

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Sandwell Training Association Limited**

**04 December 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
- **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

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

## Sandwell Training Association Limited

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Sandwell Training Association Limited (STA) was established in 1963 as an engineering employers training association. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The company has four training sites across the West Midlands and provides training for foundation and advanced modern apprentices, learners taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and Jobcentre Plus clients. Areas of learning include engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology (ICT), and retailing, customer service and transportation. STA has 290 learners. Of these, 179 are modern apprentices, 26 are taking NVQs and four are Jobcentre Plus clients. The remaining 81 learners are employed within the care sector and are following qualifications in management which is part funded through the European social funding (ESF).

2. STA is managed by a council of management elected annually from its membership of 24 local employers. The management team consists of the chief executive and five senior managers. They have responsibility for all aspects of the company's day-to-day management. Twenty-seven full-time staff are involved in training and assessment. A further seven staff are responsible for general administration.

3. STA funds its training through contracts with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Jobcentre Plus. In August 2003, the unemployment rate in Sandwell was 4.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.5 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 20.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent. The proportion of school leavers in Sandwell achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above is 34.2 per cent, compared with a national average of 51.6 per cent. Classed as an area of multiple deprivation, Sandwell ranks 17th, in terms of disadvantage, out of 354 areas. Sandwell is a densely populated area, but its population is declining.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

4. STA provides engineering training for 87 learners. Thirty-two are advanced modern apprentices, 44 are foundation modern apprentices and 11 are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The NVQs offered include performing engineering operations at level 2 and engineering maintenance, engineering production, installation and commissioning and technical services at level 3. The initial off-the-job training is carried out in STA's training centres in Cradley Heath and Wednesbury. Learners also attend a local college to achieve appropriate qualifications. Assessment of performing engineering operations and key skills is carried out for all modern apprentices by STA's staff. On-the-job assessment is carried out in the workplace by a team of STA's assessors. Learners are visited in the workplace every two to three weeks and formal progress reviews are carried

out every 12 weeks.

### **Business administration, management & professional**

5. STA runs three different programmes in this area; a care management programme funded jointly by the local LSC and the ESF, a work-based learning programme for young people and a 52-week programme funded by Jobcentre Plus, leading to work. Eighty-one learners are working in management roles in a range of care centres. These learners are working towards a level 4 diploma in management that has been customised for the care sector. Seventy-three learners are working towards advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships and NVQs in administration, with a further five working towards an NVQ in management at level 3. Four Jobcentre Plus clients are taking NVQs at level 2 and 3 in business administration. Learners in work-based learning for young people spend two weeks in STA's main training centre for the induction. These learners are either placed or employed in a variety of local employers, most of which are manufacturing and engineering companies. The care management diploma is assessed through internally set assignments and projects. Learners attend background knowledge sessions every fortnight which are held at several of STA's venues. Learners in work-based learning are assessed in the workplace and can attend the training centre to work towards key skills, additional qualifications and the qualification in background knowledge. These learners receive 12-weekly progress reviews in the workplace with their assessor. There are five assessors and one internal verifier for work-based learning. The care management programme has a team of specialist tutors who teach and assess all of the units. This programme also has an internal verifier who assures the quality of assessment.

### **Information & communications technology**

6. There are 18 foundation modern apprentices in this occupational area. One further learner is working towards an NVQ at level 2. All are taking a level 2 qualification in using information technology (IT). Learners receive most of their training in the workplace. Some off-the-job training is available in one of STA's training centres. All learners are visited in the workplace at least fortnightly by STA's staff. Learners are recruited locally by a variety of methods, mostly through local schools and Connexions. Recruitment takes place about four times a year. All learners take an assessment for literacy and numeracy when they start. Learners with identified additional learning needs are supported through a local college.

## Retailing, customer service & transportation

7. Twenty-one learners are following programmes in retailing and customer service. Of these, nine are foundation modern apprentices in distribution, storage and warehousing operations and two are foundation modern apprentices in retailing operations. There are nine modern apprentices in customer service, of whom five are at foundation level and four are at advanced level. One learner is taking a level 2 NVQ in distributive operations. Most learners are employed by local companies. Those who are not employed attend work placements with employers and receive a training allowance and travel expenses. Visiting assessors carry out assessments and progress reviews in the workplace. Training is mostly on the job and is provided by the employer. The induction is carried out over one day in the workplace if the learner is employed. Learners who are not employed have a two-week induction at one of STA's training centres. This can be extended to four weeks if no work placement is available.

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	28
Number of learner interviews	50
Number of staff interviews	29
Number of employer interviews	22
Number of subcontractor interviews	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	3
Number of partner/external agency interviews	2
Number of visits	37

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

8. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning in retailing, customer service and transportation, and in business administration, management and professional is unsatisfactory. The quality of training in engineering, technology and manufacturing and in ICT is satisfactory. The leadership and management of STA is satisfactory, as is its approach to quality assurance and equality of opportunity.

## 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	3
Quality assurance	3

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

Business administration, management & professional	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

9. **There is good attainment of vocational skills in engineering.** Learners quickly acquire good practical skills and a good understanding of background knowledge. Learners work to high standards in a wide variety of engineering tasks as soon as they start at their work placements.

10. **Rates of retention and achievement in engineering are poor.** Of the advanced modern apprentices who started in 1999, 19 per cent completed their framework. In the past, few learners were recruited to foundation modern apprenticeships and none completed their framework. Recently, the number of foundation modern apprentices has increased, but these learners have not been following their course long enough to complete the framework. Achievement rates for learners taking NVQs have been very poor, but they are rising each year.

11. Care management learners develop good management skills. They are able to develop business plans, maximise profitability and improve the recruitment and retention of staff. These skills are learnt and developed in background knowledge sessions and are well used in the workplace.

12. **A high proportion of learners in administration move on to employment.** Of the 153 learners who started in the past three years, 36 per cent have gained employment.



13. **Achievement rates are poor in administration.** Only eight apprentices out of the 218 who have started since 1999, have achieved the targets on their individual learning plan. Of the 270 learners who have started NVQs since 1999, only 17 have achieved their qualification.

14. **Learners are making slow progress in administration, management and ICT.** On the care management programme, none of the learners have achieved their qualification. Some learners have been training for nine months and have only recently completed their first assignment. Modern apprentices and NVQ learners in administration who have been in training for more than a year, still have at least three units of their main qualification left to complete, as well as optional and key skills units. Learners in ICT have great difficulty understanding the terminology associated with the evidence requirements.

15. **There is good attainment of vocational and personal skills in retailing and customer service.** Most learners in warehousing take the opportunity to gain a lift truck licence. Computer literacy qualifications are available to learners who would benefit from them. Most learners who have completed a level 2 qualification would like to move on to the level 3.

16. **Learners in retailing and customer service are making slow progress towards completing their frameworks.** Of the 26 advanced modern apprentices who have started since 1998, none has completed the framework within the required time. Five have gone on to complete their frameworks after their target completion dates and six remain in learning. Fifty-eight foundation modern apprentices have started since 1998, but only two have completed their modern apprenticeships within the agreed time. Two have gone on to complete their frameworks after their target completion date.

## Quality of education and training

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	2	0	0	0	3
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Information & communications technology	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

17. **Learners have good work placements in engineering and administration.** These are well matched to the needs of learners and employers. Learners in engineering are placed with prestigious employers in the area and have opportunities to produce top-quality products, allowing them to use and enhance their skills. Administration learners work in modern, well-equipped offices and receive on-the-job training, such as training in environmental awareness, ICT, and health and safety.

18. **Progress reviews are inadequate in engineering.** Learners are rarely set demanding

targets and do not have detailed learning plans. Most target dates are for the end of the funding period.

19. **STA provides good support for learners in engineering, ICT, retailing and customer service** throughout their training. STA's staff find jobs for learners soon after they start their training.

20. **Learners in care management have good learning materials.** Good use is made of open learning materials that allow these learners to progress at their own pace and develop project management skills. Learners can also use the learning centre at one of STA's sites and are referred to websites and other sources of material that will assist them with their assignments.

21. **Learners in administration and ICT have a good induction.** Learners perform a variety of useful tasks, all of which are designed to prepare them for the workplace. All learners receive training in interview techniques and jobsearch.

22. **Initial assessment is inadequate in administration, retailing and customer service.** There is little assessment of learners' key skills until they attend a specific training session or take a mock test at the end of their NVQ. Individual learning styles are not systematically assessed at the start of a learners' programme.

23. **Learning programmes in administration are not tailored to the individual learner.** None of the learners in care management have an individual learning plan. Care management learners do not receive personal tutorials or reviews of progress. There is no short-term action-planning to assist with progress and all learners are set the same dates for achieving their targets. Learners in work-based learning receive an individual learning plan. However, this does not accurately reflect the components of their programmes.

24. **Assessment is unsatisfactory in administration.** In care management, assessors do not standardise their activities and staff do not meet regularly to share good practice. Young people are expected to collect too much evidence.

25. **On-the-job training is well co-ordinated in ICT.** Learners are given the opportunity to work in different roles and expand their experience. Many learners are offered extra training in the workplace. This can be training for a specific job, such as training in customised software, or it can be more general training, such as in first aid and health and safety.

26. **Learners in ICT do not start work on key skills at the start of their programme.** Learners recruited before September 2003 did not collect any key skills evidence until after they had completed their NVQ. Learners have little understanding of the role of key skills in their learning programme and regard them as separate from their vocational work.

27. **There is insufficient internal verification in retailing and customer service.** The

monitoring of assessments in this area is behind schedule. Much of the planned sampling of portfolios has not taken place. Standardisation of assessors' practices in customer service, retailing and warehousing is inadequate and poorly recorded.

28. STA carries out suitable tests of learners' literacy and language, but it cannot fully meet some learners' identified needs. To remedy this, members of staff are working towards suitable qualifications.

### Leadership and management

29. **Partnerships with external organisations are good.** STA has particularly effective arrangements with local colleges that allow for the sharing of staff, resources and accommodation to meet learners' needs.

30. **STA has clear strategies for improvement.** The council of management and its chairperson, along with senior management, have various long-term strategies for the development of the company. These include careful plans for financial management and organisational restructuring.

31. **The monitoring of health and safety in the workplace is poor.** STA has a schedule for workplace monitoring based on assessments of risk. However, this is not always followed. Monitoring documents are not amended when learners change their roles at work or move to different departments.

32. **STA takes effective action to widen participation.** Data on recruitment are collected and analysed and actions are agreed. STA has set up various partnerships with local community groups.

33. **STA does little to reinforce equality of opportunity.** Learners receive little literature after induction and there are few discussions on issues such as respect in the workplace.

34. **Management information is well used to identify areas for improvement.** Rates of achievement have increased significantly from earlier levels of about 2 per cent. However, they remain unsatisfactory.

35. **Recent quality assurance initiatives, including staff observations and lesson evaluations have been good.** Electronic quality assurance systems have been introduced that can be used by all staff and easily updated.

36. **Self-assessment is inadequate.** STA developed a good consultation process for self-assessment, but the resulting report and action plan was not detailed and accurate. The action plan does not contain realistic actions to continue to improve performance.

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- strong partnerships with external organisations
- clear strategies for improvement
- effective action to widen participation
- good use of management information to identify areas for improvement
- good recent initiatives to develop quality assurance

### **Weaknesses**

- poor rates of retention and achievement
- poor monitoring of health and safety
- little reinforcement of equality of opportunity
- inadequate self-assessment report and action plan

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### **Strengths**

- good attainment of vocational skills
- good work placements
- very good support for learners

### **Weaknesses**

- poor rates of retention and achievement
- inadequate progress reviews

## **Business administration, management & professional**

### **Strengths**

- good development of new management skills by care management learners
- good progression into jobs for administration learners
- good learning materials for care management learners
- good work placements for administration learners
- good induction for administration learners

### **Weaknesses**

- poor achievement rates on all work-based programmes for young people
- slow progress by all learners
- inadequate initial assessment of learners' support needs
- insufficiently tailored learning programmes to individual learners' needs
- unsatisfactory assessment

## **Information & communications technology**

### **Strengths**

- good induction
- good support for learners
- well-co-ordinated, on-the-job training

### **Weaknesses**

- slow progress by some learners
- late introduction of key skills

## **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

### **Strengths**

- good attainment of vocational and personal skills
- very good pastoral support for learners

### **Weaknesses**

- poor progress towards completion of frameworks
- inadequate initial assessment
- insufficient internal verification

**WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SANDWELL TRAINING ASSOCIATION LIMITED:**

- the level of support they receive - 'we are always able to ring up and get pointed in the right direction'
- the rate of progress into jobs - 'they found me a job quickly'
- the range of skills that they gain

**WHAT LEARNERS THINK SANDWELL TRAINING ASSOCIATION LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:**

- the distance they have to travel - 'it takes me ages to get to work'
- the quality and availability of resources
- time allowed for completing assignments in the workplace - learners want more time

## **KEY CHALLENGES FOR SANDWELL TRAINING ASSOCIATION LIMITED:**

- continue to improve rates of retention and achievement
- better identify individual learners' needs
- improve monitoring of learners' progress
- improve internal verification
- further reinforce equality of opportunity in the workplace
- develop self-assessment process

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

#### Strengths

- strong partnerships with external organisations
- clear strategies for improvement
- effective action to widen participation
- good use of management information to identify areas for improvement
- good recent initiatives to develop quality assurance

#### Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement
- poor monitoring of health and safety
- little reinforcement of equality of opportunity
- inadequate self-assessment report and action plan

37. STA has strong partnerships with external organisations. It has ongoing partnership arrangements with Connexions and Jobcentre Plus. The company also has good relationships with local schools. It has been invited directly by schools to participate in careers fairs and open evenings. STA also provides work experience for pupils at the local schools, who spend one or two weeks in STA's workshops. STA has strong links with agencies that offer expertise in areas where its own staff are not qualified to guide and support learners. STA has particularly strong links with local colleges, especially for its engineering programmes. It is now developing its links to strengthen other programmes, such as administration programmes. Senior managers have negotiated partnerships with local colleges that benefit learners of both organisations. STA and the colleges make good use of shared premises, equipment and staff. These partnerships also make it easy to progress from entry level through to level 4 qualifications. STA has detailed arrangements with subcontracted colleges. Communications within STA are satisfactory. Staff and managers meet regularly and the minutes of their meetings are available to staff.

38. STA has clear strategies for improvement. Strategic management is the responsibility of an annually elected council of management working alongside the senior management team. Members of the council of management retain strong links with local industry and are aware of the requirements of the local labour market. The chairperson of the council of management and senior managers are fully involved in determining the company's long-term strategies. These include strategies for organisational restructuring, the management of capital investment and the development of existing partnership arrangements. There is clear strategic-planning with good use of target-setting at a senior level, which has already started to have an impact in the



organisation. STA has recognised that it needs to improve the support it offers learners in language, numeracy and literacy. It carries out suitable tests of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills, but cannot fully meet some learners' identified needs. STA has introduced a revised staff development programme and staff are working towards a suitable qualification to meet this need.

39. Rates of retention and achievement are poor across most of the training programmes. STA has recognised this problem through its own analysis of data and has introduced measures to resolve it. These have succeeded in raising rates of retention and achievement. For example, achievement in some areas has risen to about 25 per cent from less than 2 per cent over the previous two years. However, rates of retention and achievement remain unsatisfactory.

40. The monitoring of health and safety is poor. Workplaces are given a risk banding which determines the frequency of monitoring of their health and safety. Much of this monitoring is not carried out at the set time. A series of tick boxes is used during monitoring and in some instances all the boxes have been ticked, even when only a choice of one from three was required. An appendix contains columns for recording actions and the dates when they were agreed or carried out. However, it is often unclear which date has been entered. This makes it difficult to establish whether an action has been completed. When learners change roles at work, or move to a different department, new health and safety monitoring is not carried out, nor is the existing monitoring document revised to reflect the changes. However STA has a good system to ensure that employers forward copies of their employers' liability insurance as soon as it is renewed to ensure that all learners are covered by appropriate levels of insurance. Other resources within STA, including staffing, accommodation and equipment are managed to a satisfactory level.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

41. STA takes effective action to widen participation. An equality of opportunity committee meets quarterly to discuss a range of issues. Data on recruitment are thoroughly analysed and regularly discussed at management meetings. Clear action plans are produced as a result of this analysis. The equality of opportunities committee set effective targets for recruiting learners from groups that are under-represented on learning programmes. STA has developed many partnerships with local community groups that reflect the demographic composition of the West Midlands. Meetings are held, and regular correspondence and discussions take place. STA arranges various socially inclusive events to celebrate learners' achievement. It has worked with a national trade organisation and funding bodies to arrange ceremonies to recognise achievement.

42. STA promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily in its actions and policies. Inductions include a well-run half-day training session for learners covering a range of topical issues. Learners can recall the induction, including equality of opportunity and health and safety training. The equal opportunities policy distributed to learners is clear. However, no images celebrating the diversity of learners are displayed in the training

centre, although packs are available that contain such images. Much is done to encourage under-represented groups. For example, STA goes into schools to assist in GCSE engineering courses and to promote engineering to female learners.

43. Staff and learners receive satisfactory support and development. Training needs are discussed and many staff are offered training. However, some members of staff have identified needs for development that are not being met. STA resolves complaints well and has clear procedures. Learners are aware of the complaints procedures, which apply equally to learners, employers and staff. A range of individual support, such as counselling and guidance is available to learners.

44. STA does little to reinforce equality of opportunity. They do not receive enough literature after induction. Learners understand some aspects of equality of opportunity, but little is done to emphasise issues such as respect in the workplace. STA does not build on good training given at induction. Although employers participate in progress reviews, they are not encouraged to use them to discuss equality of opportunity. In some progress reviews, the subject is not mentioned at all. Employers are not aware of their responsibility to promote equality of opportunity as part of learners' experience at work. STA made a handbook available in January 2003 which sets out learners' rights and responsibilities as employees, but this is not being used.

45. STA has clear equal opportunities agreements with employers, but insufficiently monitors whether they are applying equality of opportunity in the workplace. Employers have to use STA's equal opportunities policy if they do not have a satisfactory one of their own. STA has also developed an employers' pack that will provide more extensive information about all the relevant issues. STA's agreement with employers recognises the need to monitor how employers are applying equality of opportunity and how staff consider employers are applying equality of opportunity. However, there is no systematic monitoring and recording of employers' practices.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Contributory grade 3**

46. Managers use a range of data to identify areas for improvement. Information is collected, collated, analysed and discussed in meetings and action is taken. For example, equality of opportunity data are used well for recruitment. STA is able to assess the effectiveness of its recruitment strategy by being able to determine what proportion of learners find out about its programmes from newspapers or Connexions. It is also able to identify learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. STA has been making it a priority to improve retention and achievement rates. Management realised that performance was poor and had a series of meetings to improve quality assurance. They measure success by the number of leavers who have completed their qualifications. This measurement is useful in assessing improvement in the achievement rate for all programmes. The rate of achievement rate is still poor, but it is improving significantly in all areas. Some data are not being used effectively. For example, there is little monitoring of learners' additional needs.

47. STA has recently introduced good initiatives to improve quality assurance. It has

skilfully converted all paper-based quality assurance systems into an electronic system. The electronic system is available to all staff at all training centres. A CD is available for members who are off-site. This allows staff to identify the policies and procedures and their current effectiveness and to update and introduce new quality arrangements. A range of methods are used to develop the system and a record is kept of when each policy is reviewed and changed. The accessibility, portability and design of the system has helped to achieve coherent quality assurance procedures. All staff understand and use the system. There has been an improvement in quality assurance over the past 18 months. For example, lesson evaluations and staff observations have been introduced. Some procedures are not being fully followed in some areas such as individual learning plans. Progress reviews have improved, but clear targets are still not being set.

48. Internal verification is satisfactory in engineering and ICT, but less than satisfactory in retailing and business administration. The internal verifier understands the process well and the internal verification system is clear. Learning programmes are regularly evaluated and the results are collated and analysed well. This information is then communicated effectively to the assessment team. However, there is insufficient sampling, assessment-planning and standardisation in some areas.

49. The self-assessment report and action plan are inadequate. Staff were aware of self-assessment and were consulted as part of the process. Focus groups were set up to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the learning programmes. The results were collated well by senior managers and the draft self-assessment report was produced. The report provides some useful information but has insufficient detail and is not accurate. Many of the strengths and weaknesses were not explained in the text, for example excellent planned training by some employers. Some identified strengths reflected no more than normal practice and some strengths were contradicted by the weaknesses. Few of the identified strengths and weaknesses were also identified by inspectors. For example, induction was found to be a strength but it was not identified as such in any area of the self-assessment report. The action plan does not contain realistic actions to improve performance. Actions are not explained in sufficient detail and some important areas for improvement are not covered.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

### Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	87	3

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

#### Strengths

- good attainment of vocational skills
- good work placements
- very good support for learners

#### Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement
- inadequate progress reviews

#### Achievement and standards

50. Learners attain good occupational skills. Learners quickly acquire good practical skills and a good understanding of background knowledge. Learners and employers value these skills. Learners are able to work to good standards in a wide variety of engineering tasks as soon as they start their work placements. This strength was partly recognised in the self-assessment report.

51. Retention and achievement rates are poor. Rates of completion for advanced modern apprentices are very poor, but increasing. If all the current learners complete their frameworks, the completion rate will be close to satisfactory. From the 1999 intake, 19 per cent of advanced modern apprentices completed their framework. In the past, few learners were recruited to foundation modern apprenticeships and none completed their framework. Recently, the number of foundation modern apprentices has increased, but learners have not been in training long enough to have completed their framework. Thirty-five per cent of the 2002 intake of 52 learners, and 80 per cent of the 2003 intake of 26 learners, are still in learning. Achievement rates for learners taking NVQs have been very poor, but are also rising each year. The self-assessment report underestimated the importance of retention and achievement rates.

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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			13		4		26		31		25		29			
Retained*			1	8	0		13		14	45	11	44	15	52		
Successfully completed			1	8	0		1		6	19	4	16	6	21		
Still in learning			11	85	3		13		3	10	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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	32		52				1		4		3					
Retained*	0		1				0	0	1	25	1	33				
Successfully completed	0		0				0	0	0	0	0	0				
Still in learning	26		18				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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		23		51		70		46		40					
Retained*	0		1		14	27	19	27	3	7	8	20				
Successfully completed	0		1		12	24	14	20	3	7	6	15				
Still in learning	2		6		3	6	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

52. STA arranges good work placements that are well matched to the needs of learners and employers. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Learners are placed with prestigious employers in the local area. Learners have opportunities to produce top-quality products. This allows them to use and enhance their skills. Employers are supportive and encourage learners to work on projects with minimal supervision. Learners are producing work of the best quality. Many workplaces provide

mentors for learners. One mentor is taking the same NVQ as his learner so that he can assist the learner through the process. Some companies' senior managers are former STA learners and are excellent role models. Managers understand NVQs and the assessment process and are now helping learners to collect evidence.

53. Learners receive very good support from STA's staff throughout their programme. STA's staff find jobs for learners soon after they start on the programme. Staff have strong links with engineering employers in the region and encourage learners to apply for jobs that meet their aims. Staff can quickly arrange extra tutorials for learners who are struggling with their college work. STA is flexible in its arrangements with employers and learners. It provides off-the-job training in a way that is acceptable to learners and their employers. A pilot at one training centre involves learners meeting with all staff every two weeks to discuss their training and to suggest improvements. Learners receive satisfactory support with literacy, numeracy and language. They take a literacy, numeracy and language test during induction and the results are promptly fed back to learners and recorded in their files. When support requirements are identified, it is arranged through a local college. Learners who need additional support with key skills are assessed to identify the most suitable method. Good support for learners was not recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

54. Resources are satisfactory. The engineering workshops are adequately equipped with suitable machinery and equipment. Some of the machines in one of the centres are old, but are still in working order. Both training centres have satisfactory classrooms and provide an adequate environment for learning. Resources in employers' premises are very good.

55. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactory. The awarding body's documents are being used correctly. The planning of assessment is adequate, but a few assessments are planned too long before they are taken. On-the-job assessments are good, with assessors taking detailed notes that are passed to learners for inclusion in their portfolios. Assessment practices across the two engineering training centres are standardised by the internal verifier and there is a timetable for visits to internally verify on- and off-the-job assessment.

56. Learning programmes are satisfactory and meet the needs of learners and employers. The NVQ content of the advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships is adjusted to suit the needs of employers and learners. For example, STA arranged for a learner to take an installation and commissioning NVQ to meet a company's specific requirements.

57. Progress reviews are inadequate. Reviews take place every three months, but few clear, short-term targets are set. Target dates in learning plans are often for the end of the funding period. Learners are not set realistic target dates for completing individual parts of their programmes which they can use to measure their progress against. Targets are not specific enough to ensure good progress towards the qualification. Learners are not challenged if they do not meet their targets and targets are not reviewed at each progress review. Employers are involved in progress reviews and their comments are

included on the paperwork. Progress reviews do little to encourage progress towards the qualification. They are not used to identify good assessment opportunities or to review learners' progress in key skills. The self-assessment report did not recognise this weakness.

### **Leadership and management**

58. The management of this area of learning is satisfactory. STA provides very good support for learners and is in frequent contact with employers and learners. This enables STA to deal with short-term problems, but it does not enable it to focus on learners' progress. Quality assurance arrangements include observations to monitor the quality of training. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process. However, most of the strengths were overstated and the weaknesses were not identified. The self-assessment report did not identify retention and achievement rates as an important weakness, although they have been very poor. Little is done to reinforce equal opportunities. Some progress reviews do not cover equal opportunities. Records of earlier reviews contain no evidence that equal opportunities was discussed. No system exists for reinforcing equal opportunities at progress reviews. Equal opportunities was mentioned in one progress review observed by inspectors, but the content was insufficient.

**Business administration, management & professional****Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	163	4

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good development of new management skills by care management learners
- good progression into jobs for administration learners
- good learning materials for care management learners
- good work placements for administration learners
- good induction for administration learners

**Weaknesses**

- poor achievement rates on all work-based programmes for young people
- slow progress by all learners
- inadequate initial assessment of learners' support needs
- insufficiently tailored learning programmes to individual learners' needs
- unsatisfactory assessment

**Achievement and standards**

59. Care management learners develop good management skills. These learners are developing new skills and are improving systems and procedures in the workplace. They can now develop business plans, maximise profitability and improve the recruitment and retention of staff. These skills are learnt and developed in background knowledge sessions and are well used in the workplace. Learners have also gained the skills necessary to develop new business opportunities and to bid for, and secure, new funding.

60. The progression into jobs from work placements by foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners in administration is good. Of the 153 learners who have started these programmes in the past three years, 36 per cent have gained employment. Of the 51 learners who started foundation modern apprenticeships or NVQ programmes since 2002, 49 per cent are already employed and 25 have started since September 2003. Of the learners seen during the inspection, those who progressed to jobs had done so within four to six months of starting their work placements.

61. Rates of achievement on work-based learning programmes are poor. Only eight modern apprentices out of the 218 who started since 1999 have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plans. Of the 270 learners who have started NVQ training since 1999, only 17 have achieved their qualification. Rates of framework completion are poor for all modern apprentices. Achievement rates are improving, although they are



still unsatisfactory. There has been a decline in the number of advanced modern apprentices over the past four years, from 27 in 2000 to one in 2003.

62. Learners are making slow progress on all programmes. On the care management programme, none of the learners have achieved their target qualification. Some learners have been training for nine months and have only recently completed their first assignment. Many who have been in learning for more than 15 months have up to 50 per cent of taught sessions still to attend and three assignments and a large project still to complete. Some learners who have been on work-based learning programmes for more than a year, still have at least three units of their main qualification to do, as well as optional units and key skills. Learners who started between four and six months ago have still not achieved a full unit of their NVQ. Learners who started their training before January 2003 did not start work on key skills at the beginning of their programme. Some learners who started in July 2002 are only now starting to take their mock key skills tests and have not had any sessions on background knowledge. Some sessions for modern apprentices and NVQ learners and some care management sessions are poorly attended. Attendance is monitored and learners are contacted if they fail to attend.

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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		1		14		27		28		4		4			
Retained*	0		0	0	1		9		5		0	0	2	50		
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0		1		1		0	0	2	50		
Still in learning	1		0	0	9		5		3		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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	32		41		7		28		39		10					
Retained*	0		1		3		7		4		0	0				
Successfully completed	0		0		2		2		2		0	0				
Still in learning	25		19		1		3		1		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

SANDWELL TRAINING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		10		69		85		104		67					
Retained*	0		2		16		17	20	10	10	3	4				
Successfully completed	0		2		4		4	5	7	7	2	3				
Still in learning	2		5		4		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

Other government funded																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		58		21											
Retained*	0		0		0											
Successfully completed	0		0		0											
Still in training	2		58		21											

\*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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults																
	2003-04		2002-03													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			8													
Retained*			0													
Planned learning completed			0													
Gained job			0													
Still in training			4													

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

## Quality of education and training

63. Learners in care management use good learning materials. These learners use materials that enable them to work at their own pace and develop project management skills. Learners can also use the learndirect centre at one of STA's sites and are referred to websites and other sources of material to support their assignments. Tutors are extremely good at helping learners to develop the literacy, numeracy and IT they need to complete their course work. However, this support is unstructured and depends on the tutor's ability to recognise the need for it. Learners in care management attend a two-

day residential team-building course to develop their teamwork and communication skills. Training for all programmes is well planned with lesson plans and suitable resources. Staff are well qualified and have good management experience in their area. However, learning sessions for young people have long periods when there is little opportunity for learners to interact. Administration learners develop good skills during their off-the-job training and are able to apply their experience from the workplace in assignments to develop their background knowledge. For example, they are using computers to produce organisational charts and can participate in detailed discussions about teams and roles in a variety of organisations. Learners in administration do not have enough up-to-date learning material. In care management, however, professional learning materials are supplied to all learners during each background knowledge session, for them to use as a study pack. The good learning materials for care management were recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

64. Work placements for modern apprentices and NVQ learners are good. Most learners are in jobs that allow them to meet all the requirements of their learning programmes. They work in modern, well-equipped offices and receive on-the-job training in areas such as environmental awareness, ICT and health and safety. One employer is supporting a learner to attend a local college for an ICT qualification. These good work placements were recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report but were not given appropriate importance. Mentors and workplace supervisors support learners well. This support is overseen by senior managers. Progress reviews are well attended by appropriate staff who participate fully in the meeting. Details of on-the-job activities are not always recorded and some learners have not taken advantage of opportunities to train in the workplace. Learners who receive a training allowance also receive financial support from their employers. Some learners have been driven to and from their off-the-job training. Learners on work placements are treated like permanent employed staff and enjoy the same benefits, including Christmas parties.

65. Inductions for administration learners are good. The one-day induction to STA is particularly well remembered for its practical activities and videos on equality of opportunity and health and safety. The induction programme is structured with set times for certain topics, such as the production of curriculum vitae, interview techniques and telephone techniques. All learners take a nationally recognised level 1 qualification in ICT. If they do not complete this qualification before they get a work placement, they can return to complete it on day release. All employed learners receive an induction in the workplace and are invited to attend STA's training centre for the scheduled induction programme. Learners are helped to prepare for job interviews. They receive feedback and are helped to improve their techniques. STA matches learners to work placements. If a work placement does not fully meet the needs of a learner, the learner can come back to the training centre until another placement is found. Good inductions were recognised in the text of the self-assessment report, but were not highlighted as a strength.

66. Initial assessment is inadequate for all learners. There is no initial assessment to identify additional learning support needs in the care management programme. Applicants can join the learning programme regardless of prior learning, experience and

individual need. Support and learning needs are not assessed. STA does not provide mentors or advise line managers of their role in the learning programme. Modern apprentices and NVQ learners have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy, but do not receive adequate support. STA identified problems in its literacy and numeracy support, but did not identify it as a weakness. STA carries out an initial assessment for key skills, but some learners do not take this. For those that do, the results are poorly recorded. Too few sessions are scheduled for key skills theory and the scheduled sessions are intermittent. Learners are not able to build on previous knowledge. Previous qualifications are considered, but are not built on. Some learners and employers are receiving poor advice about the requirements of modern apprenticeships and the commitment needed to complete them.

67. None of the care management learners receive an individual learning plan. However, they do have a schedule of all off-the-job training sessions. Care management learners do not receive personal tutorials or reviews of progress. There is no short-term action-planning and all learners have the same target dates for completion. Modern apprentices and NVQ learners receive an individual learning plan. However, this does not accurately reflect the components of their learning programme and it stays in the company's file. Employers do not receive a copy of the individual learning plan. All administration learners are taking the same optional units, regardless of their previous qualifications and the qualifications they are taking with their employers.

68. Assessment is unsatisfactory across all programmes. In the care management programme, assessors' activities are not standardised and staff do not meet regularly to share good practice. Some marks given to assignments are overgenerous and some assignments do not contain sufficient evidence to meet the standards required. Learners do not receive adequate feedback on their assignments. Often, learners are given feedback too long after the assignment is completed. Modern apprentices and NVQ learners are asked to collect too much information. For example, over 11 pieces of evidence were put forward for one part of a unit. There is little cross-referencing of evidence and some assessors are following a unit-by-unit approach to assessment. There has been only one observation in the past year of an administration assessor carrying out an assessment. Some evidence has not been authenticated and some observations have been recorded that were not carried out by the assessor. Internal verification is insufficient.

## **Leadership and management**

69. The three programmes in this area of learning are managed by two managers who operate from different sites. The administration manager is relatively new to the organisation. However, the care management manager has good experience of providing management programmes. The care management programme is managed by STA as the lead member of a consortium. STA communicates regularly with the other partners, but there are no regular meetings with all tutors to discuss and standardise practice. The care management diploma is a new qualification and STA has not asked the external verifier to oversee and check the standard of work being provided. Too little is done to assure the quality of all elements of the programme, and contractual

requirements are not being met.

70. Employers have little awareness of their responsibilities within the modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes. They have a very poor understanding of what their learners are working towards. They do not know what their learners are studying when they attend the training centre for off-the-job training. This problem was referred to in the self-assessment report, but was not identified as a weakness. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is not reinforced. Some employers have not included equal opportunities in their workplace induction. Off-the-job training in care management is well planned and is provided flexibly, allowing learners to reschedule sessions they have missed. Insufficient time is given to key skills to enable learners to consolidate their understanding.

71. The self-assessment report did not include care management within business administration, management and professional, but it did include ICT. The report was not accurate in its identification of strengths and weaknesses. However, some of the strengths and weaknesses found during inspection were referred to in the text of the self-assessment report.

**Information & communications technology****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	19	3

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good induction
- good support for learners
- well-co-ordinated, on-the-job training

**Weaknesses**

- slow progress by some learners
- late introduction of key skills

**Achievement and standards**

72. Some learners are making slow progress towards their qualifications. Some of the learners have great difficulty understanding the terminology associated with the evidence requirements. The assessor visits frequently and develops an action plan during each visit. However, the actions plans do not include detailed step-by-step instructions. Employers do not fully understand the learners' qualifications. They are not sufficiently aware of the requirements for evidence to be able to help learners. The NVQ is taught unit by unit, which does not give learners an overview of the complete qualification.

73. Numbers on this programme are low and there is little historical information on which to base a judgement on retention and achievement rates. However, all learners who started in 2003 are still in learning. Of those who started in 2002, just over half remain in learning, giving a maximum possible achievement rate of 60 per cent.

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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts									1							
Retained*									1	100						
Successfully completed									1	100						
Still in learning									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																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																	
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99						
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	4		15		11		2										
Retained*	0		1		9		2	100									
Successfully completed	0		0		3		2	100									
Still in learning	4		9		5		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																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			1		17		2		1		1					
Retained*			0		4		1	50	0	0	1	100				
Successfully completed			0		2		1	50	0	0	0	0				
Still in learning			0		1		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

74. STA provides a good induction. It is designed to last a month and all unemployed learners spend at least two weeks at the training centre before starting a work placement. During this time they take part in a variety of useful tasks, all of which are designed to prepare them for the work. The induction introduces the modern apprenticeship framework and explains the process of gathering evidence. Learners are also taught the importance of health and safety in the workplace and how to carry out a

risk assessment. Equality of opportunity is taught using a video and a series of linked case studies. All learners receive training in interview techniques and jobsearch. When learners are not successful at interview, feedback is given and further training is arranged. All learners are offered an additional basic qualification in IT.

75. Support for learners is good. Assessors visit at least fortnightly but more frequently if requested. All learners can easily contact their assessors at any time. Counselling and guidance are available to support them through a range of personal difficulties. STA has a procedure which learners can use to request help. If the help required is beyond the assessors' area of expertise they can arrange help from the wide range of partners that STA has agreements with. All counselling is recorded and details are kept in a confidential file. Support in the workplace is also good. Learners have a workplace supervisor or mentor, who is their point of contact in their workplace. STA's staff have good working relationships with employers and work with them to meet learners' personal and training needs.

76. On-the-job training is well managed. All work placements are good and provide learners with many opportunities to gather evidence for their portfolios. Learners are matched to work placements that suit their professional ambitions. They are given the opportunity to try out different roles at work and expand their experience. Many learners are offered extra training in the workplace. This can be training for a specific job, such as training in customised software, or it can be more general such as training in first aid or health and safety. STA's staff take this training into consideration when planning off-the-job training and assessments.

77. STA's resources are satisfactory. Off-the-job training is carried out in well-equipped computer rooms. However, the computers are not yet linked to the internet. Learning materials and handouts for the induction are good. The materials used in training sessions are adequate, but insufficiently stimulating. Assessors and training staff are appropriately qualified and have the necessary experience for this area. Progress reviews are also satisfactory. These are carried out at the agreed times and involve employers. However, employers' contributions focus on learners' pastoral care rather than the progress they are making towards their qualifications. Internal verification is satisfactory. All learners have at least one assessment checked during their training. A further two units of the NVQ are checked at the end of the programme. Records of assessment and internal verification are up-to-date and thorough. There are regular team meetings to review learners' progress and to check that assessment and internal verification are taking place as planned.

78. Learners do not start work on key skills until late in their programmes. Learners recruited before September 2003 did not collect key skills evidence until after they had completed all their NVQ units. Learners have little understanding of the role of key skills in their learning programme and regard them as separate from their vocational work. Learners are not taking advantage of opportunities to gather key skills evidence in their day-to-day work. Since September 2003, changes have been made to the way in which key skills are introduced and taught. However, it is too soon to judge the impact this will have on current learners.



79. Arrangements for support with literacy, numeracy and language are satisfactory. Initial assessment helps to identify needs for support but STA does not have the resources to meet these needs fully. Learners receive support through extra visits from their assessor or through off-the-job training sessions at STA. Learners who need further support can receive this from a local college.

### **Leadership and management**

80. Little is done to reinforce equality of opportunity in the workplace. Although learners receive good equal opportunities training during induction, this is not reinforced in the workplace. Employers' awareness of equal opportunities is not sufficiently monitored and their policies and procedures are not adequately checked by STA's staff.

81. The self-assessment report comments on all the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors, but does not attach adequate weight to each of them. STA did not identify strengths and weaknesses specific to this area of learning, as it was combined with business administration, management and professional.

**Retailing, customer service & transportation****Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	21	4

*The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:*

**Strengths**

- good attainment of vocational and personal skills
- very good pastoral support for learners

**Weaknesses**

- poor progress towards completion of frameworks
- inadequate initial assessment
- insufficient internal verification

**Achievement and standards**

82. Learners attain good vocational and personal skills. This was partly recognised in the self-assessment report. Most warehousing learners take the opportunity to gain a lift truck licence. This helps them to work independently and take on additional responsibility in the workplace. STA offers computer literacy qualifications to learners who would benefit from them. Learners increase their confidence considerably and make presentations during their work for the communication key skills. Attendance at work is generally very good. Learners who are not placed with an employer immediately receive valuable jobsearch training and a detailed induction, which lasts between two and four weeks. Learners want to continue to learn and progress with their employer. Most learners who have completed level 2 qualifications would like to take qualifications at level 3. STA provides internal certification for units of learners' qualifications.

83. Learners' progress towards completing their modern apprenticeship frameworks is poor. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Although there have been recent initiatives to improve retention rates and to motivate learners, achievement rates are poor on all programmes. Of the 26 learners who have started advanced modern apprenticeships since 1998, none has completed the full frameworks in the required time. Five learners have gone on to complete their frameworks after their target completion dates and six learners remain in learning. Fifty-eight foundation modern apprentices have started since 1998, but only two have completed their modern apprenticeship frameworks in the agreed time. Two have gone on to complete the framework after their target completion date. A significant proportion of current learners have gone beyond their agreed time for completion. Of the 12 learners who started foundation modern apprenticeships in 2002-03, seven have already left. Learners who stay on their programmes, achieve the NVQ at the required level, but are not given the opportunity to gather key skills evidence until they are near the end of their programme.

Some assessors are inexperienced in interpreting the key skills requirements. STA has recently decided to send staff on additional key skills training, but this has not yet had any great effect on learners.

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)															
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Number of starts			2		2		10		11		1				
Retained*			0	0	0		4		8	73	1	100			
Successfully completed			0	0	0		2		3	27	0	0			
Still in learning			1	50	1		2		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

LSC funded work-based learning															
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)															
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99				
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Number of starts	12		19		4		13		8		2				
Retained*	0		1		3		6	46	2	25	1	50			
Successfully completed	0		1		2		2	15	0	0	0	0			
Still in learning	5		8		1		2	15	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

LSC funded work-based learning															
NVQ Training															
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99				
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Number of starts			3		13		19		4		9				
Retained*			0		4	31	5	26	0	0	0	0			
Successfully completed			0		2	15	1	5	0	0	0	0			
Still in learning			1		0	0	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**

84. Learners receive very good pastoral support from STA's staff and employers. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Progress reviews are very thorough and detect problems that learners are experiencing. Employers are fully involved. Learners are supported when problems arise at work. For example, they are relocated if there are problems in the workplace or with other employees. Learners understand the complaints procedure and know how to get assistance. However, some learners' understanding of STA's equal opportunities policy is weak. Relationships between learners, assessors and workplace supervisors are excellent. Open and frank discussions take place during assessments and progress reviews, and assessors find it easy to visit learners in the workplace. Learners are visited frequently by assessors. Often, the support of the visiting assessor has helped a learner get full-time employment. Assessors are very sensitive to learners' problems and employer issues.

85. Initial assessment is inadequate. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Learners take literacy, numeracy and language tests at the start of their programme, the results of which are recorded on their individual learning plans. However, STA has little expertise in helping learners with additional learning needs. There is little initial assessment of learners' key skills until they attend a specific training session or take a mock test at the end of their NVQ programme. STA is currently training key members of staff to teach literacy, numeracy and language and key skills, but this has not yet had an impact on current learners. Individual learning styles are not systematically assessed at the start of learners' programmes. Individual training programmes are poorly planned and training in background knowledge for learners' NVQs is not structured. Most training is carried out on the job and assessors sometimes use their own resources to help learners with specific requirements for background knowledge. Learners receive some coaching in the workplace but this is not always recorded or taken into consideration when assessments are planned. Assessment in the workplace is satisfactory. Various methods of assessment are used and portfolios contain a range of diverse evidence. Assessors have suitable qualifications and experience to carry out their role.

86. There is insufficient internal verification. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. STA has developed internal verification systems, but these are not fully effective. Many portfolios have not been checked as planned during learners' training. Observations of assessors are behind schedule. Assessors and internal verifiers' meetings do not cover all the requirements of the awarding bodies. Assessors in customer service, retailing and warehousing qualifications do too little to standardise their activities and do not keep adequate records of their attempts to standardise them. Standardisation is not part of the overall internal verification strategy. Some assessors have not updated their knowledge to the new assessors' qualifications. STA has not ensured that internal verification is carried out by staff with sufficient vocational competence.

## **Leadership and management**

87. Self-assessment included the gathering of staff views through focus groups. However, this did not result in an effective self-assessment report or action plan. STA recognised only one strength in its self-assessment report. None of the weaknesses found during inspection were identified by STA. In particular, learners' poor rates of achievement and slow progress were not recognised.

88. Equality of opportunity is promoted to learners, but not enough is done to reinforce it throughout learners' programmes.

89. STA has attempted to improve its poor rates of retention and achievement. Rates have improved over the past two years, but are still unsatisfactory.