

INSPECTION REPORT

Springfields Fuels Limited

20 January 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learn**direct 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.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for Springfields Fuels Limited	1
Grades	2
About the inspection	2
Key Findings	2
What learners like about Springfields Fuels Limited	7
What learners think Springfields Fuels Limited could improve	7

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	8
Equality of opportunity	9
Quality improvement	9
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	11

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Springfields Fuels Limited (SFL) manufactures fuel products for nuclear reactors. The company currently employs 1,400 people, on a single site near Preston, where it has its own purpose-built training centre. SFL contracts with Lancashire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide engineering training for apprentices at its main site and at Blackpool and The Fylde College. Twenty-two of the 63 apprentices have their on-the-job training at SFL, while the remainder are employed and given on-the-job training by other local businesses. SFL was previously inspected in 2002 under the name BNFL Westinghouse.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** SFL's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for quality improvement. The training in engineering and manufacturing technologies is good. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory.

3. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process is well managed and includes all relevant parties. The self-assessment report identified effectively all the strengths in the provision but missed one key weakness and only partly identified another. SFL collects feedback from stakeholders and identifies areas for improvement. Learners and staff participate very well in the identification of shortcomings in the training provision and the implementation of improvements.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** SFL has a well-managed process for identifying its shortcomings and has implemented improvements effectively. Its improvement plan is reviewed regularly. Managers have made a range of very good operational improvements to the training programme since the previous inspection in 2002. However, they have underestimated the need to continuously improve equality of opportunity training.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SPRINGFIELDS FUELS LIMITED:

- sustain and improve the good rate of apprenticeship framework completions and reduce the rate of early leavers
- continue to improve good off-the-job training including health and safety training
- further improve resources and continue to improve the training centre facilities and equipment
- improve the learner review process
- clarify strategic objectives and the role of the apprentice board in performance management
- develop equal opportunities training throughout the programme

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

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

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Engineering		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	63	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. SFL's engineering training and its leadership and management were inspected over four days by two inspectors. The inspectors observed training in SFL's training centre, and on-the-job training at SFL and some of the other employers. They also interviewed learners, employers and staff.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	8
Number of learners interviewed	16
Number of staff interviewed	14
Number of employers interviewed	4
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	4
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

6. **SFL's completion rates for engineering apprenticeship frameworks are very good.** Over the past five full years, 80 per cent of the learners who started, completed the framework. Retention rates are good overall, but since 2000-01 the proportion of early leavers has risen.

7. Learners make good progress. They attain well in the workplace and complete

increasingly complex tasks on sophisticated equipment, often working independently.

The quality of provision

8. **Off-the-job training at SFL's training centre is good.** Learners follow a well-structured training programme with clear schemes of work and lesson plans. They receive a good introduction to engineering and develop a wide range of basic engineering skills.

9. **The range of training resources is good.** The training centre is well equipped and workshops are spacious and laid out well to create a safe environment. Trainers are qualified engineers with good industrial and training experience. Seven members of the team are qualified assessors and two are internal verifiers. However, none is a qualified teacher.

10. **Support for learners is very good.** Learners are treated with respect and feel they are valued. All learners benefit from a comprehensive two-week induction at SFL which provides a good preparation for their training. Most training takes place in small groups with plenty of individual coaching and good vocational support. The support SFL offers includes free transport to the training centre and also to the college where learners complete their technical certificates. Learners have access to the full range of welfare services enjoyed by SFL's other staff.

11. **SFL implements its health and safety training very effectively and thoroughly.** There have been no accidents in the apprentice training area for more than two years. Employers recognise the outstanding quality of the health and safety training their apprentices received at the SFL site.

12. **The learners' progress review process is unsatisfactory.** Staff do not always record learners' performance targets effectively on review documents. They do not always use reviews to discuss and record learners' progress at college.

13. There is insufficient assessment of level 3 learners by direct observation. The proportion of on-the-job observations has increased since the previous inspection but there are still too few, and the learners in external companies receive fewer, on average, than those working at SFL. Assessment and internal verification, in other respects, are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

14. **SFL has achieved very good framework completion rates over a sustained period of time.** Strong support by senior managers and the apprentice board has contributed to the continuing high levels of framework completions and the quality of training provided at the training centre.

15. **The training centre is managed particularly well.** Staff maintain high standards and provide well-planned training with well-presented schemes of work. However, strategic management is not well established, and the apprentice board's responsibilities for performance management and strategic direction have not been specified.

16. SFL manages effectively a **range of good external links to promote participation in engineering training.** Staff devote a significant amount of time and resources to activities

with schools and to visits intended specifically to promote engineering training to school pupils. It has good partnerships with other employers whose learners attend the training centre, and effective arrangements for managing and reviewing off-the-job training with the main subcontractor, Blackpool and The Fylde College.

17. SFL has carried out **very many improvements** since it was inspected in 2002. It has a good management process and a very positive attitude towards continuous improvement. Learners and staff are closely involved in the identification of shortcomings and the implementation of improvements, particularly to the training facilities, to safety arrangements and to learning resources.

18. SFL has effective staff development arrangements, and trainers participate in a range of training and development. Succession plans and a strategy for staff training and development that will reflect future business needs are under discussion, but have not yet been formally agreed.

19. Arrangements for the provision of literacy and numeracy are managed effectively. The initial assessment process is appropriate and learners with literacy or numeracy learning needs are able to access suitable additional learning support. Mentoring is provided.

20. Managers do not make sufficient use of data on early leavers, and the significance of the decline in retention rates between 2000 and 2003 has not been adequately recognised or reported. There are no formal procedures for exit reviews to capture feedback, although the training centre manager has a good knowledge of individual cases and notes learners' reasons for leaving.

21. Effective induction sessions provide learners with a good introduction to equal opportunities and to their rights and responsibilities. Staff use appropriate learning materials, and posters and other media provide positive messages and learning points about equal opportunities.

22. The learners' health, welfare and sense of responsibility is promoted well during training. For example, staff provide well-organised and resourced external training sessions to promote safe attitudes to driving and drug awareness. Apprentices take part in community projects and are encouraged to take responsibility for organising events.

23. Managers monitor the performance of the programme and set appropriate targets for inclusion and participation by members of minority groups. However they have not carried out enough evaluation to identify the more successful strategies.

24. There is too little reinforcement of equal opportunities training during the programme. Progress reviews at work only cover equality of opportunity superficially.

25. Managers have improved health and safety training and maintained high safety standards. There have been no accidents for more than two years.

26. SFL has significantly improved the way it reviews progress and plans actions with its subcontractors. Blackpool and The Fylde College provides off-the-job background knowledge and technical certificate training. Managers have improved co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training by introducing an integrated vocational assessment project.

27. SFL has improved its teaching arrangements. Teaching and learning sessions are observed regularly, and staff are given feedback which is also recorded. Good practices are shared and staff implement the improvements suggested.

28. The scope of the quality assurance arrangements has been extended and the staff's access to them has been improved. However, the current procedures do not adequately cover learners' progress reviews, and the quality assurance of these reviews is not systematic.

29. Self-assessment has improved and the current report is better than the one available at the previous inspection. SFL recognises that this process can be developed further to involve other stakeholders.

30. The self-assessment report identified most of the strengths found by inspectors and matched the inspectors' grades for the engineering programme and leadership and management. The self-assessment of equality of opportunity underestimated the requirement to continuously improve in this area.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very good framework completion rates over a sustained period of time
- particularly effective operational management of the training centre
- good external links to promote participation in engineering training
- many significant improvements to training

Weaknesses

- incomplete analysis and review of data on early leavers
- insufficient reinforcement of equal opportunities training

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Engineering

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good off-the-job training at the centre
- good range of resources
- very good support for learners
- very effective implementation of health and safety training

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory review process
- insufficient assessment by direct observation for level 3 learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SPRINGFIELDS FUELS LIMITED:

- the good opportunities for practical skills training
- taking part in community projects and team-building courses, organising charity events, and working with school pupils
- the wide range and large amount of training activities covered in the programme
- the very thorough training
- developing interpersonal skills at work
- 'instructors have in-depth knowledge and are good at getting it across'
- 'knowing you are valued'
- working in different parts of the plant

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SPRINGFIELDS FUELS LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- 'nothing'
- 'some college teaching takes too long and leaves no time for assignment work'
- 'some instrumentation equipment needs replacing'
- the time allowed for key skills training
- NVQ language and the amount of repetition
- the building - specifically the leaking roof

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good framework completion rates over a sustained period of time
- particularly effective operational management of the training centre
- good external links to promote participation in engineering training
- many significant improvements to training

Weaknesses

- incomplete analysis and review of data on early leavers
- insufficient reinforcement of equal opportunities training

31. SFL has achieved very good framework completion rates over a sustained period of time, with the help of strong support by senior managers and the apprentice board. Despite a difficult business environment over recent years and uncertainty about the future of the plant and the training centre, good performance has been maintained. Since 1998, the achievement rate for apprentices has been 80 per cent.

32. The operational management of the training centre is particularly effective, which benefits the learners. Well-planned and managed internal communication, meetings and briefings keep staff well informed and motivate them to maintain and improve high standards of training and good achievement levels. Staff use SFL's effective performance management systems to set and review targets and standards of work. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are well supported by managers. Apprentices are particularly well involved in the day-to-day management of the training centre and take responsibility for general housekeeping. Practical engineering and training resources are managed well. The programmes run at the training centre are organised and planned well. However, strategic management is not well established. The apprentice board's responsibilities for performance management and strategic direction are not formally specified, although the board members are involved in both areas and discuss the strategic direction with managers and staff.

33. SFL maintains good communication with employers and with its sole subcontractor, Blackpool and The Fylde College. Staff at the training centre use well-managed monitoring systems, including visual displays, to monitor learners' progress and skills development. Health and safety management is very good and the training centre has an excellent record of preventing accidents and maintaining high levels of awareness among staff and learners.

34. Staff development arrangements are effective, and appropriate appraisal, review and development planning takes place with individual members of staff. Trainers participate in a range of training and continuous professional development which keeps them up to date and maintains their industry experience. However, managers have not yet formally agreed strategies for succession planning or staff training and development that reflect future business needs, although these are under discussion.

35. SFL manages the provision of literacy and numeracy effectively. The initial assessment process is appropriate and learners with literacy or numeracy learning needs can access suitable additional learning support. Mentoring is also provided.

36. Managers do not make enough use of data on early leavers and have not realised the full significance of the decline in the retention rate between 2000 and 2003. This is borne out by management reports and minutes of the apprentice board's meetings. Moreover, there are no formal procedures for exit reviews or for capturing feedback. The training centre manager has a good knowledge of individual learners, and notes their reasons for leaving their courses. In its self-assessment report, SFL has recognised the need for an exit procedure but not the need to consider the data trends more thoroughly.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

37. SFL manages good external links with a range of contacts and organisations to promote participation in engineering training. Managers devote a significant amount of time and resources to activities with schools. Visits to schools are well planned to promote positive messages about engineering training. In some cases, apprentices of both sexes take part, offering positive role models. Staff visit minority groups in the community and take care to communicate with all young people. They use good promotional literature and advertising to target specific groups. SFL maintains good communication with its partners, and regular meetings are held to improve participation. Additional meetings are arranged for prospective learners from minority groups and their parents. They are given further information and their interest is closely nurtured. Recruitment and selection are monitored closely to maintain fairness and equality of access to training. SFL has a good record for meeting targets for participation. Managers recognise that participation rates can continue to improve and are working to achieve this.

38. Effective induction sessions provide learners with a good introduction to equal opportunities and to their rights and responsibilities. The induction is built on during the first six months at the training through regular contact with the training staff and through training sessions and activities. Staff use appropriate learning materials, and posters and other media provide positive messages and learning points about equal opportunities.

39. SFL monitors the performance of the programme and sets appropriate targets for inclusion and participation by minority groups. However performance has not been evaluated in sufficient depth to identify the more successful strategies. Staff are well trained and experienced and equal opportunities is a regular topic in staff discussions, although no formal training has taken place in the recent past.

40. There is too little reinforcement of the equal opportunities training later in the programme when learners are visited at work. Equality of opportunity is not part of the workplace induction, and progress reviews carried out at work only cover equality of opportunity superficially.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

41. SFL has made very many good improvements to the quality of its training since it was inspected in 2002. Managers have a good process for, and a very positive attitude towards, continuous improvement. Improvement plans are reviewed regularly. The current plan is well managed and a colour coding system highlights priorities for action and

staff planning.

42. Learners and staff are closely involved in the identification and implementation of improvements. For example, a regular forum is used to encourage staff and apprentices to bring forward ideas for improvement and then to implement them. Many improvements have been made to the training facilities, to safety arrangements and to learning resources as a result of this forum.

43. Improvements have been made to health and safety training. Behavioural training has had a major effect on learners' attitudes to safety, and through a continuous improvement in the health and safety standards the accident rate has been at zero for over two years.

44. Significant improvements have been made to the way in which SFL manages the monitoring of learners' progress and plans actions with the subcontracted college. The college co-ordinator and SFL's training co-ordinator now meet every month to review the progress of individual learners. Actions to be followed are identified, recorded in a clear and specific manner and reviewed at the next meeting. Good records are kept and there is regular and effective communication between meetings. However, information is not routinely passed on to trainers in written form for them to use in learners' progress reviews. The training co-ordinator reviews learners' progress with their college work individually, and discusses it with their employers.

45. Staff have improved the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training by introducing an integrated vocational assessment project. This is well planned and organised to develop learning and skills and to enable background knowledge to be put into practice. Internal verification is well managed and effective.

46. Improvements have been made to the teaching arrangements. Teaching and learning sessions are observed regularly, and feedback is given and recorded. Good practices are shared and staff make improvements effectively. Staff meet regularly to consider standards and ways to improve sessions. The scope of the quality assurance arrangements has been extended and the staff have better access to them. However the current procedures do not adequately cover learners' progress reviews. The quality assurance of learners' progress reviews is not systematic.

47. SFL's self-assessment process has improved and the current report is better than the one available at the previous inspection. The process has been revised and is now more inclusive of the staff and learners. The apprentice board is also involved. Good levels of feedback are obtained from employers and used in the self-assessment process. SFL recognises that the process can be developed further to involve other stakeholders.

48. The current self-assessment report accurately identifies most of the strengths in the provision. The grades it gave the engineering programme, leadership and management and quality improvement, matched those given by inspectors. However SFL's managers failed to identify declining retention rates as a potential weakness, and the self-assessment report does not recognise that progress reviews are unsatisfactory. The self-assessment of equality of opportunity underestimated the requirement to continuously improve in this area.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Engineering Apprenticeships for young people	63	2 2

49. SFL trains engineering advanced apprentices for itself and for eight other employers in the northwest of England, all within 30 miles of SFL's site. There are 63 advanced apprentices specialising in electrical maintenance, mechanical maintenance, installation and commissioning or engineering production. All the learners are employed, and many progress to responsible positions with their employer. Learners spend their first 26 weeks at the training centre, working towards a level 2 national vocational qualification (NVQ) and key skills qualifications. Some then return to their employers to work towards the level 3 NVQ in the workplace. SFL's learners, and those from British Energy at Heysham, continue at the training centre for a further 50 weeks, developing background knowledge for the level 3 NVQ. Throughout their apprenticeship, learners attend Blackpool and The Fylde College for one day a week. Four members of staff at the training centre are key skills trainers and assessors, and two are internal verifiers.

Engineering

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good off-the-job training at the centre
- good range of resources
- very good support for learners
- very effective implementation of health and safety training

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory review process
- insufficient assessment by direct observation for level 3 learners

Achievement and standards

50. Framework completions rates are very good and retention levels are good overall. Over the five completed years since 1998-99, 80 per cent of learners successfully completed the apprenticeship framework. Learners make good progress, completing their level 2 NVQ and key skills qualifications in the first six months of training. They also complete their level 3 NVQ within the planned target dates. Although retention rates remain good, the proportion of early leavers rose from 17 per cent in 2000-01 to 22 per cent in 2002-03.

51. Level 3 learners attain well in the workplace. They complete increasingly complex

tasks on sophisticated equipment, often working independently. Most learners progress to higher education, and to the achievement of higher technical qualifications. Learners also complete a range of additional vocational training, some of which is externally accredited. Learners enjoy their work, are well motivated, and acquire good workplace skills.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00		1998-99		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	20		21		27		27	100	26	100	29	100	26	100	32	100	
Retained*	0		0		0		20	74	21	81	24	83	25	96	28	88	
Successfully completed	0		0		0		19	70	21	81	22	76	22	85	28	88	
Still in learning	20		20		22		1	4	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

The quality of provision

52. Off-the-job training in the training centre is good. Learners complete a well-structured training programme with clear schemes of work and lesson plans. They receive a good introduction to engineering and develop a wide range of basic engineering skills that their employers value. Trainers have a good rapport with learners, and learners are attentive and participate well. Trainers use a variety of assessment methods and monitor learners' progress well.

53. The range of training resources is good. The training centre is well equipped for training learners towards key skills qualifications and the level 2 NVQ in performing engineering operations. Workshops are spacious and laid out well to create a safe environment. There is a range of well-maintained conventional machine tools, but none of these have digital readouts, and there are no computer numerically controlled training machines in the centre. Classrooms are conveniently located, and well decorated and furnished. However, they have no information and learning technology equipment. Learners can use two suites of up-to-date computers, as well as the computers in the workshop area. Trainers are qualified engineers, have good industrial experience, and participate in professional updating and development. Seven members of the team are qualified assessors and two are internal verifiers. However, one is not a qualified trainer, and none is a qualified teacher.

54. Support for learners is very good. Learners are treated with respect and feel they are valued. All learners benefit from a comprehensive two-week induction at SFL which provides a good preparation for their training. Most training takes place in small groups with plenty of individual coaching and good vocational support. Learners receive good support from their mentor with whom they meet regularly during the first six months of their training. Learners are involved in the management of their programme and are highly motivated. Training staff meet individual learners regularly to review progress, identify assessment opportunities and resolve any problems. Communications between training staff, learners and workplace supervisors are good.

55. Before they start their training, learners receive satisfactory initial information, advice

and guidance both from SFL and from Connexions. They are encouraged to attend open days and other events to see at first hand what is involved in engineering apprenticeships. They continue to receive effective vocational guidance while they are at the training centre.

56. The good support by SFL includes free transport to the training centre and also to the college where learners complete their technical certificates. Other employers, such as British Energy, also offer free transport to college for level 3 learners. Learners at SFL have access to the full range of welfare services enjoyed by other staff. The training programme at SFL is accredited by a professional body for engineers, and learners are encouraged to apply for technician engineer status on completing their apprenticeship. Learners' successes are celebrated at an annual prize day and also at an annual 'Rewarding Excellence' event. Initial assessment and literacy and numeracy support for learners are satisfactory.

57. Health and safety training is very effectively implemented. Learners receive very thorough and effective health and safety training during induction and it is regularly reinforced. Managers have developed a culture in which individuals take responsibility for point-of-work risk assessment, and also for ensuring a safe working environment for themselves and their colleagues. Learners and training staff attend behavioural safety workshops and receive good guidance from their managers. There are frequent and regular meetings at which safety issues are discussed, standard operations are reviewed and areas for improvements identified. The apprentice safety committee, which is learner-led, effectively involves learners in the process. There have been no accidents in the apprentice training area for more than two years, and employers recognise the outstanding quality of the health and safety training their apprentices received at SFL.

58. Learners' health, welfare and sense of responsibility are promoted well during the training programme. For example, well-organised and resourced external sessions are provided to promote safe driving attitudes and drug awareness. Learners participate in a customised outdoor personal development programme with a leading national specialist provider which promotes self-awareness, teamwork and individual responsibility. Apprentices organise fund-raising activities and put on Christmas parties for young people who have disabilities or who are disadvantaged. Apprentices take part in community projects and are encouraged to take responsibility for organising events. Some of the work apprentices do with schools requires them to take on considerable responsibility in planning practical projects to involve pupils and organising groups to participate in activities.

59. The learners' progress review process is unsatisfactory. Reviews are held frequently and learners receive copies of the completed review document. However, performance targets are not always recorded effectively on review documents. Most employers are involved in their apprentices' progress reviews. However in the case of apprentices employed by SFL, the supervisor or team leader responsible for the on-the-job training does not attend the review meeting, although they do provide an end-of-period report. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is reviewed in a very superficial manner, and their progress at college is not always discussed formally or recorded. Some review records are incomplete.

60. A small number of level 3 learners return to their employers after completing their level 2 NVQ at the training centre. These learners receive too little assessment by direct

observation in the workplace. However in all other respects, assessment and verification are satisfactory and meet current awarding body requirements. There is no evidence that learners' progress has been affected, and since the previous inspection, the overall proportion of assessment by observation has increased.

Leadership and management

61. Communications between managers, trainers, employers and college staff are good. The staff team at SFL's training centre holds regular and well-planned meetings at which action points are specified. There are well-planned and managed internal briefings which include learners and provide good information about the training programme. Apprentices are expected to take responsibility for their programme and participate in managing the centre. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are well supported by managers. Appropriate staff development and performance review systems are in place.

62. Training programmes are well managed and there are particularly good health and safety management systems and practices. Induction is effective and includes good training sessions on equal opportunities. Quality assurance is generally effective and internal verification is well managed and contributes to improvements in assessment and training practices. Progress monitoring systems work well.

