

INSPECTION REPORT

SIGTA Limited

24 July 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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** 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

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.

INSPECTION REPORT

SIGTA Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. SIGTA Limited (SIGTA) is a group training organisation, which specialises in work-based learning for young people in engineering. The association was established in 1964 by four Sussex-based engineering companies. Its member companies are located mainly in the south of England, most of them in Sussex and Surrey.
2. A chief executive is responsible for the overall management of the company and reports to a board of non-executive directors representing the association's member companies. The general manager, who is also the company secretary, is responsible for the operational management of the company. SIGTA employs four full-time staff and nine part-time staff in addition to the chief executive and general manager. These include two full-time and five part-time training advisers.
3. SIGTA's work-based engineering programmes for young people are funded by Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Apart from a two-day induction programme, all off-the-job training and formal vocational training is either subcontracted to local colleges, or is carried out by the employer.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

4. SIGTA has 95 learners on engineering programmes, all of whom are employed. There are 57 advanced modern apprentices, 16 foundation modern apprentices and 22 working towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level two or three. Learners are employed in a wide variety of engineering and manufacturing companies whose activities range from the precision engineering of aircraft components to the manufacturing of pens, paint products and environmental equipment. Learners may start their programme at any time of the year. Most of the advanced modern apprentices attend local colleges of further education either full time for one year or part time for two years to gain an NVQ in performing engineering operations at level two. Their training continues in the workplace and at college on day release. A few learners receive all their training in the workplace. One member of staff is responsible for the recruitment of employers, and another for the recruitment of learners. SIGTA employs four training officers, three of whom work part time. They all have many years of industrial experience and hold appropriate assessors qualifications. Their responsibilities include visiting learners in the workplace to carry out progress reviews and assessments. Five employers have their own assessors. SIGTA operates mainly with employers in southern England but also supports one major international employer in the London area.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of inspectors | 4 |
| Number of inspection days | 16 |
| Number of learner interviews | 37 |
| Number of staff interviews | 16 |
| Number of employer interviews | 18 |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 14 |

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, work-based learning in engineering and SIGTA's leadership and management are satisfactory. The approach to equality of opportunity is good but SIGTA's quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| Leadership and management | 3 |
| Contributory grades: | |
| Equality of opportunity | 2 |
| Quality assurance | 4 |

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

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. **The retention rate for learners is good, and improving.** Of the 20 advanced modern apprentices who started in 2002-03, 19 are still in learning and of the eight foundation modern apprentices, six are still in learning. All the learners who began NVQ training in 2002-03 are still on programme.

7. **Learners have achieved or are working towards a wide range of additional academic and vocational qualifications** in subjects such as first-aid, abrasive wheel regulations, portable electrical appliance testing and lift truck operation. Some learners are studying for higher national certificates (HNCs) or degrees in engineering, a level of qualification that exceeds the requirement of their modern apprenticeship framework.

8. **Learners acquire good practical engineering skills and demonstrate a high standard of achievement during their on-the-job training.** Many learners approaching the end of their modern apprenticeships are regarded as key employees and make a significant contribution to the performance of their employers.

9. In the past, achievement rates have been low and have been affected by the downturn in the engineering and manufacturing sector locally. However, with an improving retention rate, the potential achievement rates are rising.

Quality of education and training

10. Learners benefit from gaining good practical engineering skills during their on-the-job training. The training for most learners is planned effectively by their employers who provides good opportunities for them to work on a variety of challenging activities. Resources in the workplace are good and enable learners to gather the full range of evidence for their NVQ. **Employers are very supportive of training.** They help and encourage learners to gain new skills, including those beyond the requirements of their framework.

11. **Learners use an extensive range of modern, industry-standard equipment at work.** The staff working directly with them are knowledgeable and possess relevant occupational experience. Many employers assign learners to experienced mentors who are responsible for monitoring the development of their skills. Most learners have detailed training development plans which provide for planned rotation through various manufacturing areas where they broaden their skills and abilities through relevant training experiences.

12. **There is particularly good support for learners at all stages of their programme.** Applicants for the programmes are given effective support in obtaining employment with a SIGTA member company. All candidates are subject to a range of initial assessment tests where their needs and abilities are clearly identified. Learners are placed on learning programmes that closely match their needs, skills and abilities. Learners' basic literacy and support needs are clearly identified through appropriate diagnostic assessment.

13. Learners' basic literacy and numeracy needs are identified using appropriate diagnostic tests. Support is provided from early in learners' programmes for those who need it.

14. There are some poor assessment practices. **There is little planning of on-the-job assessment.** Most assessment takes place towards the end of learners' programmes. Some vocational assessors place insufficient emphasis on assessment by direct observation and rely too much on portfolio and log book entries initialled by work-based recorders. There is no clear strategy for internal verification. Some internal verifiers were unable to produce current sampling plans and some assessors are not included in the internal verification sampling. These inconsistencies in assessment practice are not being

identified through the centre's internal verification system.

15. **There is poor monitoring of learners' progress** with many learners and their employers unclear about how far they have got with their qualification. Most learners are set short-term targets during their progress reviews, but there is little monitoring of their completion of NVQ units. Copies of progress reviews are not automatically given to employers. Some progress review forms contain minimal information on achievement. In most cases the employer and learner do not know how close the learner is to completing the qualification.

Leadership and management

16. **SIGTA has established particularly effective partnerships with employers** that are members of the group training association. Many have worked successfully with SIGTA to provide young people with modern apprenticeship training opportunities. SIGTA has helped several employers to design training programmes that meet their specific needs rather than just offering a standard package. The company has made innovative responses to non-standard training requirements, such as devising courses in telephone equipment maintenance and developing national certificate courses for building engineering services apprentices.

17. The board and senior management of SIGTA have developed **very clear business strategies and a lucid mission statement**. The board clearly understands the strategic implications of the changing national agenda for the vocational training of young people.

18. **The company has established a good balance between its publicly funded training programme for young people and its commercial activities**. The physical resources at SIGTA's premises present a good image for engineering and benefit learners. SIGTA is working effectively with two other local engineering training providers to improve business performance and encourage subcontractors to improve their provision and pricing.

19. **SIGTA has a good, computerised management information system**. Managers use the database effectively to manage learners' records and administer training programmes. The system allows detailed analysis of programmes, and provides information on topics such as the proportion of early leavers and the effectiveness of the recruitment strategy.

20. **The appraisal scheme and training arrangements for staff are good**. Staff have regular appraisals which lead to individual development plans to improve performance, meet business targets and encourage career development. Individual training needs identified at the appraisal or arising from the business plan are collated into a training plan. There are adequate training funds, and staff attend training programmes as required. Recent staff training has been linked closely to the needs of learners and covered topics such as equality of opportunity, working with people who have hearing difficulties and using the internet effectively. Staff have also had sales training and quality assurance auditor training to support SIGTA's business needs.

21. Following the recent reduction in staffing, there have been some instances of poor internal communications. **Individual responsibilities, administrative processes and control systems in the revised organisation are not always clear**, and the filing system is not being controlled effectively or centrally.

22. **SIGTA has developed highly effective strategies for promoting equality of opportunity.** It has a comprehensive and detailed equal opportunities policy that is revised annually. The policy includes learners' and employers' responsibilities, diversity training, complaints procedures, disciplinary and grievance procedures, the monitoring of employers' equality of opportunity procedures, continuous improvement activities, relevant legislation and employment policies. The company has an extensive range of effective activities and initiatives to keep its staff, employers, learners and prospective learners aware of equality of opportunity and its relevance in the workplace.

23. **SIGTA's staff actively promote engineering as a career path to under-represented groups.** Training officers go into local schools and colleges and work closely with careers staff to promote a better understanding of the opportunities for learners in engineering. Special careers events and talks have taken place in areas with a high minority ethnic population.

24. Although SIGTA has a number of well-established quality assurance systems and procedures, overall its **quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory.** Key business processes are monitored through the ISO 9001/2000 system, an international quality assurance standard. The quality of training is partly assured through the systematic auditing of its operational procedures and paperwork.

25. **There is insufficient monitoring of subcontractors.** There are no service level agreements to set out their roles and responsibilities to learners. SIGTA's quality assurance systems and procedures do not cover all aspects of the subcontractors' provision. SIGTA's staff do not observe subcontracted training, and the subcontractors do not supply information on the quality of their training.

26. **The internal verification process at SIGTA is inadequate.** Internal verification of assessment is carried out near the end of the learners' training. There are systems and procedures in place to ensure standardisation of the process, but they are not always implemented and do not include all the assessors. The internal verification sampling plan does not include work-based assessors, there are no sampling schedules which cover all the provision, and some individual sampling plans are incomplete.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- particularly effective partnerships with employers
- very clear business strategies

SIGTA LIMITED

- good management information system
- good staff appraisal and training
- highly effective equality of opportunity strategies

Weaknesses

- some poor internal communications
- insufficient monitoring of subcontractors
- inadequate internal verification

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- improving retention rate
- good practical skills acquisition
- particularly good support for learners
- learners access a wide range of additional qualifications

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- some poor assessment practice
- some poor monitoring of learners' progress

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SIGTA LIMITED:

- getting experience of the real world and working
- the variety of work experience; 'it's really interesting'
- designing and changing drawings to meet new specifications
- 'being left to get on with it and using my own initiative'
- feeling that you are contributing and being valued in the workplace
- putting a portfolio together

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SIGTA LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of paperwork you have to fill in - there is too much of it
- log book entries that are relevant to assembly work need to be adapted to fit work in administration and drawing
- 'some things we do are not relevant to the NVQ'

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SIGTA LIMITED:

- developing better systems for assessing and monitoring learners' progress in the workplace
- ensuring that learners complete their modern apprenticeship framework within the planned timescale
- improving the monitoring of subcontractors and developing service-level agreements with them
- improving internal verification

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- particularly effective partnerships with employers
- very clear business strategies
- good management information system
- good staff appraisal and training
- highly effective equality of opportunity strategies

Weaknesses

- some poor internal communications
- insufficient monitoring of subcontractors
- inadequate internal verification

27. SIGTA has established particularly effective partnerships with employers. Well-established and effective working relationships have been developed with members of the group training association over many years. Many employers have worked successfully with SIGTA to provide young people with modern apprenticeship training opportunities. Some former SIGTA learners now hold managerial positions with employers. Many employers regard SIGTA as their primary source of information on training and development. SIGTA has developed a computer-based system to manage employers' training information and analyse their training needs. In partnership with several employers, it has designed programmes to meet the specific needs of those employers and their learners. SIGTA has made innovative responses to non-standard training requirements. It has devised courses in telephone equipment maintenance and developed national certificate courses for building engineering services apprentices.

28. The board and senior management of SIGTA have developed very clear business strategies and a lucid mission statement. The strategic plans and objectives have been translated into an effective business plan. In light of the continuing reduction in the number of engineering apprenticeships offered by employers, SIGTA has reduced its staffing levels. The company has established a good balance between its public funded training programme for young people and its commercial activities. The physical resources at SIGTA's premises give a good impression of engineering and benefit learners. SIGTA has formed an effective alliance with two other local engineering training providers. They work co-operatively to improve business performance and encourage local colleges to improve the quality of their provision.

29. SIGTA has a good computer-based management information system, which is used

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effectively to manage learners' records and support the administration of training programmes. The system provides information on topics such as early leavers, progress towards recruitment targets, and vacancies in the engineering sector. Good use is made of the system to produce reports in a variety of formats for the board, staff and managers. SIGTA has a well-designed website which provides information on training matters, the recruitment of modern apprentices, and job vacancies.

30. There is a good staff appraisal scheme and training arrangements. Staff appraisals take place regularly and include individual development plans to improve staff performance, meet business targets and encourage career development. Individual training needs identified by the appraisal and those arising from the business plan are collated into a training plan. There are adequate resources to fund training and staff attend training programmes as required. Recent staff training has been linked closely to supporting the needs of learners. Topics have included equality of opportunity, working with people who have hearing difficulties and using the internet effectively. Staff have also been given sales training and quality assurance auditor training to support SIGTA's business needs. SIGTA is a learndirect centre and staff are encouraged and supported to enrol on a wide range of courses. The company holds the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

31. Following the recent staff reductions and transfer of responsibilities, internal communications have yet to be fully established. There are some instances of poor internal communications. Inspectors had difficulty finding files and other information covering SIGTA's operational aspects such as assessment, internal verification and learners' progress. There is insufficient clarity about individual responsibilities, administrative processes and control systems in the revised organisation. The filing system is not being controlled effectively or centrally.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

32. SIGTA has developed highly effective strategies for promoting equality of opportunity. It has a comprehensive and detailed equal opportunities policy that is revised annually. The policy includes learners' and employers' responsibilities, diversity training, complaints procedures, disciplinary and grievance procedures, the monitoring of employers' equality of opportunity procedures, continuous improvement activities, relevant legislation and employment policies. SIGTA maintains good links with a specialist equality of opportunity training provider to ensure that it keeps up-to-date with changes to legislation.

33. Equality of opportunity is monitored satisfactorily by training officers in the workplace through the learners' review process and by regular contact with employers. Training officers collect copies of employers' equality of opportunity policies which are then reviewed by the general manager. Any company without an adequate policy is offered help to create one.

34. The company has an extensive range of effective and well-planned activities and initiatives to keep its staff, employers, learners and prospective learners aware of equality

of opportunity and its relevance in the workplace. However the impact of these is not always formally monitored through its quality assurance systems. It has made a high priority of training events which focus on important aspects of equality of opportunity for staff, learners and their employers. A successful two-day training event in the use of signing was recently held for staff to help them communicate with a newly appointed member of staff with a hearing problem. The course also greatly assisted by raising staff awareness of the problems faced by learners with similar impairments. Supervisors, mentors and managers in the workplace were recently invited to two one-day training events about their role in supporting learners through the modern apprenticeship framework, recognising differences in learning styles, and helping with collection of evidence for assessment purposes. The two-day induction programme for learners now includes interactive sessions on health and safety and its implications as well as equality of opportunity. Learners are encouraged to look at their responsibilities, and those of their employer, to ensure fair treatment for all. Learners' progress reviews have been changed to improve discussion and recording of equality of opportunity issues and concerns. Staff have benefited from an equality of opportunity training course that uses leardirect material. There are plans to incorporate this into the learners' induction programme in the future.

35. SIGTA's staff actively promote engineering as a career path to under-represented groups. Training officers go into local schools and colleges, and work closely with careers staff to promote a better understanding of the opportunities for learners in engineering. SIGTA has taken a group of schools' careers staff into a local engineering firm to demonstrate that engineering is a worthwhile career for young people. Special careers events and talks have taken place in areas with a high minority ethnic population. SIGTA takes great care to ensure that its publicity materials do not exclude or offend individuals from any section of the community. One member of staff sits on the committee of a local education business partnership to promote engineering and vocational training routes for young people. Another works with a local young engineers group where engineering modern apprenticeships are actively promoted as an alternative to the academic route. SIGTA is working with a local school for children with additional learning needs. The children are designing a model vehicle using computer-assisted design software, as part of an initiative sponsored by a national Formula One racing car manufacturer.

36. There is good recognition of learners' achievements. SIGTA has run an award scheme for the past 15 years to acknowledge and celebrate learners' vocational achievements and their progress in the face of personal and social difficulties. Nominations are invited from employers and judged by a panel that includes representatives from subcontracted colleges and employers, and SIGTA's training officers. Candidates are invited to give presentations and answer questions on their work. The awards are much prized by learners.

37. There is good access to SIGTA's training centre, including toilet facilities for people with mobility problems. The computer training suite is located on the ground floor and a ramp has been installed to improve access at the front entrance. SIGTA has received recognition from a national organisation for its positive approach to working with the

disabled.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

38. Although SIGTA has a number of well-established quality assurance systems and procedures, its quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. Key business processes are monitored through the ISO 9001/2000 system, an international quality assurance standard. The quality of SIGTA's training is partly assured through the systematic auditing of its operational procedures and paperwork. The training officer with responsibility for quality assurance, produces an annual report for the board to review progress and ensure compliance. Quality assurance is also monitored through the five training officers, who assess learners' work in the workplace, review their progress, liaise with employers and sometimes visit subcontracting colleges. There are no systematic observations of off-the-job training, except in health and safety training. Monthly meetings are held between the training officers and the general manager to discuss quality assurance and other issues and plan for future training needs. These are also used successfully as a forum for some staff training and development sessions and to share good practice. Staff from Connexions recently attended a meeting to explain developments within the service.

39. Feedback is collected annually from learners and employers and used to improve training and assist partner organisations. Feedback is analysed and issues are resolved or acted on. For example, last year the employers' survey revealed that some 40 per cent of small employers working in partnership with SIGTA did not have their own equal opportunities policy. SIGTA has since contacted them and offered to help them create one.

40. Information on early leavers is collected regularly. The reasons for leaving, and learners' destinations, are discussed as a regular agenda item at staff and board meetings, where the implications for future training are considered. Equal opportunities data are also collected regularly. Information about all aspects of learners' programmes, including key skills is being collected centrally, although their progress in completing NVQ units is not yet included.

41. SIGTA carries out self-assessment annually. The last three reports produced were in April 2000, August 2001 and June 2002. All training staff are involved in the process with contributions from administrative staff. Feedback from learners and employers is used as a valued source of information, as are complaints logged throughout the year. No formal feedback is collected from subcontractors. Inspectors did not find the format of the self-assessment report easy to use. The organisation assessed and graded itself against the seven key questions in the 'Common Inspection Framework'. It did not grade equality of opportunity or quality assurance separately. Inspectors also identified some of the weaknesses mentioned in the self-assessment report, but regarded some of the strengths as normal practice. SIGTA's development plan covers all the weaknesses and areas for improvement, listing specific actions, expected outcomes, success indicators and deadlines for each one. Progress on some actions in the development plans is reviewed at staff meetings, but completion is not monitored closely enough and some

have now fallen behind their original target dates.

42. There is insufficient monitoring of subcontractors. There are no service level agreements to set out their roles and responsibilities to learners. SIGTA's quality assurance systems and procedures do not cover all aspects of the subcontractors' provision. No observations of subcontracted training are carried out by SIGTA's staff and no information on the quality of the training is supplied by the subcontractors. No regular formal feedback is sought from subcontractors, and they were not included in the self-assessment process. However most subcontractors supply employers with regular progress reports and attendance data on their learners, together with details of the training programmes. However, some do not, and employers have commented on the lack of information. Training officers identify problems with subcontracted training through their contacts with the employer and the learner. These are dealt with by SIGTA in a timely and effective manner. Training officers go to subcontractors' premises when learners are in training to discuss their progress. Some contact subcontractors directly for information if they have a particular concern about a learner. For example, some learners who were initially placed on an inappropriate course by a subcontractor were moved following the intervention of their training officer. SIGTA is working with two other local training organisations and some of the subcontractors to improve the training they provide.

43. The internal verification process at SIGTA is inadequate. Internal verification of assessment is carried out towards the end of the learners' training. There are systems and procedures to standardise this process, but they are not always implemented. For example, work-based assessors are not included in the internal verification sampling plan, there are no overall current sampling schedules and some individual sampling plans are incomplete.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 95 | 3 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- improving retention rate
- good practical skills acquisition
- particularly good support for learners
- learners access a wide range of additional qualifications

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- some poor assessment practice
- some poor monitoring of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

44. Retention rates are good and improving. Of the 20 advanced modern apprentices who started in 2002-03, 19 are still in learning. The only leaver was made redundant by his company. Of the eight learners who started foundation modern apprenticeships in 2002-03, six are still in learning. All the learners who began NVQ training in 2002-03 are still in learning. In 2001-02, eight advanced modern apprentices, 22 per cent of the intake, left the programme early because of redundancy, employers' reorganisation or dismissal. A major local employer carried out an extensive redundancy programme in 2001 which resulted in over 40 of its learners registered with SIGTA being made redundant or leaving early in the anticipation of redundancy.

45. Historically, achievement rates have been low and have been affected by the downturn in the engineering and manufacturing sector locally. The average achievement rate for learners starting advanced modern apprenticeships in 1997 and 1998 was 39 per cent with a further two learners, or 3.5 per cent still in learning. However, with an improving retention rate the potential achievement rates are better. The achievement rate for the first intake of 36 foundation modern apprentices in 1999 was very poor at 6 per cent. Of the 34 early leavers, five transferred to advanced modern apprenticeships and a further 11 had lost their jobs as a result of major redundancy programmes. For learners on NVQ training programmes, the achievement rate was 50 per cent in 1999-2000.

46. At least 30 per cent of learners are working towards or have achieved additional

vocational qualifications in subjects such as first aid, abrasive wheel regulations, portable electrical appliance testing and lift truck operation. Some learners are studying towards HNCs in engineering, a level of qualification that exceeds the requirement of their modern apprenticeship framework. Three learners are studying for a first degree in engineering.

47. SIGTA's advanced modern apprenticeship programme has received recognition from a professional institution for incorporated engineers. Modern apprentices are eligible for student membership of that professional body and SIGTA pays their subscription.

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----|---------|----|---------|----|-----------|----|---------|----|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|
| Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA) | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | 1999-2000 | | 1998-99 | | 1997-98 | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| | Number of starts | 20 | | 37 | | 23 | | 25 | | 24 | | 33 | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 0 | | 15 | | 13 | 52 | 7 | 29 | 17 | 52 | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 1 | | 3 | | 5 | 20 | 6 | 25 | 16 | 48 | | | | |
| Still in learning | 19 | | 16 | | 12 | | 8 | 32 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | | | | |

*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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|---------|----|---------|----|-----------|----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA) | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | 1999-2000 | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| | Number of starts | 8 | | 16 | | 20 | | 36 | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 6 | | 10 | 62 | 5 | 25 | 2 | 6 | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 1 | 6 | 3 | 15 | 2 | 6 | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 6 | | 9 | 56 | 2 | 10 | 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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---|---------|---|---------|----|-----------|----|---------|----|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|
| NVQ Training | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | 1999-2000 | | 1998-99 | | 1997-98 | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| | Number of starts | 9 | | 9 | | 13 | | 4 | | 21 | | 69 | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 6 | | 10 | | 2 | 50 | 3 | 14 | 27 | 39 | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 2 | | 2 | | 2 | 50 | 3 | 14 | 27 | 39 | | | | |
| Still in learning | 9 | | 4 | | 8 | | 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

Quality of education and training

48. Learners acquire good practical engineering skills during their on-the-job training. The training for most learners is planned effectively by their employers who provide good opportunities for them to work on a variety of challenging activities. Resources in the workplace are good and enable learners to gather the full range of evidence for their NVQ. Most learners are employed by small or medium-sized engineering businesses. One employer is a multinational organisation. All offer a wide range of engineering activities with good opportunities to develop knowledge and skills. Learners benefit from being able to use an extensive range of modern, industry-standard equipment at work. Staff who work directly with learners are knowledgeable and possess relevant occupational experience. Many employers assign learners to experienced mentors who are responsible for monitoring the development of their skills. Most learners have detailed training development plans which provide for planned rotation through various manufacturing areas where they can broaden their skills and abilities through relevant training experiences. Many learners nearing the end of their modern apprenticeships are regarded as key employees and make a significant contribution to the performance of their company. One final year learner was temporarily in charge of the night shift in his company's machine shop. In another company, a learner was working on the servicing and maintenance of modern telephone systems with minimal supervision.

49. All off-the-job training and teaching is subcontracted to local colleges located close to the employers. Inspectors were unable to observe any teaching at the colleges because courses had been completed for the academic year. The only off-the-job training courses provided by SIGTA are the induction programme and a range of additional skills training. Four of these teaching sessions were observed, two of which were judged good, and two satisfactory.

50. There is particularly good support for learners at all stages of their programme. All candidates for training programmes are subject to a range of initial assessment tests where their specific needs and abilities are clearly identified. Candidates who pass SIGTA's assessment tests are sent to group member employers for interview. Learners are placed on to learning programmes that closely match their needs and abilities.

Learners support needs are clearly identified through appropriate diagnostic assessment. When a learner is identified as needing support with literacy or numeracy, it is provided early in the learner's programme. If a learner has been identified as needing a revised training programme, it is discussed with the learner and employer and a more appropriate course is selected. Training officers visit the workplace or college every four to eight weeks to formally review learners' progress. Learners appreciate and value this frequent contact with the training officer and are motivated by it. Employers are very supportive of training. They help learners acquire new skills and encourage them to gain additional skills beyond their framework requirements. Some training officers give learners their personal telephone number and encourage learners to contact them for guidance and support. Additional off-the-job training is arranged for some learners to help with portfolio-building and the collection of key skills evidence.

51. There are some poor assessment practices. There is little planning of assessment on the job. For many learners, most of the assessment of their vocational skills takes place towards the end of their training programme. Although good use is made of work-based recorders to provide additional evidence of learners' ability and competence, there is insufficient quality assurance monitoring of their decisions. Some vocational assessors place insufficient emphasis on assessment by direct observation and rely too much on portfolio and log book entries initialled by work-based recorders. In some instances it is difficult to confirm the identity, status and occupational capability of these recorders from their signatures. Learners have a poor awareness and understanding of the NVQ appeals procedure. There is no clear strategy for internal verification. Some internal verifiers were unable to produce current sampling plans, and some of SIGTA's assessors are not included in the internal verification sampling. These inconsistencies in assessment practice are not being identified through the internal verification system. The standard of learners' portfolio work is satisfactory, but their portfolios have not been adequately cross-referenced to the awarding body standards.

52. There is poor monitoring of learners' progress. Although most learners are set short-term targets during their progress reviews, there is poor monitoring of their completion of NVQ units. Copies of progress reviews are not automatically given to the employer. Some progress review forms contain minimal information on achievement. In most cases the employer and learner do not know how the learner is progressing towards the qualification and are unable to forecast a completion date. Individual learning plans in learners' portfolios are not updated, and in some cases they contain different information to that held at SIGTA's offices. In many cases, colleges do not issue reports to the employer. Employers can only find out about progress from the learners. There is no overall system for monitoring learners' progress to assist managers in assessing the effectiveness of their systems.

Leadership and management

53. SIGTA maintains good links with employers in the engineering and manufacturing industries. The company has taken firm and effective action to ensure that it remains financially secure through an extended period of declining employment prospects for young people in engineering. Numbers of learners have decreased steadily from 196 in

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April 2000, to 122 in August 2001 and 95 at this inspection. SIGTA continues to work closely with employers, devising courses that meet their specific training needs. The academic courses offered by local colleges do not meet one employer's requirements. With SIGTA's help the employer is working to become a registered awarding centre for national certificate courses. SIGTA has supported the employer well by identifying suitable course units and providing guidance on the refurbishment of training workshops.

54. Every year SIGTA and its employers identify learners who are worthy of recognition and the receipt of SIGTA's awards. These awards celebrate outstanding personal achievement and progress. Learners appreciate this recognition and value the awards they receive.