

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION
REPORT APRIL 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
AUGUST 2001

Sunderland Engineering Training Association Limited



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 Sunderland Engineering Training Association Limited was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in a less than satisfactory grade being awarded for management of training. This area has 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 section of the original report dealing with management of training has 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).

Sunderland Engineering Training Association Limited provides good training in a variety of engineering disciplines. Excellent work placements and a well-resourced training centre contribute to the high standard of training. Learners are well supported throughout their training programme with frequent visits to work placements by Sunderland Engineering Training Association Limited's staff. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively with a particular focus on under-represented groups. No analysis of equal opportunities information is carried out by Sunderland Engineering Training Association Limited. The company shows a strong commitment to staff development. At the time of the original inspection there was a lack of written management procedures and little monitoring of the subcontracted work carried out by further education colleges. Management procedures are now fully documented and recorded. There are written agreements with all further education colleges, but monitoring arrangements have not yet been established. The lack of a staff appraisal system and written subcontractual agreements were found to be key weaknesses in the original inspection. These are no longer key weaknesses. Quality assurance policies and procedures are comprehensive, although they have not yet lead to continuous improvement.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high retention and achievement rates of learners
- ◆ good-quality training resources
- ◆ high rates of employment among learners
- ◆ good targeting of under-represented groups
- ◆ high levels of support for learners
- ◆ strong commitment to staff development
- ◆ good staff involvement in quality assurance procedures
- ◆ frequent site visits in support of learners

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak internal verification practices in the workplace
- ◆ no initial assessment of basic skills
- ◆ little assessment by observation in the workplace

INTRODUCTION

1. Sunderland Engineering Training Association Ltd (SETA) is a group training association with 45 member companies. Established in Sunderland in 1965, SETA moved to Washington in 1975 to establish its own training centre. A move to the current site was completed in 1979. A board of four directors, consisting of local employers, oversees the running of SETA. The training centre in Washington is also the organisation's head office. SETA has been involved in government-funded training initiatives since 1976. The organisation had continued to grow and at the time of the original inspection employed 15 full-time and three part-time staff. SETA currently employs 12 full-time and three part-time staff. Training is offered to learners following engineering modern apprenticeships in mechanical, electrical and maintenance engineering and fabrication and welding. SETA had a contract with Sunderland City Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide the modern apprenticeship programmes. The contract for providing advanced modern apprenticeships is now with Tyne and Wear Learning and Skills Council (LSC). A number of further education colleges are used by SETA to provide the theory knowledge and other vocational training that is required by the modern apprenticeship framework. SETA provides a variety of adult training programmes for its member companies and other organisations. Government-funded training accounts for 50 per cent of SETA's total business on an annual basis. At the time of the original inspection there were 172 learners on government-funded training programmes. When the reinspection took place, there were 126 learners on government-funded training programmes.

2. At the time of the original inspection, the unemployment rate in the Sunderland area was 6.8 per cent, compared with a national average of 3.9 per cent. The unemployment rate when SETA was reinspected was 6.3 per cent, compared with a national average of 3.4 per cent. The city of Sunderland is the largest of the five local authorities which make up the Tyne and Wear district. The total population of Sunderland is currently 292,000. Over the past 20 years, Sunderland has experienced a restructuring of its economy with a move away from traditional industries to commerce and public services. The major growth area for employment over the last five years has been in the call centre and customer service sector. There is a strong engineering presence servicing the needs of the automotive products sector. The largest concentration of people in the area is in the city of Sunderland. Minority ethnic groups currently make up around 1 per cent of the local population.

3. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 34.6 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, these proportions had risen to 38.4 per cent and 49.2 per cent, respectively. In the Sunderland area in 1999, 55.7 per cent of 16 year olds remained in full-time education and 25.1 per cent went into work-based training. In 2000, 54.1 per cent remained in full-time

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education and 17 per cent entered work-based training. There are other training providers in the area which compete with SETA and there are also employer-based training centres offering engineering training.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. SETA started the self-assessment process in June 1999, having previously attended a presentation on self-assessment organised by the local TEC. The chief executive co-ordinated the production of the self-assessment report. All staff contributed to the process and the views of both learners and employers were collected. The TEC was consulted and offered advice on certain aspects of the self-assessment report. Inspectors considered many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with weaknesses identified by the company. The inspection grades matched the self-assessment grades except for management of training which was awarded a lower grade by inspectors.

5. The current self-assessment report was produced in May 2001. All staff received a copy and were able to comment on it. Inspectors identified three of the strengths given in the self-assessment report but found some others to be no more than normal practice. SETA identified no weaknesses in its self-assessment report but inspectors identified one weakness which was related to a weakness in the original report.

6. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at SETA during April 2000. Inspectors examined learners' portfolios of evidence and personal files, achievement and retention rates and company documents and awarding bodies' information. They examined TEC contracts and audits and agreements with employers. Inspectors observed national vocational qualification (NVQ) assessments and off-the-job training in both the SETA training centre and the local colleges. Inspectors interviewed 58 learners, 16 employers and work-based supervisors, and conducted 28 staff interviews. Interviews were carried out with eight college staff and five training sessions were observed. One NVQ assessment and one progress review were observed.

7. At reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of six days at SETA during August 2001. They carried out nine interviews with SETA's staff and three college staff. Two workplaces were visited and two workplace supervisors were interviewed. A total of 11 learners were interviewed in the workplace. Information from the awarding body and the local LSC were examined, as were learners' portfolios of evidence and personal files.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

8. SETA operates a group training scheme for engineering and manufacturing companies within the Northeast of England. Contracted to Sunderland City TEC they offer modern apprenticeships leading to an NVQ at levels 2 and 3. Training is carried out in mechanical, electrical/electronic, maintenance and fabrication, and welding disciplines. Applicants for training are given psychometric tests and an interview. The training programme comprises two distinct processes, foundation training and workplace training. Successful applicants attend SETA's training centre for an engineering foundation course. Achievement of an NVQ at level 2 occurs during this period. All trainees have employed status. Trainees either find employment themselves or through SETA's recruitment and selection service. Training and assessment for level 3 NVQ are carried out within the employers' premises. The company's supervisors and technicians provide the training. SETA's staff carry out assessments and visit trainees within the workplace at defined intervals. Progress reviews are carried out at this time. There are currently 172 trainees taking the modern apprenticeship programmes. Currently, 32 trainees are taking foundation training and 140 are in work placements. Further education qualifications are achieved by attendance at one of the five subcontracted colleges used by SETA. Trainees attend college on a day-release basis. There has been an 82 per cent achievement rate over the past three years for NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The company cited most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. Some of the strengths and weaknesses did not relate to the engineering training but related to generic areas of work. Action plans have been developed to rectify the weaknesses, with target dates for their completion. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

In one exercise in the key skills unit application of number, trainees were given the results of responses to trainees' questionnaires from previous intakes of apprentices. Trainees analysed the data for mean, median and mode for the responses then presented the data in pie chart, bar chart and pictogram formats. Trainees understood the practical reasons for collecting data, the types of analysis which were undertaken and the appropriate methods of presenting data for different purposes.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality training resources
- ◆ well-structured foundation training programme
- ◆ excellent workplace training
- ◆ high standard of portfolio work
- ◆ high achievement and retention rates
- ◆ high employment rates among trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little assessment by observation in the workplace
- ◆ low awareness of key skills by trainees in the workplace

9. There is a selection process for all applicants. Interviews are held and initial assessment of trainees' key skills is carried out together with the testing of their

basic numeracy and literacy. Employers refer recruited trainees to SETA. The foundation training occurs over a period of 40 weeks within SETA's training centre. Trainees complete a four-day induction at the start of the programme. The induction is well planned and includes information about the course administration. Health and safety principles and practices, the NVQ process and qualification routes are covered in depth during induction. The foundation programme requires trainees to complete five core units and six technical units of the NVQ at level 2. Some accreditation of prior achievement takes place when individuals' training programmes are planned. An innovative approach to the teaching of key skills is introduced during the foundation training programme with trainees taking responsibility for gathering and presenting evidence.

10. Training in the centre involves trainees working in groups. Each group is trained on particular engineering practices for five weeks. Engineering practices include milling, turning, basic computer numerical control (CNC) processes, bench fitting, electronic and electrical assembly and basic welding processes. There are good resources within the training centre. Resources are plentiful and allow each trainee ample opportunities for access. The training programme for the foundation period is well structured. Training objectives are clear and are recorded on the staff's training plans. An individual form is used to monitor each trainee's progress through the respective areas. Weak performance or slow progress can be identified and action taken. On completion of each process SETA's tutor carries out an assessment of competence for each individual trainee. Trainees complete each of the units for the level 2 NVQ and then carry out a further five weeks of specialised training. This gives the trainees experience of engineering practices which they will encounter during their employment period. Trainees are given more complex tasks to perform and are encouraged to work with minimal supervision. SETA's staff are available to provide guidance and to maintain a monitoring function particularly with regard to health and safety compliance. All trainees have appropriate personal protective equipment.

11. Trainees attend college on a day-release basis. Facilities within the colleges are good. There is good use of simulation coupled with practical tasks. Trainees are completing ordinary national certificates (ONCs) and higher national certificates (HNCs) and other qualifications. The units of the NVQ selected within the trainees' action plan are decided by the employer and SETA's management. This ensures that the qualifications are relevant to employment. Trainees themselves have little input to this selection process as employers have predetermined requirements.

12. There are excellent work environments within the group of companies. Trainees in the workplace are trained by supervisors or by engineers employed by the company. Engineers break down tasks into manageable units and provide training in practical applications and theory. The employers are committed to providing a variety of training opportunities. Evidence from daily tasks is collected by trainees. There is good development of portfolios, both within SETA's training centre and the workplace. Several types of evidence are used including witness

testimony, photographic evidence and worksheets. Trainees are informed of their progress during regular monitoring visits at which actions and objectives are set for the following visit.

13. Assessment within the workplace is carried out by SETA's staff. The practice of workplace assessment relies heavily on witness testimony from workplace supervisors. There is little assessment by observation carried out by SETA's assessment staff. Trainees within the workplace have made little progression towards gathering key skills evidence. They have poor awareness of the requirements for integrating evidence into naturally occurring work activities. In some instances, trainees have almost completed the modern apprenticeship programme but have not begun the key skills units. SETA has designed an action plan to address this situation.

14. Over the past three years, the trainees' retention and achievement rate on the level 2 and 3 NVQs has been high. Some 86 per cent of trainees were retained on the programmes with 82 per cent achieving a qualification. All of the trainees who have qualified in the past year have remained in employment on completion of the training programme.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

15. SETA has an equal opportunities policy which is current and updated regularly. All trainees and staff are introduced to equal opportunities at their initial induction. Senior management takes responsibility for the implementation and promotion of equality of opportunity. Employers are made aware of their responsibility to ensure that everyone receives fair and equal treatment. Minority ethnic groups constitute 1 per cent of the local population. There are currently no minority ethnic trainees on training programmes. SETA has facilities for people with disabilities and has access for wheelchair users. No trainees who are registered as disabled are currently on training programmes and there are no women on training programmes. The company has a written complaints procedure. The self-assessment report identified two strengths with which inspectors agreed but other strengths identified by the company were seen by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Two weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report. One was considered by inspectors to belong in another generic area, inspectors did not agree with another one and inspectors identified two additional weaknesses. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ active targeting of under-represented groups
- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring and analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ lack of staff training in equal opportunities awareness

16. SETA has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which is given to all trainees as part of the induction process. Staff are also introduced to the policy as part of their initial induction. There is good promotion of equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy is displayed in the reception area and at other relevant points throughout the building. The chief executive has responsibility for ensuring that the policy is updated regularly and that the organisation subscribes to a national publication which specialises in employment law and issues regular updates. The training agreement which employers sign when initially employing a trainee identifies that all individuals should be treated fairly and there should be no form of discrimination. The trainees' application forms identify the organisation's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity.

17. Trainees' induction includes issues concerning equal opportunities, grievances, complaints and harassment and also identifies the organisation's policy on bullying and intimidation. Trainees are introduced to the latest legislation regarding disability and harassment. SETA also has a policy on fairness and equality in training. A post-induction questionnaire is issued to all trainees and their level of understanding of equal opportunities is tested. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is monitored at the review stage. Advertisements for the recruitment of staff and trainees carry equal opportunities messages and invite applications from all sections of the community. SETA has a comprehensive complaints procedure which allows for the recording of all complaints, the recording of actions and the ability to identify any emerging trends. The training centre is easily accessible to people in wheelchairs with good access to the ground floor workshops and classroom facilities. A toilet for people with disabilities has recently been installed in the training centre and the corridors provide ease of movement around the ground floor of the building.

18. SETA actively encourages under-represented groups to consider a career in engineering and targets the recruitment of women into what is traditionally a male-dominated occupational sector. One female trainee who completed a modern apprenticeship in engineering in 1999 has been used as a role model by both the organisation and the local TEC. She was the first trainee to complete a modern apprenticeship with SETA. When SETA receives an application from a woman the chief executive sends a personal letter of encouragement to the prospective trainee and encloses a copy of a newspaper article which featured the successful female modern apprentice. Schools are encouraged to visit SETA and pupils spend a full day on the premises. Particular attention is paid to any women who express an interest in joining engineering training programmes. The local careers service visits SETA for 'appreciation days' and a particular emphasis is given to encouraging women into engineering. Prospective trainees from minority ethnic groups are encouraged to apply by both schools and the careers service.

19. Currently, there is no monitoring of equal opportunities information which relates to the recruitment of staff or trainees. Information on ethnicity, gender or disability is not collected to influence future recruitment. Although staff are conscious of equal opportunities, no staff have received formal training in equal opportunities awareness. Two staff members were due to attend an awareness-raising session which was organised by the TEC in 1999 but this was cancelled.

Trainee support

Grade 2

20. SETA operates an engineering training scheme for local companies which belong to its group training association. Potential trainees who are interested in an engineering career either contact SETA directly or are referred by companies. Companies are approached to determine the overall demand for trainees for a forthcoming intake. On application or referral from a company, trainees are sent an application form and details of the scheme. All applicants undergo initial aptitude tests. These are normally held at SETA but occasionally are conducted at employers' premises. Employers select potential apprentices using the results of these tests and by interview. All trainees are employed from the start of their training programme. Most trainees spend the first week of employment at their company before starting the training at SETA. A general induction period covers the first four days at SETA. Trainees spend five weeks in each engineering section and receive a specific induction there in addition to the general induction. Trainees' progress is recorded when they change sections. Assessment of trainees' work at level 2 NVQ is carried out at the end of the placement on each section. In subsequent years of training, when trainees are working towards their level 3 NVQ, all assessment is work based. Progress reviews are carried out periodically by SETA's staff throughout the training. The self-assessment report identified three strengths but failed to identify any of the other strengths or any of the weaknesses which were noted by the inspectors. One weakness which was included in the self-assessment report applied to another generic area. The grade awarded by the inspectors was the same as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective recruitment procedures
- ◆ well-planned induction programme
- ◆ frequent workplace support visits by staff
- ◆ effective recognition of trainees' prior achievements
- ◆ high level of personal support
- ◆ good access by trainees to additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of basic skills
- ◆ no use of individual training plans to set intermediate targets
- ◆ little involvement of employers in review process

21. Potential trainees are required to take a series of psychometric tests which determine their suitability for engineering training. Their numeracy, mechanical and abstract reasoning skills are tested. Employers are approached by SETA in order to determine the number of trainees and the engineering disciplines that are required by each employer. On completion of the tests, companies are sent a detailed short list of the successful applicants with their selection test results and application details. The list is based on the companies' demands, the aspirations of the applicants and the proximity of the company to the applicants' home. Companies interview and select the trainees who are acceptable to them. The small number of trainees who leave the programme early reflects the effectiveness of the selection procedure.

GOOD PRACTICE

After an introduction to manual lifting techniques in the induction session, trainees undertake an exercise which involves moving a table around the building, up and down stairs and around many corners. It is regarded by the trainees as a humorous activity but it is good practice as it combines leadership, planning and manual lifting skills, in addition to being a highly successful team building exercise.

22. The induction of new trainees into SETA is carried out over a period of four days in SETA's training centre. It is well planned and trainees receive a copy of the induction timetable at the start of the week. The induction is comprehensive and covers administration details, first aid, health and safety, appeal procedures, SETA's equal opportunities policy, prohibited activities and manual lifting techniques. At the same time, trainees are introduced to the centre's staff and receive details of the NVQ system. On completion of the induction process trainees complete a questionnaire. In addition to their three-monthly progress reviews, a member of SETA's staff visits trainees in the workplace on a monthly basis. Trainees value these additional visits. They receive help in the development of their portfolios and general support and encouragement. Many trainees also receive a personal action plan to help them make progress in their NVQ.

23. Trainees who have successfully completed key skills on GNVQ programmes are credited with relevant key skill units in their individual training plans. Trainees who have already completed identical work at level 2 NVQ are also credited for their prior achievement. In one instance a trainee with a level 2 NVQ remained at his employer's place of work gaining valuable experience until the group had advanced to the trainee's level. The trainee then rejoined the group. While accreditation of prior achievement is given there is no formal accreditation of trainees' prior learning.

24. The organisation adopts a caring and supportive attitude towards trainees. Recently, a trainee's young child was in hospital. On three occasions, the chief executive drove the trainee to hospital to be with the child. On another occasion a trainee lost nine weeks of training owing to a broken limb. A special programme was arranged for the trainee, which enabled the trainee to catch up with the rest of the group.

25. Many trainees are studying for higher qualifications which are in excess of that demanded by the modern apprentice framework. Some employers regularly sponsor trainees who have completed their framework qualification to enable them to study for a degree. After starting training trainees undergo a comprehensive assessment to determine their level of entry on the key skills programme. There is no written initial assessment of basic skills. Consequently, any shortfall in a specific area of basic skills may not be detected. A trainee cannot therefore receive any additional support or training to rectify any learning difficulties. This is of particular importance in literacy. Trainees with basic numeracy skills have difficulty passing the aptitude test and hence are filtered out before they enter training.

26. The individual training plan for each trainee contains completion dates that are not specific to the trainee. The plans show that trainees finish all level 2 NVQ units at the end of their first year of training. All level 3 units and key skills units are scheduled to be completed at the end of the modern apprenticeship. In reality trainees complete their unit training in stages during their level 2 programme and complete their key skills two years in advance of the completion date given in the plan. Consequently, it is not possible to compare trainees' actual progress with that scheduled in their training plan.

27. Trainees are formally reviewed in the workplace every 12 weeks. The review normally takes place without the trainees' employer present and, in most cases, the involvement of the employer is minimal. The employer receives a copy of the review. There is no place on the review form for the employer to show that courses of action between reviews have been agreed on with the employer.

Management of training

Grade 2

28. At the time of the original inspection, SETA employed 15 full-time and three part-time staff. SETA currently employs 12 full-time and three part-time staff. The management structure is fully understood by all staff. A team of managers and co-ordinators reports directly to the chief executive. The board of directors and the chief executive meet every three months. The workshop instructors report to the works manager. At the time of the original inspection, staff turnover was low. Since that time, six staff members have left the organisation, one has rejoined in a more senior position and four new members of staff have been recruited. Some staff have worked for the organisation for over 20 years. All staff are based at the Washington training centre. The group training adviser has overall responsibility for all learners in the workplace and the works manager is responsible for all learners who attend the training centre. Staff are recruited both from within and outside the company. All vacancies are advertised in the local press. The self-assessment report identified one of the strengths. Other strengths included in the report related to other generic areas. The main weaknesses in the management of

training were identified but had been allocated to other generic areas. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than the grade in the self-assessment report.

At the original inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of written communications
- ◆ no written contracts with subcontracted further education colleges
- ◆ lack of targets and objectives in business plan
- ◆ no staff appraisal system

29. SETA has rectified the weaknesses identified at the original inspection through a well-managed action-planning process. Written communications are now good and meetings are minuted. The business plan is detailed and targets and objectives are reviewed at monthly staff meetings. Staff now receive a regular appraisal of their performance. Subcontractual arrangements are still not strong but written agreements are now in place. The inspection grade matched the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ innovative teaching of key skills at foundation level
- ◆ effective monitoring of learners
- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ good targets and objectives in business plan
- ◆ good staff appraisal system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of established subcontractual arrangements

30. All staff have job descriptions and are aware of their roles and responsibilities. SETA is committed to staff development. For example, some of the management team were originally appointed as instructors. New staff follow a comprehensive induction programme. All new staff have a mentor until they are confident in their jobs. Instructors have received their training and development awards with SETA and have been trained in instructional techniques. All instructors are able to obtain a formal teaching qualification. Managers undertake regular training to update their skills and to acquire new skills, particularly in information technology. An annual training request form is now circulated to all staff. A covering note states that all development requests should be in line with the individual's job role and the business development plan. Once agreed, the development activity forms part of SETA's staff development plan and the individual's personal development record. Current staff development is focused predominantly on developing the information technology skills of staff. The organisation is in the process of

installing a networked computer system with Internet access. At the time of the original inspection, there was no evaluation of staff training. Staff views are now collected on training in progress and training completed. This information is used to help improve and develop SETA's staff development plan.

31. The original foundation programme of 36 weeks has been extended by a further four weeks, at the request of SETA, to undertake key skills training. Learners analyse the engineering practices in the workshop and identify where evidence of key skills development can be collected. They present their findings to SETA's staff either in a written report or on a flipchart. Following the original inspection, key skills training is provided by three members of staff as part of a structured four-week course. This training finishes with a presentation by learners. In June 2001, administration staff and the chief executive attended this event. The staff who taught the key skills course stated that learners had benefited from a different type of training to that which they normally experienced in engineering workshop training. All learners who attended this course achieved key skills certification.

32. The company has introduced a highly effective monitoring system which quickly shows how learners are progressing. This is used for foundation learners in the company and learners in the workplace. Instructors use the information to plan training. If learners are not progressing satisfactorily, an action plan is devised by the learner and SETA's staff. The monitoring system has been used successfully since the original inspection.

33. At the time of the original inspection, there was a lack of written communications within SETA. Staff meetings were not held on a regular basis. Meetings which did take place involved only the management team. These meetings were minuted. At the time of the reinspection, the management team holds regular meetings. The chief executive encourages informal communication within the training centre and talks regularly to instructors and learners. Following the original inspection, there are now monthly meetings between the workshop manager and the instructors. Minutes of these meetings are distributed to relevant members of staff. The meetings are used mainly to exchange information and there is little opportunity to discuss action points and target dates. Instructors, however, value the meetings as a way of improving communications and getting information first-hand from managers. The chief executive has produced numerous newsletters on a range of subjects and distributed them to the staff to ensure that they are aware of developments in the company. A computer network is about to be installed in the training centre, providing each member of staff with e-mail facilities. The need for this was identified in the business plan. Training that staff will need to use the new system has been identified and recorded. SETA's management information systems are a mixture of manual and computer-based systems. Information is used to meet the contractual requirements of the local LSC. At the time of the original inspection, these systems were at an early stage of development. Following the original inspection, the computer-based system is now an essential part of the management information system and is used to produce

management reports and statistical data.

34. At the time of the original inspection, SETA's business development plan identified the strategic areas of the company's development but lacked overall objectives and targets. The individuals responsible for each strategic area were not identified. Staff did not contribute formally to the business planning process. SETA now has a detailed business plan which identifies seven specific areas for improvement covering aspects such as marketing, resources, quality assurance, communications and information technology. Targets for improvements are set and staff responsibilities are clearly laid out. The business plan and action plan are reviewed at monthly staff and management meetings, and more frequently if required. Staff are able to influence SETA's development and are consulted as a part of the business improvement process.

35. At the time of the original inspection, there was no staff appraisal system through which staff would have an opportunity to influence the company's development. Although staff were taking part in many training activities, there was no planning of staff development against business needs and objectives. A formal staff appraisal system has now been introduced by SETA and all staff have been appraised. The chief executive visited partner companies to collect information about best appraisal practice before devising SETA's appraisal system. Staff were informed of the appraisal system in a newsletter. The system and the reasons for its introduction were fully explained. Staff receive paperwork before the appraisal to help them to prepare for their appraisal meeting. The appraisal includes the setting of targets and objectives, confirmation of development needs in line with the company's business requirements and the measurement of individual's progress against business improvement targets. Staff are appraised at least annually and, if necessary, every six months.

36. At the time of the original inspection, there were no written contracts or service level agreements between SETA and the five colleges which provide the subcontracted further education. Six colleges are currently being used. Service level agreements have now been drawn up between SETA and each college. These took 12 months to complete. In spite of clauses in the agreement stating that colleges will provide SETA with weekly absence and student reports, difficulties have been experienced in getting this information. The agreements did not come in force until May 2001 and have consequently not been tested over a full academic year. There is, however, a strong commitment to ensuring the success of the agreements between SETA and the colleges. As evidence of the strengthened relationships, one of the colleges has given engineering machinery to SETA to carry out practical engineering training activities on behalf of the college. SETA has had no input into their learners' progress reviews and does not contribute to the college's quality assurance arrangements of the colleges. These two issues have not been addressed since the time of the original inspection. SETA does not receive from colleges the views of external moderators, or teaching observation data.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

37. An experienced quality assurance co-ordinator was appointed in 1999 to assist the chief executive. The self-assessment cycle has been completed twice in the last six months and the resulting action plans have been implemented. Some of the strengths given in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. The weakness described in the report refers to the limited time during which the new quality assurance process has been implemented. Inspectors identified other strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive detailed quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ full staff involvement in quality assurance systems
- ◆ high level of internal quality audit
- ◆ good self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic target-setting
- ◆ quality systems do not yet ensure continuous improvement
- ◆ weak internal verification in the workplace

38. SETA now has a comprehensive set of detailed quality assurance policies and procedures. Following a long period without any effective quality assurance procedures, SETA appointed a quality assurance co-ordinator last October as part of a reorganisation of its structure. Since then, new quality assurance procedures have been written. The policies and procedures were circulated in draft to all staff who were encouraged to suggest amendments. These comments were considered by the managers in the quality review meeting. Staff feel that they have contributed to the process and are familiar with it. The main quality assurance policy statement is prominently displayed in SETA's building.

39. Five training and assessment staff, including three internal verifiers, are designated as internal quality auditors. During February and March 2000, most of the new quality assurance procedures were audited. The audit results show only minor areas of weakness and action plans have been written to address them. In preparation for the inspection SETA carried out its second cycle of self-assessment. As with internal audit, the self-assessment process has become an integral part of the quality assurance process. The second report is noticeably better than the first. Both reports have been circulated in draft to all staff for comment. Its grading judgements are generally sound and inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in it.

40. SETA identified that there had been time so far for only partial implementation of the new quality assurance systems, with the result that, while improvements have been made, measures to secure continuous improvements in training have not been fully adapted across the company. The company does not set quality improvement targets for all its work. For example, the quality of the training and assessment at level 2 during the full-time foundation year is good. However, once trainees have completed the full-time foundation year and have achieved their level 2 NVQ, the company does not monitor the on-the-job training provided by the employer. SETA does not carry out any quality assurance of the trainees' day-release training in the colleges.

41. The internal verification of assessment at level 2 is rigorous. In the workplace assessment at level 3 is carried out by visiting assessors from SETA. Some workplaces have supervisors working towards the achievement of their assessor awards. SETA encourages this and provides the training. However, in some instances, progress is slow. Workplace supervisors working towards their assessor qualifications give witness testimony and observation evidence. A visiting assessor from SETA carries out the final assessment. The internal verification of workplace assessment at level 3 is less robust than at level 2. There is little monitoring of assessment practices in the workplace. Assessors are not systematically observed as they plan assessments, judge evidence, question trainees and give feedback.