

REINSPECTION REPORT

Sandwell Training Association Limited Reinspection

09 February 2005



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. 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
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Sandwell Training Association Limited (STA) was established in 1963 as a training organisation for engineering employers. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. A council of management, elected annually from STA's membership of 24 local employers, oversees the company's work.
2. The management team consists of the chief executive and six managers. They have responsibility for the provision of training. Fourteen full-time training consultants provide training and assessment for learners. A further 12 staff support the operation of STA.
3. STA has contracts with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council for apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The company has training centres at Cradley Heath and West Bromwich. 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 227 learners, of whom 148 are apprentices, 67 are advanced apprentices and 12 are taking NVQs. In addition, STA provides training to learners and organisations which fund their own training.
4. STA recruits most of its learners from Sandwell, a metropolitan borough in the Black Country, and some from adjoining areas. In 2004, the proportion of school leavers in Sandwell achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above was 38 per cent, compared with 54 per cent nationally. The proportion of the population in Sandwell from minority ethnic groups is 20.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent. Sandwell has a ranking of 17 out of 354 for multiple deprivation in England for local authorities.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

5. STA has 65 learners on business administration, management and professional programmes, of whom 21 are advanced apprentices, 39 are apprentices and five are on NVQ training. All are working towards NVQs in business administration. All learners have a four-week induction and receive an initial assessment to identify additional needs in literacy, numeracy and language skills. Assessment and most training takes place in the workplace. STA provides off-the-job training at its centre in Cradley Heath. Training consultants visit all learners in the workplace at least every two weeks. Formal progress reviews take place every 12 weeks. Twenty-seven per cent of learners are employed and the remainder are on work placement.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

6. STA has nine learners on retailing, customer service and transportation programmes, of whom five are advanced apprentices, three are apprentices and one is on NVQ training. Eight are working towards NVQs in customer service and the other learner is working towards an NVQ in warehousing. All learners have a four-week induction and receive an initial assessment to identify additional needs in literacy, numeracy and language skills. Assessment and most training take place in the workplace. STA provides off-the-job training at its centre in Cradley Heath. Training consultants visit all learners in the workplace at least every two weeks. Formal progress reviews take place every 12 weeks. Eight learners are employed and one is on a work placement.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	8
Number of learner interviews	8
Number of staff interviews	6
Number of employer interviews	7
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	9

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. At the previous inspection in December 2003, all aspects of STA's provision were found to be satisfactory, with the exception of training in business administration, management and professional and retailing, customer service and transportation. At the end of the reinspection process, training in business administration, management and professional and retailing, customer services and transportation were found to be satisfactory.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

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

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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

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	65	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good involvement of employers in learners' training
- good support for learners
- good internal verification

Weaknesses

- low achievement rates

Achievement and standards

8. The weakness at the previous inspection of slow progress for learners in business administration, management and professional is resolved. Learners now achieve NVQ and key skills units and technical certificates at an appropriate pace. Learners have good occupational skills and they are gaining confidence in their job roles. They are motivated to succeed in the achievement of their qualifications and in their work placement. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory to good. Evidence in portfolios is relevant and well organised.

9. The proportion of learners at the reinspection who started and completed a programme of learning remains low. However, at the reinspection, the number of learners who have completed the programme has increased from 4 per cent to 10 per cent. The proportion of learners who achieved their qualifications has increased from 25 per cent to 60 per cent. At the previous inspection, just under 60 per cent of learners left early, but this has now declined to just over 30 per cent.

Quality of education and training

10. Employers' involvement in learners' training is good. They offer a wide range of on-the-job training and learners develop their occupational skills to meet the requirements of the NVQ and of industry. Employers contribute significantly at progress review meetings and are fully aware of the learners' progress. They are fully involved in helping learners to choose the most appropriate NVQ units for their job role. Employers allow learners the time to work on their portfolios during work hours. There is a particularly good

working relationship between training consultants and employers.

11. Training consultants provide good support. They have a particularly caring attitude and take full responsibility for the learners' welfare and development. Training consultants visit work placements frequently and respond swiftly to concerns. They monitor learners' work placements particularly thoroughly to ensure suitability for training. Training consultants arrange the training to ensure that it matches learners' job roles. They provide good off-the-job training to develop background knowledge. Training consultants now provide learners with additional training courses to develop their occupational skills. At work-placement visits, training consultants provide good short-term learning targets in discussion with learners and employers. Since the previous inspection, the key skills are started promptly and training consultants encourage those who are exempt to continue to develop their communication, numeracy and information technology skills.

12. Resources are satisfactory. Training rooms at the Cradley Heath centre are well equipped with modern ICT equipment. The accommodation is comfortable, with sufficient workspaces. Learning materials are satisfactory and include questionnaires to check learners' understanding. All training consultants are appropriately qualified and experienced in their occupational areas. STA has effective arrangements for staff development. Work placements have a range of suitable resources.

13. Assessment for NVQ and key skills is now effective, accurate and fair. Assessors use a full range of assessment methods, including observations, witness statements, portfolios of evidence and professional discussions. They vary the assessment arrangements effectively to suit the learners' needs. However, the assessors often reference the learners' evidence to NVQ competences, rather than allowing the learners to do it themselves.

14. Support for learners with additional literacy, numeracy and language needs is satisfactory. All learners receive an effective initial assessment, which includes an interview and computerised assessment of learners' prior attainment and levels of literacy, numeracy and language skills. This was a weakness at the previous inspection. If learners need additional help, STA provides a range of support either from training consultants or from local organisations.

Leadership and management

15. Internal verification is good. Portfolios are internally verified frequently and thoroughly by a team of internal verifiers who work together closely to compare notes and agree decisions. Paperwork is particularly clear and easy to understand, showing that assessors are carrying out assessment fairly and accurately, and following awarding body guidelines. There is very good forward planning for quality assurance and monitoring of assessment. Observations of assessment are well planned and recorded. Internal verifiers provide good coaching for assessors to ensure that they cross-reference key skills and NVQ units effectively. There are regular and thoroughly planned internal verification meetings. Minutes show thorough discussions and good recording of action

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points. All assessors and internal verifiers are well qualified and experienced.

16. Since the previous inspection, managers have resolved most of the weaknesses for business administration, management and professional. Communications between managers and staff are good. Regular staff meetings include discussions on the quality of provision, health and safety, and equality of opportunity. STA has established policies and procedures to promote equality and there are arrangements for anti harassment and bullying. Training consultants reinforce equal opportunities during reviews but learners' recall of this is not strong. Managers involve staff in quality assurance arrangements including self-assessment. Since the previous inspection, quality assurance is more effective and is raising the standard of provision. Self-assessment includes an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses for the area of learning and these are clearly recorded in the report.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	9	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good development of occupational skills by learners
- particularly effective working relationships with employers
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- low achievement rates

Achievement and standards

17. A strength which STA has maintained from the previous inspection, is the development of good occupational skills by learners in retailing, customer service and transportation. During the programme, learners improve their occupational skills significantly and take on a wide range of tasks and responsibilities in their work placements. They develop their customer service skills particularly well, improve their telephone techniques and show greater confidence in dealing with new situations. Portfolios of evidence are well organised and show that learners are developing a good understanding of their area of learning.

18. At the reinspection, the proportion of learners who complete a programme of training is low at 25 per cent. However, this is a 15 per cent increase on the situation from the previous inspection. Since then, the proportion of learners who reach the end of their planned learning programme and achieve their qualification has increased significantly from 30 per cent to 90 per cent. At the previous inspection, just under 75 per cent left early. This has now declined to just over 35 per cent. A weakness at the previous inspection was that learners made poor progress towards NVQ unit achievement. STA has resolved this weakness and learners now make satisfactory progress.

Quality of education and training

19. Working relationships between employers and STA are particularly effective. Communications are good and STA takes prompt action to resolve difficulties, and to answer requests for information or advice from employers. Employers work well with training consultants to plan the training at work placements. There is good co-ordination

between employers and training consultants to provide relevant programmes to meet the individual needs of the learners, the requirements of the NVQ and the employers' business. On-the-job training and coaching by employers is good, is relevant to learners' work and their qualifications, and is particularly effective at developing learners' occupational skills and broadening their job role. Employers are fully involved in progress reviews.

20. Support for learners is good. This was a strength at the previous inspection. Training consultants offer good support and visit learners frequently in their work placement. They respond promptly and effectively to learners' problems and to requests for help, guidance or advice. Training consultants arrange visits to suit the learners' individual needs. Learners also receive good support through employers, through practical help and advice in collecting evidence and significant encouragement to progress. Also, time is allocated for learners to work towards their NVQ in work time. Some learners have received sustained support from STA on significant personal matters.

21. Learning resources are satisfactory. Training consultants are appropriately qualified and experienced in their occupational areas. STA has established arrangements to maintain the professional development of staff and their occupational competence. Training rooms at the Cradley Heath centre are suitably equipped with an appropriate range of ICT equipment. Resources and equipment in learners' work placements range from satisfactory to good. Learners are not fully aware of the range of resources available at STA.

22. Assessment is effective, fair and accurate. Learners understand the assessment process. The feedback to learners is detailed and is clearly referenced to the qualification standards. Assessors use a wide range of effective assessment methods.

23. STA has appropriate arrangements to support learners with additional literacy, numeracy and language needs. Learners now have an effective initial assessment, to identify if they need additional help. The assessment consists of an interview and computerised evaluation of learners' literacy, numeracy and languages skills. Training consultants or local organisations offer support to the learners who need help.

Leadership and management

24. Managers have taken effective action to resolve most of the weaknesses from the previous inspection, although they have been less effective with achievement rates. Regular staff meetings have a clear focus on standards of provision, health and safety and equality of opportunity. There are clear arrangements and policies to promote equality and procedures to eliminate bullying and harassment. Training consultants explain equal opportunities and employment rights and responsibilities at induction, and reinforce them during training. However, learners' recall of this information is not strong. The arrangements for quality assurance are raising standards. The self-assessment process is thorough and involves all staff. The self-assessment report is an informative document which identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses of the area of learning.

25. Internal verification is effective. Managers maintain full, detailed records of activities. There are regular meetings with assessors including standardisation exercises and sharing of good practice. Managers provide good advice and guidance when assessors move on to new qualifications, levels and areas.