

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
OCTOBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
NOVEMBER 2001

Rochdale 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 *learn direct* 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 Rochdale Training Association Limited was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for business administration, equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance. 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 business administration, equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance 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).

Rochdale Training Association Limited provides satisfactory training in engineering. Learners receive effective training at the training centre, at college and in the workplace. Since the original inspection, training in key skills has improved. Learners are now making faster progress towards the targets on their individual learning plans. At the time of the original inspection, training in business administration was less than satisfactory. Assessments were poorly planned and retention and achievement rates were low. Now, however, training in business administration is satisfactory. Although some aspects of assessment remain weak, the retention rate is high. Equal opportunities was less than satisfactory at the time of the original inspection, with no monitoring of employers or subcontractors' promotion of equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities is now satisfactory. Learners have a detailed understanding of equal opportunities. However, there is no monitoring of employers and subcontractors' application of equal opportunities policies. Learner support is satisfactory. The company accurately identifies learners' needs for additional learning support and is effective in helping unemployed learners to find work. Reviews of learners' progress have improved since the original inspection. At the original inspection, management of training was less than satisfactory. On- and off-the-job training were not linked and agreements with employers and subcontractors lacked detail. Now, however, management of training is satisfactory. Links between on- and off-the-job training have improved and internal and external communications are very effective. However, agreements with employers and subcontractors continue to lack detail. Quality assurance was less than satisfactory at the time of the original inspection. There was little use of data on learners' achievements and destinations, to make improvements to training, and there was no system for monitoring the quality of work-based learning. Quality assurance remains unsatisfactory. The company now uses data to guide improvements. However, monitoring of the quality of training remains inadequate and self-assessment is not linked with other mechanisms to assure quality.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Business administration	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Business administration	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ detailed understanding of equal opportunities among learners
- ◆ effective assessment of additional learning needs
- ◆ good additional learning support
- ◆ very effective communications

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak assessment practices
- ◆ weak monitoring of employers and subcontractors' promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ ineffective arrangements with employers and subcontractors
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ weak links between self-assessment and other aspects of quality assurance

INTRODUCTION

1. Rochdale Training Association Limited (RTA) is a company and a registered charity. It was formed in 1984 from the merger of the Rochdale Engineering Group Training Association and the Rochdale Group Training Scheme. Both of these organisations were formed in 1967, as the result of the *Industrial Training Act 1964*, and provided training in engineering for small and medium-sized engineering companies within Rochdale.

2. At the time of the original inspection RTA worked with approximately 175 local companies, many of which employed learners only infrequently. RTA now works with 70 employers. Of these, 32 pay an annual subscription to be members of RTA. All the employers regularly employ, or provide work placements for, new learners in engineering and business administration. At the time of the original inspection, RTA contracted with Rochdale Borough Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) to provide modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other work-based learning for young people and adults. It now contracts with Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC), to provide advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships in the occupational areas of engineering and business administration. At the time of the original inspection, RTA had 163 learners in engineering, of whom 119 were employed, and 28 learners in business administration, all of whom were employed. By the time of the reinspection, RTA had fewer learners, as a result of various changes. The company had lost its contract to provide training for adults. It had lost funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) for training in engineering and it had been recruiting fewer learners in business administration, while it was rectifying the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. It also had no contract with the local LSC to provide training towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) for unemployed young people. RTA currently has 99 learners in engineering, of whom 86 are employed. It has seven learners in business administration, of whom six are employed.

3. RTA has a management board of eight directors/trustees, who are elected from the member companies. At the time of the original inspection, RTA had 16 full-time and four part-time staff. Since the original inspection, RTA has changed its staffing structure. Currently, it has 13 full-time staff and one part-time member of staff. The company also uses five consultants, who assist with assessment and internal verification, quality assurance, and training in information technology (IT) for learners and staff. Learners in engineering attend RTA's training centre full time during the first year of their training. After the first year, they begin employment or work placements and attend one of two local colleges on a block-release basis. Learners in business administration attend RTA's training centre for the first eight weeks of their training. After this, they attend the training centre on a day-release basis for training in key skills and help with portfolio-building. The rest of their training takes place in the workplace.

4. Rochdale Metropolitan Borough is one of 10 districts which make up Greater Manchester. In 1999, the borough had a total population of 208,000. This has now grown to 210,800. At the time of the original inspection, the rate of unemployment in Rochdale was 5.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. By September 2001, the rate had fallen to 4.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.9 per cent. During the 1980s, employment in Rochdale's previously dominant textile, engineering and manufacturing industries declined, while employment in the service sector and distribution rose. However, the number of jobs in the service sector increased by only 9 per cent, compared with the national average of 16 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups has remained at approximately 7.9 per cent for the past three years. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 37.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 2001, 40.4 per cent of school leavers achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, compared with the national average of 50.0 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. RTA completed its first self-assessment report in May 2000. The CCTE provided training and support to help RTA prepare for the original inspection. In addition, RTA's chief executive and training manager attended a training event held by the Training Standards Council. RTA did not fully involve employers and learners in its first self-assessment. During self-assessment, the company made little use of data and statistics to identify trends. The self-assessment report identified a large number of strengths which inspectors did not agree with. In April 2001, the company produced an action plan to rectify the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. RTA produced its second self-assessment report in September 2001. Two members of staff attended a conference organised by the Adult Learning Inspectorate. RTA involved all staff in its second self-assessment and used feedback from learners and employers. However, the action plan which accompanied the second self-assessment report, referred to the findings of the original inspection. It did not include steps to build on newly identified strengths or rectify newly identified weaknesses.

6. For the original inspection, a team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at RTA during October 2000. They interviewed RTA's managers, five trainers, two assessors and 30 learners. They observed five progress reviews and one assessment, and observed and graded eight lessons. Inspectors visited 14 work placements and interviewed employers' staff. They also interviewed the course leader for engineering at one of the subcontracted colleges. Inspectors examined RTA's agreements with its subcontractors, the company's procedures for assessment, learners' files and portfolios, information about staff qualifications, and details of management and quality assurance arrangements.

7. For the reinspection, a team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at RTA in November 2001. Inspectors examined a wide range of documents and records. They studied RTA's new equal opportunities policy and its new arrangements with its subcontractors. They interviewed RTA's managers, four trainers, two assessors in business administration, one assessor in engineering, 15 learners, and the course leader for engineering at one of the subcontracted colleges. They also visited eight work placements and interviewed employers' staff. Inspectors observed two progress reviews and two assessments and observed and graded three lessons. They examined 18 learners' files and 10 portfolios of evidence. Inspectors found that RTA had rectified two weaknesses in engineering which had been identified at the original inspection, which were inadequate key skills training and slow progress towards the targets on individual learning plans. These no longer appear as weaknesses in the summary. However, they remain as weaknesses in the text for engineering, which was outside the scope of the reinspection. They also found that the company had rectified the inadequacy of learners' progress reviews, which had been identified as a weakness at the original inspection. This no longer appears as a weakness in the summary. However, it

remains as a weakness in learner support which was outside the scope of the reinspection.

Grades awarded to lessons at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering		7	1			8
Total	0	7	1	0	0	8

Grades awarded to lessons at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration			3			3
Total	0	0	3	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

8. RTA offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training in engineering production, engineering maintenance, fabrication and welding, electrical engineering and engineering design. There are 163 trainees. Ninety are modern apprentices of whom three are on the new advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Forty-nine trainees are national trainees, nine of whom are foundation modern apprentices, and 24 are on other training. RTA is based in a purpose-built training centre near the centre of Rochdale. The centre has an engineering workshop, a number of lecture rooms, computer training rooms and administration offices. The engineering workshop has facilities for training in milling, turning, fabrication and welding, fitting, electrical engineering and electronics. The workshop also has an area for training in spring manufacture, still an important local industry. There are five instructors in the workshop. All have training qualifications and are qualified as assessors. The chief instructor and two of the training officers are qualified internal verifiers. Most trainees spend the first year of their training at the training centre working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering foundation at level 2. The remaining trainees attend RTA's centre on a day-release or block-release basis. All training and assessment at level 2 takes place at the training centre. After the first year, trainees complete their training with their employer or with a work-placement provider, working towards the remaining qualifications on their individual training plan.

9. Employers or work-placement providers are responsible for on-the-job training. Modern apprentices also attend one of two local colleges to work towards a national or higher national certificate in an appropriate engineering discipline. During their second and subsequent years, qualified training officers from RTA assess trainees at work. The training officers are also responsible for trainees' six-weekly progress reviews. RTA has qualified internal verifiers in engineering but chooses to subcontract internal verification to a qualified, self-employed verifier.

Of those trainees who have started training since April 1996, 53 per cent are still in training, 14 per cent have left having completed their training and 33 per cent have left before completing their training. Eighty-six per cent of modern apprentices remain on the programme and the average retention rate including all other programmes is 63 per cent. No trainees have yet completed a modern apprenticeship or national traineeship. Forty-six per cent of trainees leaving other training programmes have completed their training. Fifty per cent of all trainees who start training with RTA achieve an NVQ at level 2. Fifty-six per cent of trainees starting on other training programmes get a job during or on completion of their training. The self-assessment report included a number of strengths, most of which represented no more than normal practice or related to generic aspects of the training. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and many of the weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given by RTA in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ good portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards completion of individual training plans
- ◆ insufficient assessment of trainees in the workplace
- ◆ inadequate key skills training

10. There is good on-the-job training at employers and work-placement providers. The training is well planned to meet both the requirements of the trainees' NVQs and the needs of employers. Skilled and experienced engineers train trainees, and many have a good grasp of the NVQ's requirements. Trainees receive a good variety of training which extends beyond that necessary to achieve their NVQ. For example, some trainees spend time working in one or more of their employers' purchasing, sales, and estimating or design departments. Trainees practice a good variety of appropriate skills. Trainees' progress in their planned on-the-job training is rigorously monitored by most employers. Off-the-job training in the training centre is good. It is well planned to meet trainees' individual requirements. RTA's trainers hold training and assessment qualifications. Trainees find working in the training centre stimulating and interesting. The training centre is well laid out with a wide range of up-to-date equipment which allows trainees to develop the necessary engineering skills appropriate to their jobs. The standard of tidiness and cleanliness in the training centre is excellent. The resources for training at employers and the subcontracting colleges are also good. Trainees' portfolios are well presented and trainees are encouraged to maintain a high standard of portfolio evidence by RTA's tutors and their employers. However, little evidence is added to trainees' portfolios between progress reviews. Some trainees have not added any evidence to their portfolio for many months. Some trainees have little NVQ-related evidence in their portfolios and yet believe that they are close to completing their NVQ.

11. Trainees make slow progress towards completing their training plans. They are not set demanding targets at progress reviews. There is insufficient assessment of trainees in the workplace. Level 3 trainees are not assessed until they have been in training for some time, usually around two to three years, even though they regularly produce valid evidence of NVQ-related competencies. RTA's assessors frequently visit trainees at work, but they do not take the opportunity to observe and assess trainees while at work. Assessors rely mainly on the witness testimony of workplace supervisors.

12. Key skills training is inadequate. Many modern apprentices, who have been on their training programmes for over three years, have no key skills evidence for assessment purposes. Key skills are not systematically integrated with the NVQ training. RTA has recognised this as a major problem in respect of trainees completing their individual training plans. New trainees now have a key skills training schedule designed to enable them to complete three of the five mandatory key skills units during their first year, as part of their college course. RTA is investigating contingency measures to ensure that the other trainees catch up with the key skills requirements and complete their training plans. These plans include extra tuition which will, in some cases, extend beyond the trainees' training period. These plans have been discussed and agreed with the employers and trainees concerned.

Business administration

Grade 3

GOOD PRACTICE

When several learners lack the same skills, RTA arranges special seminars for them. For example, it has held a workshop on writing reports. The company awarded a certificate to each learner who completed the training.

13. There are five learners in business administration. Two are advanced modern apprentices, two are foundation modern apprentices and one is on another programme of work-based learning for young people. Some learners are referred to RTA by the careers service. Other approach RTA directly. Four of the five learners are employed. RTA's work-placement officer for business administration, is responsible for finding learners suitable employment and work placements. New learners attend eight weeks' introductory training in key skills at RTA's training centre, before starting assessment towards their NVQs. After this, learners attend RTA's training centre on a day-release basis for further training in key skills and help with portfolio-building. The rest of their training takes place in the workplace. Learners' are assessed by observation in the workplace and their portfolios are assessed at the training centre. RTA subcontracts assessment and internal verification to three consultants, who carry out the work on a part-time basis. The work-placement officer reviews learners' progress every four to six weeks.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ weak assessment arrangements
- ◆ no integration of key skills with vocational training
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

14. RTA has rectified the weaknesses in the internal verification of assessments which were identified at the original inspection. However, two weak assessment practices remain. The company now integrates key skills training and assessment with learners' occupational training. Learners are regularly attending lessons away from the workplace and their rates of retention and progress have improved. The self-assessment report referred to learners' high rates of attendance and retention and to the effective training for learners with additional needs. However, it did not recognise that some aspects of assessment continue to be weak. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high rates of attendance and retention
- ◆ effective response to needs for additional training
- ◆ comprehensive procedures for progress reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak assessment practices

15. Learners now attend lessons at the training centre regularly. Since the original inspection, the rate of attendance has increased from 20 per cent to 90 per cent. RTA monitors attendance and punctuality and contacts both learners and employers to find out the reasons for absences. The company displays records of learners' attendance on the walls of the training centre to remind learners how important it is to attend. RTA's work-placement officer discusses attendance and punctuality with learners at their progress reviews and notes the reasons for any absences from lessons. Rates of retention have also increased since the original inspection, from 29 per cent to 75 per cent. It is too soon to judge the achievement rates of learners who have started their training since the original inspection. However, these learners' progress has been satisfactory. Learners have clear targets for achieving each unit of their qualifications. The work-placement officer monitors learners' progress against the targets during their progress reviews. Of the eight learners who have started their training since the original inspection, two have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans and the remaining six are making satisfactory progress towards their qualifications.

16. RTA responds effectively to needs for additional training. When employers identify gaps in learners' skills, RTA arranges additional lessons or support at the training centre. For example, it has arranged additional lessons in computing and telephone skills. The company also provides lessons for learners with weak spelling and grammar. RTA encourages talented learners who have appropriate roles in the workplace to achieve higher levels of key skills awards and units of additional NVQs.

17. RTA has introduced new procedures and paperwork for progress reviews. These ensure that trainers and learners agree on targets and that trainers and employers discuss how they can enable learners to achieve their targets. Employers

are now involved in progress reviews. This has made them more aware of the requirements of learners' qualifications. RTA now keeps employers well informed. This has made them sufficiently clear about their role to be able to comment on learners' progress and performance and to help set targets. RTA uses progress reviews to monitor learners' attendance, punctuality and attitude towards training. It also uses the reviews to discuss health and safety and equal opportunities and acts promptly to resolve any difficulties raised. If the learner or trainer raise any issues when they evaluate the course, these are discussed with the learner during the progress review. RTA keeps a record of any outcomes and actions agreed on at progress reviews.

18. RTA's arrangements for internal verification in business administration are now satisfactory. However, two weaknesses in assessments remain. Firstly, RTA's assessors do not record their decisions adequately at the time of the assessment. Therefore, learners do not receive immediate feedback on their performance. Often learners do not receive written feedback until their next weekly visit to the training centre. Secondly, learners each have several different files containing evidence for their portfolios and information about their qualifications. This prevents learners and trainers from quickly identifying areas which have still to be covered.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

19. The chief executive is responsible for equal opportunities. RTA introduced its equal opportunities policy in April 2001. There are clearly written procedures for dealing with harassment, complaints, appeals and grievances. The scope of the policy includes advertising, recruitment and selection of learners and staff, training and development, and discipline. All staff, learners, employers and subcontractors receive a copy of the policy. RTA covers equal opportunities during inductions for staff and learners and in its information pack for employers. The company collects data on learners gender, ethnicity and disabilities. Currently, one woman is working towards qualifications in engineering and three men are working towards qualifications in business administration. Two learners have disabilities. No learner is from a minority ethnic group.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no equal opportunities policy
- ◆ little promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ no monitoring of employers or subcontractors' equal opportunities arrangements
- ◆ no use of equal opportunities data

20. Since the original inspection, RTA has developed and disseminated an equal opportunities policy. The company now promotes equal opportunities effectively

through all its activities. RTA now carries out some monitoring of employers and subcontractors' arrangements to promote equal opportunities. However, the monitoring is insufficient. The company now collates data on equal opportunities but it is not using the data to set targets for improvement. The self-assessment report accurately recorded RTA's work to promote equal opportunities. However, it did not identify as weaknesses the company's inadequate monitoring of employers and subcontractors and its inadequate analysis of data on equal opportunities. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed understanding of equal opportunities among learners
- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak monitoring of employers and subcontractors' promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data on equal opportunities

21. Learners have a detailed understanding of equal opportunities. During their induction, RTA introduces learners to their rights and responsibilities as employees and learners, together with broader issues relating to equal opportunities. The subcontracted colleges reinforce these issues during the inductions which they provide for learners in engineering. RTA displays messages to promote equal opportunities and discourage bullying throughout its training centre. Learners are able to discuss bullying, harassment and discrimination with interest and clarity, and are clear about the reasons for treating all learners fairly during selection, disciplinary proceedings, training and assessment. They can describe RTA's procedures for dealing with complaints.

22. RTA promotes equal opportunities both within and outside the training centre. Equal opportunities appears on the agenda for all of RTA's management committee and monthly training team meetings. Most of RTA's staff have attended courses in equal opportunities. An advisory service on race relations has provided training for staff on racial equality in employment. RTA has recently held the first of a series of workshops in dealing with harassment in the workplace. The first workshop was attended by a quarter of the employers in engineering. Feedback from the employers was very positive. RTA has contacted a group which encourages women to enter science and engineering and invited the group to visit its training centre in early 2002, to promote engineering as a career for women. The company has also used its links with local schools to arrange work experience for pupils, including pupils with learning difficulties. RTA has produced, in a format suitable for those whose first language is not English, a leaflet inviting parents of pupils at local schools to visit the training centre with their children, to find out more about work-based learning in engineering and business administration. One of RTA's trainers in engineering is a woman. She represents

RTA at careers events and encourages women to consider engineering as a career. RTA's training centre has excellent arrangements for access for people with mobility difficulties. One learner with impaired hearing has recently received recognition in the local media for achieving an NVQ.

23. RTA obtains copies of employers' equal opportunities policies and keeps them on file. If an employer does not have an equal opportunities policy, RTA gives the employer a copy of its own policy. However, the company takes no further steps to monitor employers and subcontractors' promotion of equal opportunities. It does not evaluate the effectiveness of employers and subcontractors' equal opportunities policies or ensure that they are applying their equal opportunities policies. RTA does not monitor equal opportunities in learners' workplaces and colleges. Although staff in business administration discuss equal opportunities during reviews of learners' progress, staff in engineering do not. The company has no information about measures which workplaces and colleges have introduced to eliminate harassment.

24. RTA collates data on equal opportunities but does not analyse or use the data sufficiently. The company has no clear plan for using the data to make improvements. It sets no targets for recruiting learners from groups which are under-represented on its programmes. RTA issues a questionnaire to learners when they leave their training. However, the questionnaire does not seek feedback on the company's arrangements to promote equal opportunities or those of employers.

Trainee support

Grade 3

25. RTA's staff visit schools and careers events as well as holding open days to promote work-based training to young people in the local community. Trainees are recruited either by RTA or directly by employers. Some employers advertise for trainees themselves and call on RTA to help with the selection process. All applicants for business administration training undertake the adult basic skills test to identify their literacy and numeracy levels. The results of the test, together with the application form, are used to select applicants for interview. Usually, a member of RTA's staff and an employer interviews applicants. All new trainees also undertake a key skills assessment. Individuals selected for engineering programmes take three additional tests, two to identify their aptitude for mathematics and mechanical reasoning and a third to assess their general intelligence. All trainees have an individual training plan. RTA has staff who are qualified to accredit prior learning and achievements. Trainees' previous achievements are taken into account when their training plans are devised. Trainees receive an induction to RTA. This includes details of their training programme, health and safety and equal opportunities. A half-day introduction to key skills is now included in the induction programme. Trainees also receive an induction when they start their course at college and at their employer or work placement. They receive a pack of information which includes the trainees' handbook. This handbook contains the company's complaints procedure. Trainees'

progress is reviewed, on average, every six weeks throughout their training. Staff's responsibilities for trainee support are identified in their job descriptions. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and one of the two weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They awarded the same grade as given by RTA in its assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective assessment of trainees' additional learning needs
- ◆ good learning support for trainees
- ◆ supportive employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective progress reviews
- ◆ lack of awareness by trainees of some rights and responsibilities

26. RTA assesses all trainees' basic and key skills at the start of their training. Engineering applicants who pass the initial basic skills assessment and interview stage take three further tests for mathematics, general intelligence and mechanical reasoning. The results of the assessments are used to draw up trainees' individual training plans and identify any additional training that may be required. The assessment results are analysed and compared with those from earlier intakes to identify trends in applicants' profiles. This provides information for recruitment campaigns. Two of RTA's staff are qualified in psychometric testing. One trainee had a particularly low aptitude for mathematics. The results from the aptitude test allowed a programme of additional support to be developed which targeted the specific issues identified from the test. This trainee has now completed the additional support training and has moved onto a modern apprenticeship programme.

27. RTA responds well to individual trainees' support needs. Those trainees who are not employed receive substantial support to help them to find employment. RTA helps them to prepare application letters and statements of their skills and achievements. These statements are also used as evidence for key skills if appropriate. A member of the local careers service visits the training centre regularly to talk to trainees about employment opportunities and bring details of available jobs. RTA's training officers continually encourage its network of employers to consider trainees for employment and RTA's trainees frequently fill these vacancies. Unemployed trainees also receive regular careers reviews. Trainees with disabilities are well supported. For example, one trainee has a severe hearing difficulty. RTA and the CCTE have provided the trainee's instructor with a radio microphone. The trainee wears an earpiece which receives and amplifies the signals from the microphone. This allows the trainee to hear the instructor clearly even though the instructor may be some distance away.

28. Trainees' employers give good support to their trainees. Many employers send trainees on a variety of training courses in addition to those specified on their

individual training plans. Many engineering trainees attend courses on first aid, health and safety, manual handling and information technology. Some trainees have been trained in computer-aided design, electrical installation, electrical portable appliance testing, power presses, abrasive wheels, pneumatics and hydraulics. Business administration trainees have had additional training including information technology, health and safety, first aid, telephone techniques and customer service. For most trainees, time is allowed during working hours for them to work on their portfolios. Most workplace supervisors are knowledgeable about NVQs and help trainees to identify appropriate evidence for assessment and portfolio-building purposes. Some employers are members of RTA and take an active interest in its management and many employers offer a number of training places each year. Employers also offer the opportunity for applicants for national traineeships and foundation modern apprenticeships to gain work experience through a two-week 'work trail' in their companies.

29. Trainees' progress reviews are ineffective. There is little detailed discussion of trainees' work between RTA's staff, the employer/supervisor and trainees. At reviews, RTA's staff do not use the training plans to identify learning opportunities for the future or to set targets for the next review. Targets which are set are undemanding. There is no mention of equal opportunities issues at reviews. Reviews are recorded, but the records contain few specific action points and are confined to general statements of intent. Employers usually make some written comments when recording the review. Reviews are not used to give trainees a clear indication of how they can improve their progress. Trainees are not aware of their right to appeal against assessment decisions or how to communicate other complaints or grievances. Many trainees are unaware of who their assessor or internal verifier is. Trainees are given a copy of the assessment appeals procedure at induction. These are kept in files held at the training centre, not with the trainee. Many trainees do not know who to contact at RTA should they have a complaint or grievance. Trainees are reluctant to approach RTA's staff with problems although they are prepared to take a problem to their employer. The employment agreement between one trainee and their employer contains a clause preventing the trainee from complaining in the first three months of employment.

Management of training

Grade 3

30. The chief executive has overall responsibility for the management of the company. Two training officers are responsible for assessment. A lead trainer/assessor is responsible for all the engineering training which takes place outside the workplace. There are three trainer/assessors in engineering and one in business administration. All the trainers are occupationally qualified. Two members of staff are responsible for monitoring work placements and for co-ordinating training in business administration and key skills, respectively. In addition there are two administrators, a financial manager and a domestic assistant. The chief executive prepares quarterly reports for the management board. RTA's staff meet each month. There are written procedures for recruiting and appraising

staff. RTA has recently introduced new job descriptions for all staff. RTA subcontracts some training and assessment in engineering to two local colleges. RTA subcontracts assessment in business administration and all internal verification to consultants. The company monitors its performance each month against the requirements of its contract with the local LSC.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no routine use of data to guide management decisions
- ◆ weak subcontracting arrangements
- ◆ key policies not fully understood by all employers
- ◆ no strategic planning

31. Since the original inspection, RTA has strengthened the links between on- and off-the-job training. Employers have become more fully involved in learning and assessment and RTA is now more careful to link activities at the training centre and at college, with activities in the workplace. RTA and employers now routinely use data to set targets for learners and to monitor their progress towards their qualifications. RTA regularly updates employers about its most important policies. This has improved employers' understanding of the policies relating to progress reviews, equal opportunities and learners' progress. However, arrangements with employers and subcontractors remain weak and there remains no strategic planning. The self-assessment report did not identify RTA's good communications as a strength or the lack of strategic planning as a weakness. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management of changes to learners' qualifications
- ◆ very effective communications
- ◆ effective involvement of employers in training and planning assessments

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no strategic planning
- ◆ ineffective arrangements with employers and subcontractors

32. There have been important changes to the requirements of the qualifications which learners are working towards, both in engineering and in business administration. These have included new standards for qualifications in business administration and the introduction of a new NVQ, in performing engineering operations, for learners in engineering. RTA has encouraged staff to attend training to help them understand the requirements of the new qualifications. The staff who have attended training, have successfully disseminated their knowledge to other colleagues. RTA has carefully informed learners and employers of the changes and has prevented the changes from interrupting learners' progress. Since the original inspection, staff in both occupational areas have prepared good

training material and clear information about learners' new qualifications. The company has provided new resources in its engineering workshop.

33. RTA's internal and external communications are effective. There are monthly meetings of the senior managers, the financial manager and representatives of staff in engineering and business administration. These meetings are minuted and a note is made of any actions agreed on, together with the staff responsible for carrying them out. Managers encourage the dissemination of information from these meetings to all staff. The style of management is open and responsive. Managers are approachable to all staff and learners and they resolve difficulties swiftly. There is an emphasis on teamwork throughout the company. RTA has strong links with other organisations which provide training. RTA's chief executive has developed strong links with various local partners. He currently chairs a network of local training providers which aims to promote the sharing of good practice between its members. The lead trainer/assessor is a member of a forum of engineering training providers in Greater Manchester, which seeks to influence the development of new qualifications in engineering. The company has used its links with other organisations involved in training, to identify appropriate consultants to carry out assessments in business administration and internal verification in both occupational areas. RTA has strengthened its links with employers by emphasising employers' involvement in training and in reviewing learners' progress. Staff from RTA can visit most learners in the workplace at any time. Better relationships with employers and easier access to learners' workplaces have enabled RTA's staff to develop relationships with workplace supervisors more swiftly than at the time of the original inspection. RTA's staff are now also better able to identify appropriate opportunities for assessment in the workplace.

34. Since the original inspection, RTA has increased employers' involvement in training and assessment. The company now makes greater efforts to encourage employers to attend reviews of learners' progress. All employers have received details of the requirements of their learners' NVQs and plans for their learners' training in the workplace. Progress reviews are used to record the skills which have been acquired since the previous review and to set tasks, including the gathering of evidence, which learners and employers must ensure are carried out before the next review. Employers understand the requirements of learners' qualifications sufficiently to plan training in the workplace effectively and to ensure that learners develop the skills they need to achieve their qualifications. RTA now carries out more assessments by observation in the workplace. Each learner has a plan showing when assessments will take place.

35. RTA has no strategic plan for its work-based learning programmes. Although the company aims to meet the targets set by the local LSC, it has no other long-term plans for its training programmes. RTA has not assigned responsibility for marketing to any named individual or team, even though the number of new learners in engineering has fallen sharply over the past two years. The company issues a summary to staff of the targets set by the local LSC but holds few discussions with staff about how they can achieve the targets or improve their

performance. RTA reviews the training needs of all staff once each year. However, the company does not take feedback from learners and employers into account during these reviews. Nor does it appraise the performance of individual members of staff in fulfilling the responsibilities in their job descriptions.

36. RTA has service level agreements with employers and the subcontracted colleges. However, the agreements lack detail. They fail to specify the roles and responsibilities of RTA and the employers or colleges, in providing important aspects of training. The agreements do not specify who is responsible for monitoring the quality of training at college and in the workplace. They do not specify the colleges' responsibilities for providing support for learners. The agreements also fail to specify how information about learners' progress is to be shared.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

37. The chief executive has overall responsibility for ensuring that RTA has adequate policies and procedures and that all staff apply the procedures during training and assessment. He also has responsibility for the day-to-day application of systems to assure quality. At the time of the original inspection, RTA had a strategy committing itself to prepare arrangements to assure the quality of all aspects of its work, including work-based learning. However, the company has not fulfilled this commitment. RTA uses the ISO 9000, an international standard for quality assurance, as a model for its quality assurance arrangements. Each department has a copy of the most recent quality assurance manual, which contains current procedures and guidance notes, together with a policy statement and mission statement. The company uses an external consultant to review its quality assurance systems on an ongoing basis, and to record any changes. RTA tightly controls any changes to the procedures and documents and updates all the copies of the manual at the same time. RTA's procedures for assessment follow the awarding bodies' guidelines. The awarding bodies for engineering and business administration have carried out external audits during the past two years. Both audits found that the quality of training was satisfactory. RTA started its first self-assessment in 1999 and completed it in May 2000. The company produced a second self-assessment report in preparation for the reinspection.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor use of feedback from learners and employers
- ◆ poor use of achievement and destination data in making continuous improvements
- ◆ slow response to recommendations from external audits
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of the quality of training

38. Since the original inspection, RTA has introduced regular questionnaires to gather feedback from learners and employers. The company used this feedback in

its second self-assessment report. RTA now routinely uses data on learners' achievements and progress to guide improvements. The company has now complied with all the main recommendations of its external auditors. However, RTA still lacks adequate arrangements to monitor the quality of training. The self-assessment report did not identify some important weaknesses in quality assurance. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of meetings to identify areas for improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ weak links between self-assessment and other aspects of quality assurance
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice

39. RTA uses monthly staff meetings to identify and rectify weaknesses in training. It has also established a group of staff with a remit to bring about improvements in training. The meetings of this group, together with the monthly staff meetings, have brought about several improvements. These have included the development of the quality assurance manual, the introduction of computers to help learners develop their key skills, new software to help the administrators comply with the local LSC's requirements for data, and new paperwork for progress reviews. Other examples have been improvements in learners' development of technical drawing skills, the upgrading of equipment used for drawing practice and electrical training in engineering, and closer monitoring of learners' progress towards their NVQs. RTA's staff now visit the subcontracted colleges more frequently to discuss learners' progress and achievements. The frequency of assessments in the workplace has increased from once every six weeks to once each week or once each month. At the time of the original inspection, these visits were used to resolve various difficulties which learners were experiencing but the visits were rarely recorded. Now, however, RTA's staff record the visits and arrange for important issues to be discussed at the learner's next progress review.

40. RTA's quality assurance manual and procedural documents are clear. All the appropriate staff have copies of the manual. Staff understand the procedures and their role in applying them. Four staff, who are trained in auditing, audit the arrangements to assure quality according to an annual schedule. RTA has achieved some improvements by applying the procedures in the manual. RTA's internal verification meets the requirements of the awarding bodies. However, the framework for quality assurance does not include arrangements to assure the quality of work-based learning. RTA does not specify the quality of training and assessment which it expects in the workplace, at college or at its own training centre. Nor does the company sufficiently monitor the quality of training provided by employers and subcontractors. This prevents the company from being able to

make informed decisions about how to improve training. RTA's monitoring of its own training is also insufficient. RTA's quality assurance procedures are little more than administrative procedures for ensuring compliance with contracts. Although the company seeks feedback from learners and workplace supervisors, it does not routinely seek feedback from the colleges or its own staff.

41. RTA's most recent self-assessment report includes feedback from staff and learners and contains an action plan. However, the action plan refers to the findings of the original inspection. It does not include actions to build on the strengths and rectify the weaknesses identified in the most recent self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently analytical or self-critical. It contains little information about trends in each occupational area or about the quality of training and assessment. RTA asked its staff to list the strengths and weaknesses of each area of their work but the examination of each occupational area lacks detail. Many of the report's judgements lack supporting evidence. In most areas, the report overstates the company's strengths and understates its weaknesses. RTA does not sufficiently link self-assessment with other aspects of its quality assurance arrangements. RTA's self-assessment, action-planning and target-setting are not significant parts of its arrangements to assure quality. Staff within the company do not consistently share good practice and the sharing of good practice is not linked with other arrangements to assure quality. For example, staff in business administration discuss equal opportunities during reviews of learners' progress but they have not shared this good practice with staff in engineering.