

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
APRIL 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
AUGUST 2001

SIGTA Ltd



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 *learndirect* 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.

Grading

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

SUMMARY

The original inspection of SIGTA Ltd was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for engineering, equal opportunities and management of training. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with engineering, equal opportunities and management of training have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

At the original inspection, SIGTA Ltd's training in engineering was unsatisfactory. It has improved and is now satisfactory. The company has good work placements and effectively matches employment opportunities to learners' aims and abilities. Knowledgeable and experienced training officers give good support to learners. Individual learning programmes are well structured and learners' progress is carefully monitored. Retention rates have improved. Assessment in the workplace remains a weakness and learners make slow progress towards achievement of the modern apprenticeship framework. Equal opportunities is still unsatisfactory. Since the original inspection, SIGTA Ltd has taken action to improve the under-representation of women and people from minority ethnic groups. However, there is no promotion of equal opportunities to employers or learners and there has been insufficient staff training in equal opportunities. The management of training is now satisfactory. There are good communications between SIGTA Ltd, employers and colleges and the training is well managed.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Engineering	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Management of training	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective matching of employment opportunities to learners
- ◆ good, well-resourced work placements
- ◆ significantly improved retention rates
- ◆ highly knowledgeable and experienced training officers
- ◆ effective recruitment and induction
- ◆ good external communications
- ◆ positive action taken as a result of self-assessment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ slow progress in achievement of modern apprenticeship framework
- ◆ poor equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no promotion of equal opportunities to employers or learners
- ◆ poor monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no clear strategic focus on training
- ◆ poor communication of strategic aims to staff

INTRODUCTION

1. SIGTA Ltd is a group training association and a registered charity which specialises in engineering training. It has contracts with the Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Surrey LSC to offer youth training. The company also offers commercial training and services to member organisations. The company has established a *learndirect* centre as part of the engineering learning link, which is an initiative of the Engineering and Marine Training Association (EMTA). There were 196 learners on work-based learning programmes at the time of the original inspection. Of these, 96 were on modern apprenticeships, 20 were on national traineeships, 78 were following other youth programmes and two were adults. At the time of reinspection, there are 122 learners. Of these, 106 are working towards a qualification in engineering and 16 in manufacturing. Eighty-six are modern apprentices and 36 are following a programme of NVQ training. All learners are employed by their work-placement companies and all companies are members of SIGTA Ltd. Training is given by the employers and by local colleges.

2. SIGTA Ltd is based in Portslade near Brighton and employs 15 staff. Learners are placed in companies across Sussex and Surrey. The 1991 census identified that 1.3 per cent of the population in East Sussex and 2.8 per cent of the population in Surrey are from a minority ethnic group. In April 2000, the unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent in East Sussex and 0.9 per cent in Surrey, compared with a national average of 3.8 per cent. In June 2001, the unemployment rate was 2.2 per cent in East Sussex and 0.6 per cent in Surrey, compared with the national average of 3 per cent. There are significant variations across the area served by SIGTA Ltd. For example, in Hastings the unemployment rate is 4.3 per cent. In 1999, 51 per cent of school leavers in Sussex and 56.5 per cent in Surrey achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above, compared with 46.9 per cent nationally. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 51 per cent in East Sussex, 43.7 per cent in Brighton and Hove and 57.6 per cent in Surrey, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The chief executive and the quality assurance manager, supported by the training staff, produced a self-assessment report in preparation for the original inspection. Inspectors found it difficult to follow as it did not adequately describe SIGTA Ltd, or identify the strengths and weaknesses for the occupational or generic areas. An action plan was developed and was used to consolidate the strengths and resolve the weaknesses which were identified by the self-assessment report and the inspection. An action plan review was produced in May 2001 in preparation for the reinspection which outlined the progress made towards the aims of the action plan. SIGTA Ltd also assessed its training programmes against the five key questions in the *Common Inspection Framework* and therefore did not give separate grades for equal opportunities and quality assurance.

4. The original inspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors who spent a total of 16 days with the organisation in April 2000. They visited 18 employers and three colleges, interviewed 38 learners, 21 workplace supervisors, and carried out 12 interviews with staff from SIGTA Ltd. Inspectors examined assessment records, learners' portfolios, internal and external verifiers' reports, and documents from the training and enterprise council (TEC). One training session was observed and graded.

5. The reinspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors, who spent a total of 16 days at SIGTA Ltd in August 2001. They interviewed 27 learners and nine members of staff. They interviewed 18 employers and workplace supervisors. Nineteen training sessions were observed and graded. Inspectors examined documents including portfolios of evidence, learners' files, local LSC contracts, minutes of meetings, staff appraisal and development records, management information and policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

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

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		6	13			19
Total	0	6	13	0	0	19

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

6. SIGTA Ltd has 106 learners on engineering programmes. Of these, 54 are advanced modern apprentices, 16 are foundation modern apprentices and 36 are following a programme of national vocational qualification (NVQ) training. All learners are employed in a wide variety of engineering companies, ranging from precision engineering in aircraft components, manufacturing formula one racing car parts and the manufacture of pens, paint products and environmental equipment. Most of the learners are working towards NVQs at level 2 and level 3 and four are working towards an NVQ at level 4. Most of the advanced modern apprentices attend a college of further education full time for the first year for a foundation NVQ. Some attend college on day release over a two-year period to give greater flexibility to smaller companies. Other learners receive all their training in the companies where they are placed. Most learners attend day release for appropriate further education courses, which meet the theory requirements of the NVQ and offer further development of their knowledge and skills. Two members of staff are responsible for the recruitment of companies and learners. SIGTA Ltd employs five training officers who have many years industrial experience and appropriate assessor qualifications. Their responsibilities include visiting learners in the workplace to undertake progress reviews and carry out assessments. A few employers have their own assessors. One training officer is responsible for co-ordinating the assessment centre and liaising with awarding body representatives. A general manager has recently been appointed to oversee the day-to-day management of training programmes.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

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

7. Since the original inspection, SIGTA Ltd has used action-planning and close monitoring of performances to improve the planning and co-ordination of training programmes and to improve retention and completion rates. Assessment by direct observation has increased since the introduction of observation reports. Assessment is still not continuous throughout the training programme and the outcomes are not effectively recorded. Learners who have been recruited within the past year have a good understanding of key skills and from an early stage they are an integral part of their training programmes. The late introduction of key skills continues to be a problem for those in the final stages of their training. SIGTA Ltd gave individual grades for each of the key questions in the *Common Inspection Framework* but did not identify any strengths and weaknesses. The strengths remain from the original inspection. Inspectors identified new strengths

and considered that aspects of two of the weaknesses remain.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive procedures to match learners with suitable employers
- ◆ good, well-resourced work placements
- ◆ flexible learning programmes
- ◆ significantly improved retention rates
- ◆ some good key skills development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ slow progress towards achievement of modern apprenticeship framework

8. SIGTA Ltd has effective procedures to match learners with an appropriate employer. Training officers visit the employer and produce a profile of training opportunities within the company. All prospective learners are interviewed and they undertake a career assessment test which identifies their suitability for engineering. Learners' aims and abilities are matched to vacancies and employers are given a shortlist of suitable candidates. The employer makes the final selection after an interview.

9. SIGTA Ltd has good, long-standing relationships with many engineering employers who offer a wide variety of training opportunities. Most employers have a good range of tools and equipment and many of the learners achieve high skill levels as they progress towards their NVQ. If employers are unable to offer enough opportunities to develop all the skills required for the NVQ, additional college-based training and a temporary work placement with another employer are offered. Many employers offer short in-house company training courses as part of the training programme. Many learners are placed with large engineering companies where they are set challenging engineering projects which allow them to apply the skills and knowledge which they have gained. Learners are set regular targets throughout their training programmes and their progress is carefully monitored. Some of the workplace supervisors have been involved in training apprentices for a number of years, they are well qualified and trained to teach the learners.

10. Individual learning programmes are clear and well structured. Each training programme is carefully constructed to make the most of the training opportunities within SIGTA Ltd and to enable learners to develop the skills required by their employer. Training officers work closely with employers and learners to identify optional NVQ units and other relevant qualifications. SIGTA Ltd offers a variety of methods of training and assessment to give flexibility to the training programmes and to meet employers' needs. Employers can select from a range of training options which include training entirely in the workplace, or at a local training centre, or a combination of training centre and further education college and workplace.

GOOD PRACTICE

Learners in one company use projects to design and develop engineering components and process them to the manufacturing stage. On completion, they make a presentation to senior staff and this gives a good opportunity to produce evidence for their NVQ and key skills.

11. Learners' retention rates have improved over the past three years. SIGTA Ltd's analysis of the reasons why learners leave early, identifies the two main reasons are leaving of their own accord and redundancy. While redundancies have increased over the past three years, the proportion leaving of their own accord has significantly reduced from 28 per cent in 1998-99, to 23 per cent in 1999-2000 and 13 per cent in 2000-01. In addition, the proportion of learners voluntarily withdrawing from the programme while remaining in employment has fallen from 14 to 4 per cent in the past three years.

12. There have been some good developments in key skills training during the past year. SIGTA Ltd offers key skills sessions at its training centre, which helps employers who find it difficult to offer key skills training. Training sessions introduce learners to the key skills units and external tests and offer guidance on the collection of evidence in the workplace. Evaluations of these training sessions indicate that learners are very satisfied with the standards achieved. SIGTA Ltd's key skills co-ordinator has given in-house training for staff to introduce key skills training and the implementation of the key skills 2000 award. Training officers have attended awarding body and key skills training courses which have been arranged by the local TEC. Most training officers are now introducing key skills training at an early stage of the training programme and are working with employers and workplace supervisors to identify and collect evidence for key skills. Some employers have developed engineering projects to support the collection of evidence and demonstration of competences.

13. The direct observation of assessment in the workplace has increased since the original inspection, with the introduction of new observation reports. However, assessment in the workplace is not always planned, but left to chance, as when staff visit employers for progress reviews. Some learners do not know the assessment procedures well enough and are not always aware that assessments are taking place. Evidence collected for the NVQ is examined at the progress review for suitability, but is not assessed directly against the occupational standards. The progress review record makes reference to the documents examined, but assessment decisions are not recorded at this time. Learners' portfolio record sheets are not updated to show continued achievement towards the NVQ and assessment is not continuous throughout the training programme. Assessment plans are not used for the assessment of portfolio's of evidence until all the evidence is collected for the full NVQ.

14. Learners are making slow progress towards the completion of their apprenticeship frameworks. A high proportion are achieving NVQs, but few have achieved the full range of qualifications which are included in their training programmes. Of those who started the advanced modern apprenticeship in 1997-98, 85 per cent achieved an NVQ at level 2, but only 15 per cent completed their apprenticeship frameworks. No data are available for those completing the foundation modern apprenticeship framework, as SIGTA Ltd has only been offering them during the contract period 1999-2000. There is a good retention rate for foundation modern apprentices, 73 per cent of those joining a foundation

modern apprenticeship programme in the past two years remain in training.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

15. SIGTA Ltd has an equal opportunities policy which makes reference to discrimination, harassment, complaints and grievances. A copy of the policy is given to members of staff when they join the company and to learners during the induction process. The grievance and harassment procedures are explained in detail at induction. Overall responsibility for the policy lies with the chief executive. It is reviewed annually and the findings are presented to the board of directors as part of the company's annual management review. Advertisements for new staff and learners include a statement of commitment to equal opportunities. Some staff have undertaken training in equal opportunities. Data about gender, ethnic origin and disability are recorded when learners join a training programme. This information is used to gain an overall picture of participation. There are two women in training. There are no learners from minority ethnic groups or with a disability. SIGTA Ltd makes use of awarding bodies' recruitment material and produces a small amount of its own marketing literature. In the main marketing leaflet, the company states its commitment to equal opportunities.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

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

16. Since the original inspection, SIGTA Ltd has taken action to widen participation by developing its links with schools and careers service staff, and this is now a strength. The company has introduced an equal opportunities question into a feedback questionnaire for learners and a customer satisfaction questionnaire for employers. The monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices remains inadequate and many learners have a poor understanding of equal opportunities issues. SIGTA Ltd gave an overall grade for leadership and management in its self-assessment action plan and did not give a separate grade for equal opportunities.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of training opportunities to under-represented groups
- ◆ good access for learners with mobility difficulties

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no promotion of equal opportunities to employers and learners

◆ inadequate training for staff

17. SIGTA Ltd's recruitment officer has developed links with educational partnerships and local schools and colleges. Training officers are involved with a neighbourhood scheme where engineering organisations often advise on engineering careers. The recruitment officer has made presentations on engineering careers and training to all-girl secondary schools and to a secondary school where 30 per cent of students are from minority ethnic groups. This has increased the number of applications from young women and members of minority ethnic groups. Since January 2001, five prospective learners from minority ethnic groups have attended initial assessments and interviews. This compares to one application in 1999 and none in 2000. One young woman has attended for assessments and interviews in 2000 and three have made applications in the past six months.

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

19. SIGTA Ltd's policies and procedures for equal opportunities are poor. The company's equal opportunities policy states that it is committed to a policy of non-discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and disability. There are no detailed policies and procedures in place to deal with discrimination and the policy document makes no reference to current legislation. The policy is reviewed regularly, but the review does not lead to changes to incorporate any new legislation. There are no procedures which relate to recruitment of staff or learners. The policy statements on sex discrimination and harassment only cover job applications and harassment in the company's office. There is no reference to discrimination in the learners' workplace. The policy contains some inappropriate comments.

20. SIGTA Ltd does not actively promote equal opportunities to employers or learners, but it does include a question about equal opportunities in its questionnaires to employers and learners. The questionnaires ask employers if they have an equal opportunities policy and learners if they are aware of their employer's policy. Analysis of employers' questionnaires revealed that 14 of the 49 companies who completed the questionnaires did not have an equal opportunities policy. SIGTA Ltd has sent letters to some of these employers, but it has not been reinforced by more active promotion or routine checks on employers' practices. Learners complete the questionnaires during progress reviews, but their understanding is not reinforced after induction, or checked while they are in training. Equal opportunities is not raised by training officers at each progress review to reinforce learners' understanding, or to check whether they have been treated unfairly. Many learners have little or no knowledge of the policy or its aims and have a poor understanding of equal opportunities and the consequences

of poor practice. For example, one learner had placed an inappropriate poster in his workplace. He had not received any guidance on what might constitute harassment to others in this situation and the problem had not been raised with the company. However, some learners have received further training in equal opportunities from their employers and are aware of additional problems such as age discrimination.

21. There is insufficient staff training in equal opportunities. There is no analysis of staff development needs arising from their roles in the recruitment and selection of companies and learners, the training and support of learners and the management of staff. Senior staff were trained in the provision and assurance of equality of opportunity some years ago, but changes in legislation mean that their information is now out of date. Three members of staff have undergone a computer-based training programme which gives a general introduction to equality of opportunity. However, this does not give specific guidance on the problems which training officers would find in a training environment, in particular among employers and in the workplace. There has been no evaluation of the effectiveness of the training in increasing the staff's knowledge or in changing attitudes and practices.

Trainee support

Grade 3

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

STRENGTHS

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

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of initial assessment

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

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

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

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

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

27. Trainees' reviews are inconsistent. In some cases, the employer is present and

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

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

Management of training

Grade 3

29. The company is managed by a chief executive who reports to a board of non-executive directors drawn from the association's member companies. The chief executive is responsible for the overall management of the company and reports to the directors each month. The day-to-day management of the training staff is the responsibility of the general manager. SIGTA Ltd employs 15 staff in addition to the chief executive and they have an annual appraisal. SIGTA Ltd has a written agreement with each company employing a learner which specifies the responsibilities for training. Training officers visit employers to give advice, to review learners' progress and to assess in the workplace. Off-the-job training is either subcontracted to a college, or is undertaken by the employer.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

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

30. SIGTA Ltd has made good progress towards rectifying many of the weaknesses which were identified at the original inspection. Communication with employers has improved and is now a strength. The company has introduced a detailed individual learning plan to support the planning and co-ordination of training. The planning of assessment activities has improved but still lacks effective co-ordination. SIGTA Ltd has also improved the retention and achievement rates. SIGTA Ltd gave a single grade for leadership and management in its self-assessment action plan, but did not identify strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by SIGTA Ltd.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed organisational changes
- ◆ good external communications

- ◆ particularly effective management of training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor communication of company's strategic aims to staff
- ◆ no specific focus on training
- ◆ some ineffective staff development

GOOD PRACTICE

SIGTA Ltd's training centre co-ordinator arranged for an external verifier to give a presentation on the new engineering standards to SIGTA's staff and representatives from the colleges responsible for the off-the-job training. A follow-up session has been arranged to review progress and understanding and to discuss any problems which are associated with training and assessment.

31. The company has been successful in introducing a new management structure which has now been in place for five months. The appointment of a general manager who is responsible for the team of training officers and the introduction of staff meetings each month has resulted in more effective planning and co-ordination of training. Functions and responsibilities are clearly described in job descriptions and the structure is understood by all staff. Employers also understand the roles of different members of staff. Internal lines of communication and responsibility are clear and enable administrative staff to refer learners to the appropriate person. They also ensure that employers and learners have a single point of reference for each stage of the training process.

32. Communications between SIGTA Ltd, employers and colleges are frequent and effective. A comprehensive set of guidelines on work-based learning is given to companies when they join the association. The guidelines are clearly written and outline the roles of the training provider and the employer in areas such as induction, assessment, progress reviews and health and safety. There is also clear guidance on the frameworks for NVQ training and modern apprenticeships. Training officers make regular visits to colleges and to companies to monitor the learners' progress. They give advice on matching college programmes to learners' and employers' needs and work closely with employers to resolve problems as they arise. Employers report that they are given accurate and helpful information about learners' progress and advice and guidance on wider areas of training.

33. The training process is well managed. The company has detailed recruitment, selection and work placement procedures to ensure that learners are placed with appropriate employers and are following an appropriate qualification. Training officers, in collaboration with workplace managers, produce clearly structured, detailed individual learning plans for each learner which outlines the tasks and responsibilities of the company, the training to be provided by SIGTA Ltd and the arrangements for monitoring progress. They help to negotiate suitable off-the-job training at colleges which meets employers' and learners' needs. The company has improved the management of key skills training in the past year by arranging staff development, giving key skills training sessions and the early introduction of key skills training in training programmes.

34. Staff are committed to SIGTA Ltd's aims and values and receive information about the targets for government-funded training programmes. They do not receive enough information about the company's strategic aims and priorities to ensure a broad understanding of the company's direction and development. They are not all aware of SIGTA Ltd's key business issues or of their role in meeting the key

business targets. Decisions taken by senior management and the board of directors are not always effectively communicated and shared. A monthly team meeting for training officers has recently been introduced to improve channels of communication. Staff member's suggestions intended to improve the experiences of learners, are welcomed by managers and staff value the opportunity to contribute to the development of SIGTA Ltd.

35. SIGTA Ltd does not have a specific focus on training. It does not have an up-to-date business plan which sets objectives for all aspects of training activities. They produce a list of key business targets each year, but there is no operational strategy with measurable targets and few of the key business targets relate to the training of young people. The company does not identify priorities, analyse the resources required to meet targets, or agree action points to indicate how targets will be achieved and who will be responsible for them. Actions which are identified in the self-assessment action plan are not translated into business targets.

36. SIGTA Ltd has arranged training for staff involved in teaching key skills, to deal with identified weaknesses. This staff development initiative has not led to improved practices on the part of all staff and inconsistencies remain. Some learners are still told that they do not need to gather evidence for key skills until they complete their NVQ framework, and one learner, who has completed two years of training, has not yet begun key skills training. These inconsistencies hinder the progress of learners.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

37. It is SIGTA Ltd's policy to ensure that quality assurance arrangements cover all areas of its training operations, and the company has a quality manager. The quality policy statement and mission statement are well presented and displayed in the reception area. The organisation achieved the Investors in People standard in April 1999. The company has held the ISO 9002 quality assurance accreditation since 1991. Procedures for training and assessment activities follow lead-body guidelines. The policy and procedures are internally audited on a regular basis. Sussex Enterprise CCTE completed a quality audit in 1999 which found that contractual quality assurance requirements were met. A statistical analysis of trainees' achievement data was completed in February 2000. SIGTA Ltd conducted its first self-assessment in May 1999, produced an updated version in September 1999, and completed a second updated version in February 2000. The chief executive and quality manager took responsibility for the report supported by members of the training team. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report and identified further weaknesses and strengths. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-maintained and distributed procedures

- ◆ focus groups on quality issues
- ◆ positive action as a result of self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

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

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

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

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

41. Trainees are invited to complete a satisfaction form at the end of their induction programme. Apart from this, SIGTA Ltd does not systematically seek the views of trainees on the quality of their training. There is an appeals procedure, but trainees are not reminded that it is available. A questionnaire was issued to trainees in 1998. However, the questions asked were not well designed, the responses were not well analysed and no action was taken as a result of the questionnaire. The company does not seek the views of employers on the quality of training provided. Customer complaints are held on file and an analysis completed. All complaints are addressed and responses recorded.

42. Procedures for the internal verification of NVQs are not consistently applied. Internal verification visits to interview trainees during the NVQ programmes do not occur regularly enough. There are inconsistencies in the provision of feedback to assessors. Feedback records have not been completed in many cases. Assessors and verifiers tend to work to their own preferred methods and there is little sharing

of good practice. Internal verification is left to the end of the programme in most cases. Most trainees interviewed were unaware of the verification process and did not know who was to act as their internal verifier.