

INSPECTION REPORT

Stockport Engineering Training Association

27 January 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

Stockport Engineering Training Association was formed in 1966 under an initiative by the Engineering Industry Training Board to provide training services to small and medium-sized engineering companies in the Stockport and Manchester area. The association has 73 member companies and it has working relationships with approximately 450 others around the Greater Manchester area. Forty-eight employers are involved with training work-based learners, 32 are member companies and 16 non-members. At the time of inspection, there were 123 engineering learners on the programme, five on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes and 118 on advanced modern apprenticeships. There were three learners on business administration courses, however, these were not looked at during the inspection. Employers are small to medium-sized engineering or manufacturing companies and the main skill areas are mechanical and electrical engineering, sheet metal working, welding and fabrication.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Engineering learners receive good training, although achievement of their modern apprenticeship frameworks is slow. Overall, the engineering provision is satisfactory. Leadership and management in the organisation is satisfactory. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. However, equal opportunities is not sufficiently promoted and monitored.

GRADES

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	3

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- wide range of off-the-job learning opportunities
- well-structured on-the-job training programmes
- effective target-setting in business plan
- good external quality assurance of new programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor use of individual learning plans
- delayed assessment of NVQ at level 3
- no recorded monitoring of subcontractors and employers
- poor promotion of equal opportunities

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better matching of training to NVQ at level 3
- better staff awareness of equality and diversity issues

THE INSPECTION

1. Four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Stockport Engineering Training Association (SETA) in January 2003. They interviewed 30 learners and inspected 23 learning plans and 16 learners' portfolios. They visited 11 work placements, interviewed nine work-based employers and conducted eight interviews with the training provider's staff. They observed one training session and two progress reviews. Inspectors considered the latest self-assessment report, which was produced in October 2002, together with the development plan.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. SETA was formed in 1966 under an initiative by the Engineering Industry Training Board to provide training services to small and medium-sized engineering companies in the Stockport and Manchester area. It is a registered charity, limited by guarantee and has an elected executive committee of eight members representing the 73 member companies. The chief executive, along with four other directors, manages the company on a day-to-day basis. SETA contracts with Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide government-funded work-based learning for young people. SETA functions as a recruitment agency for its member and associate companies for modern apprentices. Approximately 95 per cent of applications come direct to SETA from local Connexions services. The rest come from recruitment fairs or direct from companies. Of the 30 staff employed by SETA, only 13 are directly involved with the provision of work-based learning for young people. SETA also operates commercial training services in health and safety and additional skills training for skilled engineers. There are 118 learners who are working towards advanced modern apprenticeships and five on foundation modern apprenticeships in engineering. The initial modern apprenticeship training for NVQ at level 2 in performing engineering operations is provided on a block-release basis in the company's own training centre. Colleges of further education are subcontracted to provide the background knowledge required to obtain the technical certificate element of the advanced modern apprenticeships. Colleges also teach three of the five key skills required for the advanced modern apprenticeships.

3. The population of Manchester is over three million. The proportion of the population of greater Manchester who are from minority ethnic groups is 5.8 per cent, compared with the national rate of 6.2 per cent according to the 1991 census. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in England was 3 per cent and in the northwest of England it was 3.6 per cent. The proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in 2002 was 45 per cent in Greater Manchester and the average for the rest of England was 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. The training in engineering and manufacturing is satisfactory. Learners receive good training at SETA's training centre and they have a well-structured training programme while they are at work. Many of the learners who started their training as long ago as five years are still in training, showing that overall achievement is slow. All learners are employed from the start of their programme. Learners are given an initial assessment and induction by SETA's staff at its own training centre. Advanced modern apprentices complete a level 2 NVQ at SETA and then, following a period of training at work, they complete a level 3 NVQ and key skills awards. They also attend further education colleges for technical studies one day each week. Foundation modern apprentices complete a level 2 NVQ and key skills to complete the modern apprenticeship framework. Staff at SETA provide the NVQ training and assessment. Learners on these programmes are not fully aware of the programmes they are on or how long it should take to complete the qualification. Work placements are good and provide good opportunities for advancement and for completion of the modern apprenticeship frameworks.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

5. Stockport Engineering Training Association Limited is a registered charity limited by guarantee. It has an elected executive committee of eight members who represent the 73 employer member companies. The chief executive, along with four other directors, manages the company on a day-to-day basis. SETA employs 30 staff, although only 13 of them are involved with the LSC-funded modern apprenticeship programme. There are eight engineering instructors, four workplace-monitoring officers and a training manager. SETA has held accreditation for the ISO 9000 quality assurance standard since 1994 and has recently updated its procedures to meet the latest requirements. It also gained accreditation in 1995 as an Investor in People organisation. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, and has undergone successful reaccreditation on two re-assessments and is currently accredited.

STRENGTHS

- effective target-setting in business plan
- effective staff appraisal and development
- good external quality assurance of new programmes

WEAKNESSES

- poor promotion of equal opportunities
- insufficient use of data to influence management decisions
- ineffective monitoring of equal opportunities
- no formal observation of learning

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed agreements for subcontractors
- better staff awareness of equality and diversity issues

6. The board of directors produces an annual business plan that determines the direction that they want the business go in. The business plan contains measurable targets to be achieved. The targets are clear and realistic and provide managers and staff with goals to achieve so that the business can grow. Previous business plan targets have been effective in ensuring the continuing success of the business.

7. Staff appraisals are held every year. Managers meet with each staff member to review their previous performance and look at future work requirements. The process is a two-way discussion based on a form staff complete in advance to show what they feel are their strengths, weaknesses and areas that could be improved. Following the appraisal, any development needs that have been agreed as being in line with the

company's and individual's future progression are written down and sent to the chief executive. The chief executive then produces a company training plan based on the agreed staff development needs. Training to meet staff development is monitored through regular meetings to ensure the training is providing the necessary personal and business development.

8. Many aspects of SETA are informal with little being recorded and analysed to provide managers with useful management information. For example, learners who are completing workplace training are visited regularly by SETA monitoring officers to check their progress. Progress monitoring sheets are completed at each visit to show what training segments have been completed. However, this information is not analysed to show managers which learners are progressing well or not so well. There is no attempt to collate the information to show the overall performance data, or data which are specific to individual monitoring officers. It is difficult, therefore, to pre-empt problems of slow progress or to share best practice between monitoring officers. The lack of data makes it difficult for managers to spot trends early. This results in managers having to react to situations which may have been avoidable by forward planning by data analysis.

9. Subcontractors' agreements do exist, however, they need to be updated to specify the levels of service required. Regular meetings take place between SETA and the subcontracted colleges, and appropriate action is taken to rectify any identified issues. However, meetings are informal and would be improved by writing minutes and any agreed outcomes.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

10. There is poor promotion of equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity within the company is focused on the equality of treatment for all. This is clearly stated in the equal opportunities policy and included in the learners' application form. Agreements with subcontracting colleges and employers include a section on equal opportunities. However, this is limited to a reference about the need for compliance with current legislation. Learners receive some training on equality of opportunity issues at the centre during the initial induction day. However, there is no formal, ongoing reinforcement within the centre or in the workplace. There is little formal training for staff in equality and diversity issues. The company has a complaints process for the centre, however, there is no formal process for learners' complaints in the workplace. There are no specific procedures for highlighting or dealing with harassment.

11. There is no formal monitoring process of equality of opportunity in the workplace or in subcontracted colleges by SETA. Equal opportunities data are collated and analysed for new starters at irregular intervals. However, it is not collected and analysed for learner applicants. The lack of data prevents analysis to inform management decisions, and influence recruitment policies to promote equality of opportunity to under-represented groups. While some promotion has taken place, for example, visits by SETA's staff to schools with large numbers of minority ethnic pupils, and to all-girl schools, there has been no consistent programme of promotion, or evaluation of the effectiveness of the promotions. This has been recognised by the company and an equal opportunities positive-action plan is being implemented to raise SETA's profile as a company committed to equality of opportunity.

12. There is low-level access to the engineering workshop at SETA for wheelchair users or those with restricted mobility. A formal accessibility review is planned for April 2003 in parallel with the reorganisation of the workshop facilities.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

13. The company has a well-established quality assurance system which was ISO9002 accredited and which has recently been updated to ISO 9000:2000. It includes a comprehensive quality assurance manual, mandatory procedures and processes described using graphical flowcharts with additional information on quality assurance objectives and key performance indicators. The processes are supported by more detailed procedures. There is a recorded internal audit procedure and the last recorded completion of process and procedure audits was in November 2002. These were carried out by a qualified internal auditor.

14. There are no records of effective monitoring of subcontractors and employers on an ongoing basis against a service level agreement. Discussions with SETA's staff indicated that there is no formal monitoring process, and that communication on issues of concern are usually informal. Problems are resolved as they arise but records are not kept.

15. There are no records of observation of training sessions to ensure effective teaching. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is based only on observation of learners' outcomes. There are not enough data available for analysis to help improve training and learning, and the feedback available is insufficient to provide a sound basis for effective staff development and the sharing of best practice.

16. The self-assessment report was produced in October 2002. Staff input was by informal discussions and not recorded. Other input included the outcomes of a survey of learners and employers' views. The action plan based on the self-assessment report was compiled by senior managers in conjunction with Greater Manchester LSC. Staff were not involved in the development of the action plan. The plan does not set milestones or use measurable target dates for completing actions.

17. The assessment and internal verification process is sound and well established. There are clear records of verification and the updating of assessors' qualifications. The verification process is being reviewed and updated to meet recent changes required by the awarding body.

Good Practice
<i>To encourage learners to become professional engineers, SETA registers the learners and pays the first year's subscription to the engineering professional institute. This helps to motivate learners and provides them with ongoing information about the engineering profession.</i>

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	127	3

18. SETA has 127 engineering learners. Of these, eight are foundation modern apprentices and 118 are advanced modern apprentices. There is one NVQ learner. Learners are recruited by referral from Connexions, by direct application from potential learners, or through employers. Members of SETA's staff attend local careers fairs and school careers evenings. All potential learners are subject to interview and initial assessment by SETA and are then passed to potential employers for a selection interview. All learners are employed by a variety of engineering and manufacturing companies, ranging from large to small or medium-sized enterprises. Learners work towards a variety of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) including mechanical, electrical, electronic, fabrication and welding disciplines, and maintenance and technical services skills. A team of 13 well-qualified and experienced members of staff provide and manage SETA's engineering programmes.

19. Initial training for the modern apprenticeship programmes is carried out in SETA's own fully equipped engineering training centre. Training is delivered in block periods during which modern apprentices complete an initial-stage qualification at NVQ level 2. Most learners remain in the training centre to complete the modern apprenticeship initial stage before joining their employers. Some learners, however, return to their employers for a short period of on-the-job development before returning to SETA to complete additional NVQ units. On completion of this phase, learners return to their employers and begin to work towards their NVQ at level 3. Learners attend subcontracted local colleges on a day-release basis to study for craft, national and higher national certificates. The colleges are also contracted to provide three of the five key skills units.

20. Learners follow a structured training programme within their companies. They have three-monthly progress reviews and their work is regularly monitored during their on-the-job training and development phase.

STOCKPORT ENGINEERING TRAINING ASSOCIATION

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	29		22		34		34		42		45		34			
Retained*	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	58	28	82		
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	53	24	71		
Still in learning	28		17	77	24	71	22	65	21	50	6	13	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																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4		10		1		1									
Retained*	0		6	60	1	100	1	100								
Successfully completed	0		3	30	0	0	1	100								
Still in learning	4		3	30	1	100	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																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	8		10		2		3		1		6					
Retained*	0		6	60	0	0	3	100	0	0	4	67				
Successfully completed	4		3	30	1	50	3	100	0	0	4	67				
Still in learning	0		0	0	1	50	0	0	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

STRENGTHS

- enhanced learning opportunities at supportive employers
- wide range of off-the-job learning opportunities
- well-motivated and enthusiastic learners
- well-structured on-the-job training programmes

WEAKNESSES

- incomplete initial assessment
- poor use of individual learning plans
- incomplete induction for learners
- delayed assessment for NVQ at level 3

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better matching of training to NVQ at level 3

21. Most employers actively encourage their learners to extend their skills beyond the requirements of the modern apprenticeship frameworks. Many learners hold higher national qualifications and some are supported through degree training. In the workplace, most learners experience a diverse range of activities and they are encouraged to learn and acquire business skills outside their technical roles. Many middle and senior management posts within employers' organisations are occupied by employees who have benefited from their modern apprenticeship period.

22. Off-the-job training is carried out within the well-equipped engineering centre at SETA's premises. The engineering workshops are clean, tidy, well resourced and well organised. Staff are well qualified and suitably experienced in the vocational area to support learners. The training resources in the training centre offer many learning opportunities. Modern apprentices are given instruction in skills that are not mandatory components of their formally planned programmes and are encouraged to make full use of the opportunities available to them.

23. Learners demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm in following their training programmes. Prior to starting the programme, potential learners and their parents or guardians are invited to SETA's centre where they are introduced to the company and the principles of the modern apprenticeship. This supportive activity generates motivation for learners to join and participate fully in training. Their successes are celebrated and achievements are rewarded. Annual events are organised to present NVQ certificates and special awards, such as apprentice of the year, which also have rewards to go with them. Learners speak highly of their training and development programmes both on and off the job. Many learners set themselves personal goals high above the requirements of the modern apprenticeship frameworks.

24. On-the-job training is structured on a modular basis. Learners are given an opportunity to develop and demonstrate skills in a variety of activity areas. This enables

the employer and employee to make informed judgements and selections for future career development. The training programme exposes learners to a wider range of training than that required for the NVQ. Most learners benefit from additional employer or equipment-manufacturer-driven training. The training programmes are effectively monitored against learners' progress, but are not always aligned to the NVQ of the framework. Learners are aware of their programmes and can identify where their training will be provided for given periods during the programme.

25. Learners undergo a short induction during the initial training period. The induction includes comprehensive awareness raising in health and safety. Some essential topics are missed from the induction programme. For example, learners are unable to accurately define the structure and content of their vocational programmes. They have only a superficial understanding of equality of opportunity and little understanding of their rights and responsibilities within the wider equal opportunities arena. They are subsequently unable to judge whether or not their rights are being infringed or treatment of them is fair. Learners do not understand the structure of the key skills components of their frameworks or recognise the relationship with their work.

26. The initial assessment process involves testing applicants in mathematics, logic and mechanical comprehension. The results of this assessment are used to screen potential entrants to the learning programme. Results are not analysed to detect additional learning support needs. Learners are not provided with formal additional support and there is no mechanism to inform management where this may be required. The initial assessment instruments in use do not test basic or key skills competences. Data are not collected to inform management of the needs of individual learners or of the effectiveness of the initial assessment process.

27. SETA has not yet introduced basic skills screening. Learners who have demonstrated or claimed to have difficulty with a particular phase or aspect of learning have been given assistance, but this has been a reactive, rather than planned, intervention. A strategy for basic skills testing is being developed for implementation with new recruits to the programme starting in September 2003. The chief executive holds overall responsibility for additional support. The personnel officer, who is currently responsible for initial assessment, is to hold delegated responsibility for the conduct of basic skills tests and interpretation of test results.

28. Individual learning plans are created at the beginning of the learner's programme. However, these plans are not revisited or updated as the learner progresses. Training plans exist in a range of different formats. Learners do not feel ownership of learning plans and many are unaware of their relevance. The progress review process is not used to update the individual learning plan and learners' achievements and records of progress towards the programme goals are not recorded. There is no mechanism in the learner's possession which clearly indicates the stage of development they have reached. This has been identified by employers as a weakness in the planning and review process.

29. Learners are not assessed for progress towards the level 3 NVQ until the end phases of the learners' modern apprenticeship period. Some learners have gone some time over the duration of the programme before being given their NVQ certification. Trainers review learners' progress against the training and development programme and record the learner's experience and achievement on worksheets. These monthly progress reviews, during which log-book/portfolio entries effectively monitor learners' progress, are not matched to the NVQ components and no use is made of the evidence collected for assessment purposes. This results in the learners not being assessed for the qualification until they reach or go beyond the end of the funded programme. SETA has adopted this method of not assessing the NVQ until the end of learners' training period at the suggestion of the external verifier. However, learners who leave the programme before being assessed for the level 3 NVQ, have no certification of the considerable skills they have gained during the on-the-job training period. Achievement on all the engineering programmes is slow and many of the learners are still on the learning programmes. The high numbers still in learning may lead to good achievement but this cannot be judged at this stage.