

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **South Yorkshire Training Group (SYTG) Ltd**

**03 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

South Yorkshire Training Group (SYTG) Ltd is a private limited company based in Sheffield. Formed in June 1990 to offer training to adults with additional needs, it has developed into a specialist provider of services to learners who have a range of barriers to learning and employability. Since April 2001, South Yorkshire Training Group (SYTG) Ltd has held a contract with South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council to offer Life Skills training to learners, most of whom are aged between 16 and 19. Over one-third of these learners are asylum seekers, coming from a range of ethnic groups.

### Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Foundation training is satisfactory and the leadership and management of the company are satisfactory, as is the quality assurance. Equality of opportunity is good.

### GRADES

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

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- highly approachable, consultative management
- particularly inclusive learning culture
- good work placements

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficiently focused strategic planning
- unsystematic quality assurance arrangements
- inadequate initial assessment

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better formal monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- more structured use of information technology resources

## THE INSPECTION

1. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at South Yorkshire Training Group (SYTG) Ltd's (SYTG's) premises in February 2003. They visited eight workplaces, and interviewed 21 learners, seven employers, every member of SYTG's staff, a member of the social services department responsible for the co-ordination of the asylum seekers' project, and a personal adviser from Connexions. Two learning sessions were observed and graded. They examined eight examples of learners' work, 10 individual learning plans, and a range of documents including policies and procedures, staffing information and employers' files. Inspectors reviewed SYTG's self-assessment report, which was written in December 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Foundation programmes	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. SYTG is a specialist provider of foundation training. Based in Sheffield, the company has 53 learners on the Life Skills programme, funded through Sheffield Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Learners attend SYTG's training centre for a minimum of 16 hours a week. They receive training in literacy, numeracy and language skills, and support in developing their self-esteem and employability. Some attend a work placement for part of the week.

3. Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England with a population of approximately 530,000. From the late 1970s Sheffield suffered severe industrial decline losing a quarter of its jobs resulting in concentrations of persistent unemployment in the north, east and central areas of the city. There remain substantial areas of multiple deprivation in the north, east and central areas of Sheffield. One fifth of the city's workforce has no qualifications. The city has a higher proportion of youth unemployment and long-term unemployment than the United Kingdom (UK) as a whole. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in Sheffield was 4.5 per cent, compared with 3 per cent nationally. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is between 3 per cent and 9 per cent across the area, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. There are approximately 3,800 asylum seekers in the city. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 41 per cent, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally.

### Life Skills

4. SYTG's Life Skills provision is satisfactory. The proportion of learners achieving either employment or a place in mainstream education is adequate, especially as one-third of learners are not allowed to apply for permanent employment, since they do not have work permits. Learning is flexibly planned to meet individual needs, and learners make good improvements with their confidence and social skills, and well as their ability in literacy, numeracy and spoken English. However, they do not receive a sufficiently comprehensive initial assessment at the start of their programme. Some of the targets they are set as they progress have insufficient detail.

5. Particularly good use is made of work experience to build learners' self-esteem and develop their employability skills. Work placements are well chosen and are carefully matched to the needs of learners. Learners have good support at SYTG's centre, and in the workplace. Those who have dyslexia go through a thorough diagnosis and support and training is given by a specialist organisation.



## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 3**

6. SYTG is owned and run by two directors who share responsibility for the management of training programmes and of the company overall. In addition, one oversees links with the LSC, while the other takes specific responsibility for liaison with employers. There are five other members of staff, three of whom are trainers, one is a placement officer who provides some training in health and safety, and the fifth is an administrator. The company has a quality assurance manual containing work instructions for a range of key training processes. There is an equal opportunities policy, and an equal opportunities statement which is explained to learners during their induction. SYTG has been carrying out self-assessment since January 2000. The latest self-assessment report was written in December 2002.

### STRENGTHS

- extensive external networking
- highly approachable, consultative management
- particularly inclusive learning culture
- good reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- good use of feedback from learners

### WEAKNESSES

- insufficiently focused strategic planning
- weak management of one subcontractor
- unsystematic quality assurance arrangements
- non-inclusive self-assessment process

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better formal monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace

7. Staff at SYTG develop and maintain effective links with a range of external organisations. They have particularly positive relationships with staff at Connexions, and from the asylum seekers' section of the social services department. In both these cases, there is frequent and productive liaison which results in the sharing of useful information. SYTG's managers are in regular contact with a range of other organisations including the local Life Skills providers' group, and of the work-based learning quality support network, a group run by the Learning and Skills Development Agency. SYTG is participating in a project to improve achievement and retention rates. This regular contact with other local providers allows for good practice to be shared. For example, SYTG's staff have started taking learners out on external visits, since this is a technique that has worked well for other providers of Life Skills training. The company sends staff

on courses, such as the teaching of basic skills, and receives information and newsletters from other organisations. SYTG is also on the mailing list of two large local hospitals, which e-mail regular bulletins containing employment vacancies, some of which have been successfully applied for by learners.

8. SYTG's directors are approachable, and extremely consultative in their management style. Both share offices with other members of staff, and both are closely involved in day-to-day operations, such as providing support to individual learners, monitoring the quality of learning sessions, and liaising with employers. Their emphasis of putting the learners at the centre of the learning process is well communicated to, and shared by, the other members of staff. Company employees feel that they are consulted and informed. They are able to cite instances where they have suggested improvements to some aspect of training and it has been subsequently implemented. They are well supported by the directors, through the annual appraisal system, which allows them to explore their performance and discuss their training needs, and through regular informal discussions about their progress and professional development. Communication in the company is good. There are formal staff meetings once every two months, during which a range of issues related to training and the progress of learners are discussed. These meetings are adequately recorded. In addition, there is highly effective informal communication. The close working relationships between staff, and the compact size and layout of the training premises, allow for the ready sharing of tasks, problems and ideas.

9. The company's business plan, and its overall strategic focus is not clear. The business plan sets out some strategic objectives, but does not explain in sufficient detail the steps required to achieve them. The plan covers the period 2002-04, but does not include specific timescales against which progress might be measured. Significant recent developments, such as the company's difficulty in attracting learners to its national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 programmes, are neither mentioned in the business plan, nor are their implications explored. Although the plan refers to the recent arrival of many asylum seekers on to the Life Skills programme, it does not explore what this means to the company in a strategic sense. There are insufficient links between the business plan and the company's overall approach to staff development. For example, the staff's inexperience in providing training in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to learners who speak little or no English is mentioned in the plan, but staff training has not been arranged as yet. The company has adequate systems, both manual and computerised, for managing information.

10. SYTG subcontracts with two local organisations, a specialist agency to which learners with dyslexia are referred for diagnostic testing, training and support, and a local college to which a small number of learners are sent for occupational training. There are no formal agreements in place with either of these subcontractors. SYTG's informal management of the dyslexia support agency is good. Liaison is frequent, and the directors are sent frequent reports on the progress of the learners. However, SYTG's management of the subcontracted provision with the college is ineffective. There is no named person at the college with whom they can liaise, and no meetings between

SYTG and college staff. SYTG is not sent reports on the attendance or progress of the two learners currently attending the college, and is unable to ensure that learners are on the right programme, or are receiving adequate support.

## **Equality of opportunity**

## **Contributory grade 2**

11. SYTG's staff are welcoming and highly inclusive in their approach to learners. Learners come from a very diverse range of racial and religious backgrounds. SYTG's directors collect equal opportunities data and analyse it. They have a very good understanding of the composition of their learner group. Approximately one-third of learners are asylum seekers or refugees, most of whom speak little or no English, and who face considerable difficulty in adjusting to life in the UK. One-quarter of SYTG's learners have severe to moderate learning difficulties, and over 15 per cent are ex-offenders or are currently being processed through the judicial system. The company's ethos is welcoming and highly inclusive, and no one is turned away unless the company lacks the physical space to offer them a place. One of the directors uses the Internet to research the different backgrounds of learners, to improve his understanding of their experience and their cultural expectations. New learners whose first language is not English are helped to communicate either by a translator from the social services department or by other learners who share the same language. This provides a good start to their training. Learners speak highly of the welcome they are given, and value the staff's understanding and respect for diversity.

12. SYTG's staff have a good understanding of equal opportunities, and have all attended training in equality. They deal very effectively with the challenge of integrating learners into the group. Considerable emphasis is placed on equality and diversity. These concepts, and the requirement for learners to respect each other, are clearly explained at the start of the learning programme, and are effectively reinforced throughout it. The company has a range of training materials which are used well with learners. Inappropriate or thoughtless remarks are firmly but sensitively interrupted by trainers. Learners' understanding of equality and of their rights and responsibilities, is good. SYTG's strategies to integrate learners, for example, by setting up multi-ethnic football teams, are working well.

13. Equality of opportunity in SYTG is appropriately managed by the directors, who delegate tasks to individual staff members. For example, the placement officer has been given the responsibility for implementing the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and improving access to the company's premises. At present, although wheelchair users would be able to access all training rooms, they would not be able to use the toilets without assistance. SYTG is investigating ways of improving this situation. None of SYTG's present or previous learners have been wheelchair users.

14. The company has an adequate equal opportunities policy. The policy and an equal opportunities statement are clearly explained to learners when they start their training. Learners on work placement are visited at least each week by the placement co-ordinators. These regular visits, along with the careful preselection of employers, are sufficient to ensure that the learners are protected from harassment or discrimination. However, SYTG's formal monitoring of equality in the workplace is minimal, and requires employers only to sign a form to say that they will abide by SYTG's equal opportunities policy.

**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 3**

15. SYTG's staff understand their roles and responsibilities for quality assurance procedures, and share the responsibility for updating documents. The managing director has overall responsibility for quality assurance in the organisation. Particularly good use is made of feedback from learners, which is sought on a regular basis, through formal questionnaires and informal group discussions. This feedback has led to a range of improvements, which include the integration of various ethnic groups in classroom sessions, purchase of picture and foreign language dictionaries, introduction of a breakfast club to encourage social interaction between different groups, and the provision of refreshments. Learners welcome and value the opportunity to influence improvements to their learning experience. Employers' views are sought informally but in appropriate detail during frequent visits to each workplace.

16. SYTG has a range of quality assurance measures, including a range of policies and procedures. However, the company's approach to quality assurance is insufficiently systematic. Regular observations of trainers' performance take place, but there are no standard documents for recording them. Feedback to the member of staff is given verbally and informally. There is no system for deciding how frequently, or in what circumstances, members of staff will be observed. Reviews of learners' progress are not observed and inspectors identified weaknesses in the review process. Some members of staff use different documents for recording the same process. Documents are sometimes introduced by a member of staff but are not shared with colleagues. There is no internal audit system to monitor the standard and thoroughness of document completion. Quality assurance procedures, and associated documents, are undated. It is not possible to tell when they were issued or revised, or if they are the most recent version. Data on achievement and retention rates are collected, but are not systematically analysed to identify trends. At the time of inspection, SYTG had no learners on NVQ programmes. However, adequate systems are in place for assessment and internal verification. The latest audit from the LSC carried out in November 2002, did not identify any major contractual problems.

17. SYTG has produced two self-assessment reports, the latest in December 2002. The managing director produced the report on his own and did not seek the views of staff, learners or employers. Action plans are regularly produced by the organisation, the latest in November 2002. They are adequately detailed, and are well monitored by the directors. However, some of the staff are not aware of the requirements of the action plan.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Foundation programmes

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	53	3

18. SYTG has 53 learners following the Life Skills programme. Learners are referred by a number of agencies including Connexions, the youth offending team and the Sheffield asylum unit. Nearly half of the learners are from a minority ethnic group and one third are asylum seekers or refugees. The programme lasts up to one year, although learners can attend for longer if they need to. Learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours a week, usually for five mornings or five afternoons. They do not work towards specific qualifications, but towards learning goals designed to improve their basic and social skills, their confidence and their employability. Those who do not have English as their first language attend mainly in the afternoon. All learners are given the opportunity to attend a work placement. Eighteen learners are currently on work placement, which they attend for between one and four days each week, depending on their individual requirements. Learners complete in-house health and safety courses on manual handling and chemical safety.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Life Skills																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	41		101		79											
Retained*	0		0	0	26	33										
Successfully completed	3		34	34	26	33										
Still in learning	28		25	25	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

### STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- very flexible learning programme
- excellent specialist support for learners with dyslexia

## **WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate initial assessment
- some ineffective target-setting for learners

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more structured use of information technology (IT) resources

19. The work placements attended by learners are carefully selected, and are particularly appropriate to their individual needs. SYTG's self-assessment report identified this as a strength. Two members of staff are responsible for setting up work placements, and supporting the learners who attend. They have established productive working relationships with a wide variety of local employers, including national retailing chains, pension management companies and local garages. Learners on work placement work towards a well-designed on-the-job training plan which is appropriately linked to their off-the-job activities. Learners are given very good support from their work-based supervisors, and from SYTG's staff, who visit them on placement once or twice each week. They also carry out a formal review of their progress, together with the workplace supervisor, once a month. Placements are carefully checked to ensure that they meet the requirements of health and safety legislation. SYTG's work placements are very effective in raising learners' confidence, and in enabling them to learn new skills and gain a better understanding of what employers expect. Some placements result in employment for the learners. One learner who had difficulty in controlling their behaviour has been placed in a large retail store, with a supervisor who has the necessary skills and experience to give close and appropriate support. The learner is making very good progress on placement and is gaining confidence and developing self-management skills. Another placement in a small computer repair shop provides a supportive environment where a learner is improving their English language skills considerably.

20. SYTG's diverse group of learners benefit from a flexible learning programme which is tailored to meet their individual needs. Learners receive an adequate induction to the programme, after which activities are planned over a 12-week period. This schedule is used as a framework, rather than a firm timetable. Activities are well designed, and include basic skills development, group activities, social events, personal projects, weekly football games and weekly use of a computer centre in the city centre. Learners are encouraged and helped to take up relevant part-time college courses. Groups are split for different tasks in-house so they are working with others of similar ability and experience. They all work through progressive basic skills booklets at their own pace and with support from a trainer. Trainers use opportunities to develop basic skills in the context of other activities such as jobsearch. Learners produce good work, which shows clear development of their literacy and numeracy skills. They are given clear, regular



feedback on their work, and are aware of the progress they are making. There is a good ratio of staff to learners, with three staff working with groups of no more than 16. Trainers have no formal qualifications in basic skills teaching or ESOL, but make good use of their varied and lengthy experience of working with foundation-level learners. Learners have very good support from trainers. Trainers change activities in response to learner preferences and quickly deal with behaviour that hinders the progress of the rest of the group. Trainers demonstrate an understanding of learners' personal circumstances which create barriers to learning and show a commitment to helping them overcome them.

21. Resources are good. There are three training rooms, one of which has five computers with Internet access. Some learners spend time accessing websites relevant to their own language and culture. This is of benefit to them in terms of improving their computer skills and enabling them to retain a link with their country of origin. However, they are not always directly supervised while doing this, and their use of the websites sometimes has no structure and purpose. SYTG has a wide range of appropriate learning materials including workbooks, references, books and games. The computers tend to be used by the same learners and, although sometimes valuable, this activity is unstructured and does not always make the best use of learners' time.

22. Learners who have dyslexia can attend a specialist local centre which offers particularly good diagnostic, training and support facilities. Learners attend well-structured, twice-weekly one-hour sessions to improve their reading and spelling ability, concentration, self-confidence and co-ordination. Comprehensive and professional assessments covering all aspects of dyslexia are given with recommendations of methods to be used to help the individual. The reports are used as guidance by SYTG's trainers. Learners work through a series of gently graded exercises, using a sophisticated, computer-based multi-sensory system. Their progress is continuously assessed and recorded in graph form. Learners who attend the specialist centre are progressing extremely well. Over a period of six months, one learner has increased their spelling age by more than one year and their reading age by more than two years.

23. SYTG's learners have an initial assessment when they start their training, but this is insufficiently comprehensive, and is not used as a basis for the individual's learning plan. Those who speak English complete a basic skills agency test, while non-English speakers are given a maths test. All learners give some details of their experience, qualifications and general health, but the information is inadequate to provide a detailed picture of each learner's needs and abilities. Little reference is made to the outcomes of the initial assessment later in the programme. Although the data gathered are used to decide learners' initial targets and a short action plan, they do not help identify personal and social targets. There is an over-reliance on informal interaction to prepare the learners' programme.

24. Reviews of learners' progress are regular and thorough, but the recording of reviews and the setting of targets for learners are unsystematic. Reviews do not always refer to the targets set and the decisions taken at the previous review. They rarely refer to the



outcomes of initial assessment, or to the progress against learners' overall learning goals. Some of the targets set during reviews are too general and only comprise of single words such as 'attendance' or 'comprehension'. These are unhelpful in moving the learners through their programme, and in reflecting progress. One learner has been training for 10 months and is still trying to find a work placement with the help of the placement officer. Although this learner has poor self-confidence and needs plenty of time to feel prepared for a placement, this target is insufficiently specific to help the learner move forward.

25. Achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. Of the 221 learners who started a Life Skills programme since 2000, 27 per cent have gone into employment or on to further education or training. A further 24 per cent of learners are still in learning. Given the substantial barriers to employability faced by many of these learners, and the fact that over one-third of them cannot move into employment as they have no work permit, this is an adequate proportion. The retention rates improved between 2000-01 and 2001-02, and the indications suggest a further improvement in the retention rates for 2002-03. Learners are given appropriate guidance about the progression opportunities available to them once they have completed the programme.

#### **Good Practice**

*Learners on work placement use dictaphone machines to record their day-to-day learning in the workplace. The tapes are transcribed by SYTG's staff. This method ensures that they get the best from their work placement whatever their difficulties with written English.*

#### **Poor Practice**

*Reviews of learners' progress are sometimes held in a room being used by another member of staff. The door is left open and staff and learners come and go as they please. The member of staff carrying out the review is subject to interruptions, and the noise from adjoining rooms is distracting. The trainer does not check with the learner to ensure they are comfortable with this arrangement.*