is very nervous, receives effective support. He receives regular visits, especially before examinations at college and when he is worried about his work or training. This support has helped the learner make good progress.

7. SETA and employers jointly identify the most appropriate NVQ and combination of units for each learner. The company encourages employers to visit their learners while they are at the training centre. It also holds focus groups for employers about how it can improve its training programmes and other services. Employers appreciate the good quality of SETA's services. The company's monitoring staff have effective links with workplace supervisors. The regular contact between SETA's staff and workplace supervisors benefits learners. This contributes to the high rates of retention among learners. The rate of retention has been higher than 75 per cent for the past four years.

8. The rate of achievement of NVQs at level 2 is high. It has been over 75 per cent in each of the past four years. The rate of achievement of the vocational qualification in basic engineering was 93 per cent in 2000-01 and 96 per cent in each of the two

preceding years. The rate of achievement of the vocational qualification in electrical installation was 91 per cent in 1999-2000. However, the results for this qualification in 2000-01 are not available.

9. Help with key skills is poor. Many learners do not know which key skills awards they need to achieve. Some work-based learners who have nearly completed their apprenticeships are unsure which level of the key skills award is required or what evidence towards it will be acceptable. Other learners recall key skills being mentioned but have not yet started work towards their key skills awards. One learner was insistent that key skills were not part of his training programme, even though they were listed on his individual learning plan. Learners' progress towards their key skills awards has been slow and few have achieved units of their awards. SETA recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report and has implemented plans to improve the situation. These include the introduction of training in key skills during learners' initial training at the training centre. One week of learners' initial training is now dedicated to collecting evidence towards a range of key skills. One member of staff has gained the key skills practitioners' award and another is working towards it. The company has contacted work-based learners and encouraged them to attend additional lessons in key skills at its training centre.

10. Assessments in the workplace are poor. Few assessments involve observation. There is an over-reliance on witness testimony. Often witness testimony consists of little more than a signature and a brief comment on the work carried out and the standard achieved. Assessment is often left to the end of one, or even several, completed units. Learners' portfolios are sent to SETA for assessment by an occupationally competent assessor. Learners have little involvement in this process. One learner, who had submitted a portfolio for assessment at the end of his training, was informed that he had not gathered sufficient evidence for a unit which he had worked on in the early stages of his training. Learners have little understanding of assessment and do not know who will be assessing their NVQs.

11. Learners' individual learning plans are weak. Although SETA assesses learners' basic and key skills when they start their training, it does not use the results to shape their individual learning plans. All the learners are set similar dates for completing their NVQs and key skills awards. These are normally four years from the start of training, regardless of the individual's ability. Individual learning plans do not contain sufficient detail about how the training will be provided. Some do not reflect the training which is in fact taking place.

12. Few learners have a structured programme of training in the workplace. Most learners do not have a plan for gathering evidence and rely on being able to gather evidence as the opportunity arises. Few employers play a sufficient role in planning assessments and reviewing learners' progress. Some employers produce plans for training in the workplace. However, these rarely reflect the requirements of the NVQ. SETA's staff do not refer to these plans during reviews of learners' progress.

13. SETA reviews learners' progress regularly. Some progress reviews do not result in precisely specified tasks which learners must carry out to maintain an acceptable rate of progress.

**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT****Grade 3**

14. SETA has a governing council comprising five representatives of its member companies and two co-opted members. In its business plan, the company describes itself as dedicated to lifelong learning and to the development of those who work in engineering. The chief executive is responsible for the company's day-to-day running. He is supported by three managers; a training manager, an administration manager, and a business development manager. SETA was accredited as an Investor in People in 1999. SETA has an equal opportunities policy and a quality assurance manual. The training manager is responsible for equal opportunities and health and safety. SETA has recently appointed a quality assurance manager. The company produced its most recent self-assessment report in May 2001.

**STRENGTHS**

- good understanding of strategic and operational issues at senior level
- ongoing improvement to training
- effective marketing of training

**WEAKNESSES**

- lack of clarity about responsibilities of staff
- lack of coherent plans for staff development
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements

15. SETA's business plan is prepared by the chief executive and approved by the governing council. The plan specifies the company's main goals for the year and identifies its strengths and weaknesses, together with the opportunities available to the company and the threats posed to it. All the goals in the plan demonstrate an understanding of learners' needs. The chair of the governing council meets the chief executive monthly to discuss training. The chief executive reports to the governing council on progress against the business plan every three months. The minutes of the governing council's meetings are comprehensive. They cover learners' progress, recruitment, subcontracted training, staff development and finance. The governing council has a good understanding of how to achieve best value.

16. SETA has made many improvements to its training over the past two years. It has recently appointed a new chief executive. There was a smooth changeover between the current chief executive and his predecessor. The company has started to hold focus groups, at which learners and employers discuss how it can improve its training. These groups have led to several improvements. Employers now receive reports on learners' progress from both SETA and its subcontractors. Learners and employers are now clear

whom to contact with queries. The company now monitors learners more closely in the workplace. Staff now attend monthly briefings about the company's progress towards meeting its targets. The briefings for staff cover any changes in staff, recruitment, key skills and finance. SETA also displays information about these matters on staff notice boards. The main aim of the changes is to improve learners' experiences.

17. SETA has good links with local schools. It has a video link for conferencing with eleven local schools and other schools are now keen to participate in the project. SETA's staff also visit schools to encourage more women into engineering.

18. Some staff are not fully aware of their responsibilities and targets. There are some job descriptions for groups of staff but these do not cover all staff or all responsibilities. It is not clear who has overall responsibility for equal opportunities. Staff do not fully understand one another's roles. This means that they sometimes fail to share information with the appropriate colleagues. For example, the staff who are responsible for marketing and recruitment do not always receive copies of feedback from employers.

19. SETA appraises its staff systematically. During this process, the company identifies needs for training. However, the needs which the company identifies in appraisals rarely reflect the company's objectives and the roles of the individual member of staff. SETA offers little training in management for its staff, even though it recruits some of its managers from among its existing workforce. The training for assessors is poor. Staff who are involved in assuring quality have a weak understanding of the relevant issues. The company has no plans to remedy this. SETA's own staff provide a large proportion of staff training themselves, even though many of those who provide the training have not updated their own knowledge and skills for several years. Staff have not received enough training in equal opportunities. The business plan recognises these weaknesses but does not propose actions to remedy them.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 3**

20. SETA has a comprehensive policy on equal opportunities. The policy was developed by learners and staff, with guidance from a consultant, and updated in July 2001. The introductory booklet which welcomes learners to SETA refers to the equal opportunities policy. Learners' induction packs contain the full policy. A consultant has audited SETA's application of equal opportunities and its access for people with disabilities. The company has acted appropriately on all of the consultant's recommendations. It has bought a training package to introduce learners to equal opportunities. However, it does not plan to offer this training to learners who started before it bought the package.

21. The company has a procedure for dealing with complaints and handles complaints promptly and effectively. For example, a female learner who told a female staff member about unwelcome sexual banter was advised to report the incident to the training manager; he investigated the complaint immediately and took effective action. As a result, the learner continued her training, confident that she would be protected from inappropriate behaviour. In another incident, a learner was upset by insensitive comments from his tutor; this was also swiftly resolved.

22. SETA has taken steps to promote its training to under-represented groups. It has set a target for increasing participation by learners from minority ethnic groups and has established links with a local mosque. It has also visited schools to promote engineering as a career for women. The company has analysed the effectiveness of its various marketing initiatives and produced new marketing material. As a result of these activities, SETA recruited more learners than expected this year. However, it has not yet carried out all the initiatives which it plans.

23. SETA does not adequately monitor learners' understanding of equal opportunities or employers' promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace. Some learners have a weak understanding of equal opportunities. The company has recently added equal opportunities to the checklist of topics to be covered during learners' progress reviews. However, the topic is rarely covered in sufficient depth. SETA does not monitor the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of learners who are selected for employment.

## Quality assurance

## Contributory grade 4

24. SETA has recently appointed a quality assurance manager. The company has a quality assurance manual. However, the manual is not yet complete and does not cover all the main areas of training and assessment. There are no systems for controlling documents or internal auditing.

25. Some recent activities have improved SETA's training. There have been some audits of the work of monitoring staff and some observations of training. The company has sought the views of employers and learners. Recently, it has attempted to monitor its subcontracted training. However, these activities were not part of a comprehensive system to assure quality. Few of the activities were planned.

26. Internal verification is weak. There is no strategy for internal verification. Nor is there a plan for observing assessments. Internal verifiers have a weak understanding of good practice. Usually internal verification takes place at the end of training rather than throughout the training programme. Although the business plan refers to weekly meetings of assessors and internal verifiers, these meetings take place only occasionally and the minutes are not distributed.

27. Senior staff met frequently and regularly to prepare the self-assessment report. However, inspectors disagreed with several of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. Some areas where the self-assessment report identified strengths, for example, awareness of equal opportunities among staff and staff appraisals, were found to be weak by inspectors. Some weaknesses identified by inspectors, relating to assessment and to quality assurance, were not identified through self-assessment.