

INSPECTION REPORT

Sandra Robinson Group Limited

10 February 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Sandra Robinson Group Limited is a private training provider based in Ilford, Essex. The company offers courses for young people and adults, specialising in Life Skills and English language training. It also offers training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in administration, information technology and customer services.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the foundation programmes and Jobcentre Plus programmes are good and work-based learning is satisfactory. Leadership and management are good, as is the company's approach to equality of opportunity. The arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	3

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3
Life Skills	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- good management of training
- good personal support for learners
- good teaching on all training programmes
- well-developed assessment practices
- good learning and personal development
- good work placements for learners

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor management information system
- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more flexibility in the provision of courses in English for speakers of other languages

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Sandra Robinson Group Limited (SRG) in February 2003. They observed and graded nine lessons and visited four learners at their employer's premises. They interviewed the managing director of the group, all of the tutors and most of the administrative staff, 99 learners and five workplace supervisors and managers. The inspectors also examined most of SRG's policies and procedures, a substantial number of files relating to the management of training, and the management information system. They reviewed the company's development plan, and its fourth and most recent self-assessment report, which was produced in January 2003.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Foundation programmes	0	2	5	2	0	0	0	9
Total	0	2	5	2	0	0	0	9

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. SRG was established in 1989 and specialises in providing English language and Life Skills training to young people and adults in Ilford and East London. SRG employs 17 staff, of whom 12 are tutors, and has 111 learners. Almost all the learners are from minority ethnic groups and speak English as an additional language or have a basic literacy need. SRG has a contract with London East Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide two training programmes, one of which is a Life Skills course and the other is work-based learning. SRG also has a contract with Jobcentre Plus and has 19 New Deal 25+ learners on a 26-week basic employability training (BET) programme in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

3. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in the London Borough of Redbridge was 4.5 per cent, compared with 3.6 per cent for London and 3 per cent nationally. According to the 1991 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Redbridge was 21.4 per cent, compared with 20.2 per cent for London and 6.2 per cent for England. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Redbridge who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 63 per cent, compared with 46.2 per cent for London and 47.9 per cent for England.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Retention and achievement rates for the NVQ programme are poor but improving. Too many learners do not progress into work after the initial period of off-the-job training. The teaching of English, information technology (IT) and Life Skills which prepares learners for employment before they start work-based learning is good. Teaching and IT resources are also good. Learning programmes are well planned and reviewed regularly. Learners' progress is monitored closely and they are reviewed formally twice during this period of training. During on-the-job training, learners' progress is monitored weekly. Learners return to SRG for two out of every three weeks, and are visited at work by their assessor during the third week. The quality of assessment, progress reviews and action-planning is good. Learners' NVQ portfolios of evidence are good and are checked regularly. Although equality of opportunity is covered fully during initial training, it is not sufficiently well promoted in the workplace. Employers have a good understanding of the NVQ requirements and employ a high proportion of learners when they finish their training.

New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults

5. Adults on the New Deal 25+ programme attend the same learning programmes as the Life Skills learners. This works well and both the young and the older learners enjoy being taught together. The standard of teaching and learning is good. New Deal clients achieve literacy qualifications as part of the programme. SRG achieved its target for the number of learners progressing into work in 2002, and has an action plan to achieve the target for 2003.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

6. SRG's owner and managing director manages training, assisted by four senior staff responsible for teaching, internal verification, administration and marketing. SRG employs 17 staff, of whom 12 are tutors, including the owner and two senior staff, and five are administrative staff. Three learners are on work placement in the office and two staff are responsible for finding and co-ordinating work placements. The administration officer assists NVQ learners with personal, financial and housing matters. Quality assurance and equal opportunities policies and procedures are reviewed annually by all staff. The company wrote its first self-assessment report in 1998 and produced its most recent report in January 2003.

STRENGTHS

- good management of training
- good personal support for learners
- good use made of well-developed links with external organisations
- thorough internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- limited promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace
- poor management information system

7. The management of training is good and there are clear written procedures that cover all aspects of training. Most learners are on one of four levels of a classroom-based Life Skills course, each of which lasts for 10 weeks. Each course has schemes of work and teaching plans, and learners' progress is monitored closely. Formal reviews of learners' progress take place twice during each course. These reviews are thorough and include an action plan, with targets to achieve by the next review. Remedial action is taken to meet the learning needs of those who are not making good progress. Any concerns raised by the learners at their progress reviews are included in an end of course team meeting, which is attended by all staff. Some learners' comments have helped to develop the courses and the self-assessment report. Most learners progress from one foundation level to the next after each course, but some repeat the course to achieve a greater degree of competence before progressing.

8. Learners receive good personal support throughout their training. SRG provides interpreters and uses pictorial displays to help learners understand their training courses and the policies which relate to their training. This information is available in 21 languages and, where necessary, SRG uses speakers of other languages to explain details. Support is also provided for learners with impaired sight or hearing. Each week, learners meet their tutor to discuss progress and achievements, review their personal

goals and to solve any problems related to learning. SRG also provides personal support for learners by arranging and assisting at meetings with statutory bodies for housing benefits and helping with family difficulties. During work placements, SRG contacts the employer and learner each week to monitor their progress and welfare. If necessary, SRG provides learners with alternative work placements.

9. SRG has good links with many organisations and uses them well to promote its training and improve the learners' experience. The company has good links with local secondary schools and staff visit these each year to promote its courses, especially to young people who have difficulty in speaking and using English. It also has good business links, which it uses to increase learners' work-placement opportunities. SRG has developed good links with companies by providing them with interpreters. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has assisted in improving training procedures and a local university is working with SRG with a view to piloting new ESOL teaching qualifications. The local member of parliament visits frequently to talk to learners and listen to their concerns.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

10. SRG has a clear and detailed policy relating to diversity, with supporting procedures. A separate disability policy has been developed. These policies are regularly reviewed and updated. It is a condition of employment that all staff are fully committed to SRG's policies. The diversity policy contains clear information about what is unacceptable behaviour, specifically mentioning harassment and bullying, false accusations, victimisation, and staff and learners' rights to information. All learning and publicity materials are checked regularly to ensure they are appropriate and that the pictures show learners from diverse minority ethnic groups.

11. The managing director is responsible for managing the equal opportunities policy and procedures. SRG does not have an equal opportunities committee, but equality is included as a standard agenda item at all end-of-course team meetings. Equal opportunities data are collected and analysed. Fifty per cent of the staff are men and a third is from a minority ethnic group. More than 90 per cent of the learners are from minority ethnic groups and many are refugees or asylum seekers. There is an equal number of male and female learners.

12. There is good promotion of equal opportunities during all learning programmes. SRG's managing director visits all employers before they accept a learner for work placement, to explain the NVQ and their role in it and the role of health and safety and equal opportunities. Where an employer does not have a thorough equal opportunities policy, SRG offers to help improve it. During work placements, assessors carefully check with learners whether they have an equal opportunities issue to raise and record their response. On these visits, however, assessors do not always promote equal opportunities sufficiently to raise its profile in the learners' mind.

13. SRG's current premises are not accessible for wheelchair users or people with restricted mobility. However, SRG has taken this into account in planning its move to new premises.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

14. SRG has comprehensive quality assurance procedures, which cover learners' initial assessment and induction, review and progression, support, assessment and internal verification. Each training course has published aims and objectives, which are reviewed regularly. Learners' progress is reviewed daily and action is taken to improve it when necessary. All tutors are observed teaching once during each 10-week course. Learners' classroom folders are also checked regularly during each course and those whose folders do not meet the required standard are required to write an action plan to improve them. Improvement targets for retention and achievement rates are set, but these are optimistically high.

15. The internal verification process is planned, thorough and well recorded. The managing director and one of the four senior tutors carry out all internal verification, which is planned well in advance. All assessment decisions are verified. Internal verifiers are required to observe each assessor assessing a candidate in the workplace every six months, but internal verification usually takes place every 10 weeks. An internal verification report is written after every observation. Learners' NVQ portfolios are verified every 10 weeks and internal verifiers hold an assessors' meeting every 10 weeks to ensure consistency. The two verifiers meet regularly to discuss points to raise at assessors' meetings. The external verifier visits every month and verifies all decisions. The assessment and internal verification manual, with all other policies, is reviewed and updated annually.

16. SRG involves all staff and learners in its self-assessment process. The self-assessment report gave a comprehensive and accurate picture of the provision, with a realistic assessment of strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.

17. SRG's information system uses three databases to record and produce information and is unsatisfactory. SRG has recently introduced a new management information system database, but this is still not operational. The existing system cannot produce the reports necessary to adequately monitor and manage all aspects of training.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Foundation programmes

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	41	3
Life Skills	51	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	19	2

18. SRG provides foundation and NVQ programmes for learners funded by the LSC and Jobcentre Plus. SRG staff visit schools to speak to young people about the courses they offer. They also attend local careers events and publicise their courses in attractive leaflets. New Deal clients are referred to SRG after assessment by another private training provider. Clients on the New Deal 25+ programme are funded for either 26 weeks of BET or eight weeks of short intensive basic skills (SIBS) training. Taught courses are organised into 10-week modules. All learners attend one of four modules, each of which are a different level and based on Life Skills and ESOL. Learners are placed on programmes irrespective of the source of funding. Learners who enrol for an NVQ programme attend the higher level course before they begin on-the-job training. During this period, learners are taught IT skills, portfolio-building and ESOL. All learners are able to progress to work-based learning although funding usually prevents this. Most learners work towards an NVQ at level 1 in administration and IT, or at level 2 in customer service. Funding for NVQ programmes is for 12 or 18 months, depending on age, level and the vocational area. Learners on these courses are able to achieve an additional qualification in English and a Technical Certificate.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	59		31		17											
Retained*	0		16		2	12										
Successfully completed	0		14		2	12										
Still in learning	34		7		0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Life Skills																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	79		227		81		19									
Retained*	18		118		57	70	18	95								
Successfully completed	18		106		55	68	17	89								
Still in learning	42		9		0	0	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults											
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults											
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	37		153		240		7				
Retained*	15	41	140	92	193	80	6	86			
Planned learning completed	3	8	77	50	163	68	5	71			
Gained job	4	11	46	30	24	10	0	0			
Still in training	19	51	0	0	0	0	0	0			

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

STRENGTHS

- good teaching on all training programmes
- well-developed assessment practices
- good learning and personal development
- good work placements for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement and retention rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more flexibility in the provision of courses of English for speakers for other languages

19. The teaching on all training programmes is good. More than three-quarters of all lessons observed were good or better. There are clear, written objectives for each programme and a teaching plan for every session. Most lessons were well prepared and tutors use a good range of teaching methods and activities to maintain the interests of learners, many of whom did not achieve well at school. Most learners are not able to concentrate for long periods, so tutors divide learning into short manageable periods with well-controlled short spells of group discussion aimed at improving the learners' spoken English. Tutors mark learners' written work thoroughly and promptly and provide them with good verbal and written feedback. Learners intending to progress to a work-based NVQ programme are taught good IT skills, portfolio-building, and health and safety before they start.

20. SRG uses assessment well to determine learners' initial learning needs, and set challenging goals. All learners are given a thorough initial assessment to determine their learning needs when they start the programme. Tutors provide learners with good support and assistance to produce a profile of their educational background, previous work experience, the languages they speak and their English language ability. Good use is made of diagnostic tests to identify learning needs. Staff assess the literacy and language needs of each learner and develop an action plan, which includes timescales for achieving learning outcomes. Action plans are checked regularly and updated to indicate progress.

21. Learners' progress is formally assessed and reviewed twice in each training programme and SRG's staff encourage them to consider the progress they have made since starting training. SRG makes good use of these reviews to plan further learning. Learners' progress during on-the-job training is monitored every week and their work is assessed by observation every three weeks. Assessment visits are planned and agreed between the assessor, learner, and employer, six months in advance. All learners are given supportive and constructive feedback about their progress and achievement after every assessment. Employers are given good feedback on their learners' progress. SRG encourages learners to give their views on assessment and the company has effective procedures for improving assessment practices.

22. Learners make good progress in developing their language and literacy skills, which are reinforced continuously throughout their training programme. Those with little knowledge of English at the beginning of training are given good support. Most make rapid progress with writing, reading, speaking and listening. All learners use daily journals to record their progress and to gain additional writing practice. All learners regularly work in groups and teams to develop negotiating and social skills. During

these sessions, learners increase their vocabulary, become better communicators and gain in confidence and self-esteem. In addition, learners develop good interviewing skills through well-designed role-play exercises based on social and work situations.

23. SRG has established effective partnerships with local employers to provide good work placements for learners. The company ensures that employers understand the requirements of the NVQ and provide the work experience necessary for learners to achieve the required competences. Before learners are placed with an employer, SRG's managing director explains the training programme and requires the employer to sign an agreement. Employers support learners by assisting them to produce personal development plans and updating them at regular intervals. They also help learners to understand British working practices and culture. Learners are often able to make an immediate contribution to an employer's business by using their multi-lingual skills. Employers are included in the three-weekly review visits made by assessors and contribute to the target-setting and action-planning process. SRG sends employers a written report of each review meeting. Many employers encourage learners to work for them when they finish their training. Some employers are keen to have more learners from SRG on work placement.

24. The retention and achievement rates on all of the training programmes are poor. Most learners are from minority ethnic groups with a strong allegiance to their native country and many of them leave training without notice to return to their homeland. Asylum seekers and refugees often fail to complete training because of circumstances beyond their control, such as relocation. SRG monitors absence twice each day and tries to contact those who do not attend and those who may have left training.

25. Retention has been a major problem on the NVQ training programmes. Most learners leave at the end of the classroom-based part of the programme. However, few leave once they have started a work placement. In 2002, SRG achieved the target set by Jobcentre Plus for the proportion of clients finding jobs. However, this year, the proportion so far is falling short of expectation. SRG has drawn up an action plan to deal with the problem. Some of the Jobcentre Plus clients return to SRG after a spell away, to repeat the programme.

26. Although SRG has a good range of ESOL training programmes to suit learners' differing abilities, the organisation and timetabling of these programmes into 10-week courses limits access to suitable training for learners with literacy and language needs.

Good Practice

SRG has integrated younger learners from work-based learning training programmes with adult clients from New Deal training courses in cross-cultural, gender-mixed groups. The older learners provide good role models for the younger learners and help them to take full responsibility for their learning and behaviour. All learners enjoy working in this way as it helps the quality of interaction in lessons and improves their achievement.