

INSPECTION REPORT

SIGTA Limited

07 December 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
- **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
- 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

SIGTA Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. SIGTA Limited (SIGTA) is a group training organisation which specialises in work-based learning for young people in engineering and is also a learndirect provider. The organisation was established in 1964 by four Sussex-based engineering companies. Its member companies are located mainly in the south of England, most of them in Sussex and Surrey.

2. A chief executive is responsible for the overall management of SIGTA and reports to a board of non-executive directors representing the organisation's member companies. The general manager, who is also the company secretary, is responsible for the operational management of the company. SIGTA employs 10 full-time staff and two part-time staff including five training officers, in addition to the chief executive and general manager. These include five training officers.

3. SIGTA's work-based engineering programmes for young people are funded by Sussex Learning and Skills Council. Apart from a two-day induction programme, all off-the-job training and formal vocational training is either subcontracted to local colleges or is carried out by the employer.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies and the learndirect provision in preparation for life and work are satisfactory. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Quality improvement is inadequate.

5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment is completed in January each year and is derived from the previous year's self-assessment report and action plan. Views from SIGTA's staff, learners' feedback, data from the management information system and local demographic trends are also used to produce the report. The report is concise and is not detailed enough to support the strengths and weaknesses, several of which are judged to be the norm for provision.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** Progress has been slow in the implementation of the recommendations from the previous inspection and the following quality monitoring visit. SIGTA has now put systems into place and recruited new staff to move these initiatives forward.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SIGTA LIMITED:

- maintain the successful links with employers
- continue to develop the learndirect provision
- improve the success rates for the engineering provision

- improve the use of data to manage the provision
- improve the monitoring of learners' progress

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Engineering		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	127	3	

Preparation for life and work			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Access programmes		3	
learndirect	176	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. A team of five inspectors inspected the provision in December 2006. The team inspected engineering and the learndirect provision.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	54
Number of staff interviewed	17
Number of employers interviewed	9
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	11

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good work with employers
- active partnerships to support the local and regional skills agenda

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of subcontractors
- insufficient application of systems to manage business performance
- slow implementation of actions to bring about improvements
- inadequate internal verification process

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Engineering

Strengths

- good development of workplace skills
- well-established and effective working relationships with employers
- very effective on-the-job training

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough reviews and use of targets for learners
- unsatisfactory assessment practice for some learners
- inadequate use of data and monitoring of learners' progress

Preparation for life and work

Access programmes

Strengths

- good links with employers
- good integration of learndirect with national vocational qualification programmes

Weaknesses

- weak recording of learners' progress
- inadequate quality assurance

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SIGTA LIMITED:

- being treated as adults and respected by SIGTA and the employer
- interesting jobs at work
- being helped to progress
- 'the amount I have learnt'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SIGTA LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of paperwork for the portfolio
- the alignment of college courses to work
- the co-ordination of off-the-job and on-the-job training
- many said nothing could be improved

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good work with employers
- active partnerships to support the local and regional skills agenda

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of subcontractors
- insufficient application of systems to manage business performance
- slow implementation of actions to bring about improvements
- inadequate internal verification process

8. SIGTA has close and productive relationships with employers with which it works. Communications between employers and staff at SIGTA are good and the provider responds well to employers' needs. Engineering companies are very positive about the partnerships they have with the provider. Training is designed to match closely companies' individual needs. Training programmes are planned well with employers to ensure that learners gain experience in a wide range of engineering and general business disciplines. Employers are encouraged to use learndirect programmes to meet the skills needs of their employees. SIGTA responds quickly to requests from employers for learndirect courses. Staff at SIGTA work flexibly to fit in with employers' work patterns. They have a good understanding of business needs across a wide range of engineering companies. Training officers ensure that regular visits are made to employers, many of which are based a long way from SIGTA's training centre in Brighton. Some former SIGTA learners now hold managerial positions with employers. SIGTA provides training, advisory and management services for employers who regard the provider as an important and authoritative source of information on training and development.

9. SIGTA has a number of active partnerships which support the local and regional skills agenda. The provider works closely with groups of employers and other organisations to develop those skills identified as areas for expansion within the local community and the wider region. For example, SIGTA has developed good partnerships with local schools to implement an information and communications technology (ICT) systems support apprenticeship for former school pupils. The provider has expanded its learndirect provision to offer courses which are aimed at rectifying skills shortages in areas such as skills for life, ICT and health and social care. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Different learning strategies are integrated well on learndirect courses to ensure that learners develop a wide range of vocational and personal skills. SIGTA hosts networking meetings for a number of different education and training groups and leads on a number of specific issues. The provider is part of the management group for two Centres of Vocational Excellence, one for heritage engineering and the other for advanced manufacturing. SIGTA is currently involved in the development of specialist engineering diplomas for 14 to 19 year olds with a local school. The provider has managed a successful project to provide staff development in skills for

life for another training provider and has worked closely with a provider of Jobcentre Plus programmes to run preparation for work courses for their learners and skills for life training for the staff.

10. Overall, management of training is satisfactory. SIGTA has recently experienced a period of change. A number of employees have retired and other staff have been on long-term sickness leave. Training officers frequently work long hours to ensure that they visit apprentices at employers located around the country. The staff are highly motivated and are implementing changes to improve the quality of the provision. All apprentices are supported well by their training officers and they develop good vocational skills. Staff who deliver learndirect programmes are motivated well and have a clear focus on the need to improve success rates.

11. Communications are satisfactory. As SIGTA is a small provider with all staff located in one training centre, communication is open and less formal. Team meetings are regular but are poorly recorded. Insufficient opportunities exist for formal communications with subcontracted colleges. Members of staff receive a satisfactory induction and are supported well.

12. Overall, information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. The level of information given at induction is appropriate. Initial information, advice and guidance are good on learndirect programmes. Some good initiatives have been taken with staff at local Jobcentre Plus offices to improve their knowledge of the wide range of employment opportunities in engineering.

13. The management of literacy, numeracy and language training is satisfactory, although the identification of literacy and numeracy needs is insufficiently rigorous in engineering. SIGTA does not have a written skills for life policy or a procedure for initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs. However, the arrangements for initial assessment are satisfactory. Learners are made aware of their initial assessment test results. On learndirect programmes, learners' literacy and numeracy skills are matched effectively to suitable literacy and numeracy courses.

14. There is insufficient monitoring of subcontractors. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection, since when service level agreements have been written for some of the subcontracted colleges. However, the agreements do not set out the roles and responsibilities of SIGTA and the colleges in sufficient detail. Some colleges do not have a written contract with the provider and those that do have not been issued with new contracts since 2004-05. SIGTA's quality assurance policies and procedures do not cover all aspects of the subcontractors' provision. Subcontracted colleges do not provide sufficient feedback to SIGTA about the quality of training and some employers do not receive regular reports about learners' attendance, behaviour and the quality of their work. Where colleges do provide employers with progress reports on learners, these are not routinely used during learners' progress reviews in the workplace. However, where training officers do identify problems with subcontracted training through their contacts with employers and learners, they resolve them appropriately. SIGTA does not always receive reports from colleges on learners' progress. Success rates for the qualifications offered by each subcontracted college are not monitored by the provider. SIGTA has partly identified this weakness in its most recent self-assessment report and has appointed an external consultant to improve the monitoring of subcontractors. The consultant has

started to hold meetings with college representatives and to collect feedback from observations of teaching and learning. However, these meetings do not yet focus sufficiently on quality improvement.

15. SIGTA does not apply its systems adequately enough to manage business performance. The provider does not have a business plan or strategic plan which identifies the priorities for the training programmes, how they will be achieved and what resources are required. Board meetings do not monitor the performance of the provider's different training programmes. Staff appraisals do not incorporate any reviews of targets set during previous appraisals. Staff are not set specific targets at appraisal which are linked to their own identified needs or those of the company. There is insufficient monitoring of the performance of each subcontractor, employer and assessor. SIGTA does not have an overall system for monitoring learners' progress to assist managers in assessing the overall effectiveness of their systems. However, the provider has identified problems with its previous management information system and has now replaced it with a new system. Financial performance is monitored closely by managers and the board of directors.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

16. SIGTA has recently updated the equal opportunities policy which is now comprehensive and detailed. The policy included learners' and employers' responsibilities, equality and diversity training, complaints procedures, and disciplinary and grievance procedures. The procedures for monitoring employers' equal opportunities policies are outlined to ensure that each employer has an appropriate policy. Relevant legislation is identified relating to discrimination, victimisation, and harassment. The policy is reviewed each year. SIGTA maintains good links with two providers of specialist equal opportunities training to ensure that it keeps up to date with changes in legislation.

17. The monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is satisfactory and is completed by training officers during the learners' reviews and other visits to employers. Copies of the employers' equal opportunities policies are collected by the training officers and these are reviewed by the general manager. SIGTA ensures that the equal opportunities policies are adequate and that all employers demonstrate appropriate awareness of equality and diversity issues. Employers who do not have an adequate equal opportunities policy are assisted to develop one.

18. SIGTA has some effective activities to promote the understanding of equality and diversity issues. All staff recently attended a one-day training course run by a training provider specialising in equality and diversity training which reinforced fundamental equality concepts and introduced the latest legislation. The company has maintained its commitment to provide training in signing to help staff communicate with a colleague with a hearing impairment. Recent work with a large employer of disabled people has promoted the staff members' understanding of disability and learning difficulty. The two-day induction programme for learners includes sessions on equality and diversity as well as health and safety. These sessions include some useful exercises to encourage learners to explore some basic issues and to understand their responsibilities. Learners' progress reviews include the opportunity to discuss equality and diversity and also health and safety. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory, although in some cases it is limited to the working environment.

19. SIGTA's staff promote engineering as a career path to under-represented groups. Training officers visit local schools and colleges and work closely with careers staff to promote a better understanding of the more varied opportunities for careers in engineering. Promotional material includes images which counter the usual stereotypes associated with engineering and feature women and learners from minority ethnic groups. SIGTA has recently run a training course for Jobcentre Plus staff to promote access to engineering careers for under-represented groups of learners. One member of staff sits on the committee of a local education business partnership to promote engineering and vocational training routes for young people. SIGTA is developing a specialised engineering diploma for 14 to 19 year olds to promote access into engineering courses. One female learner recently gave a presentation at a careers event as part of a women in science and engineering initiative.

20. Learners' achievements are recognised well with photographs of successful learners prominently displayed in the centre. The award scheme which had been used to acknowledge and celebrate learners' achievement, especially in the case of learners with particular social and personal difficulties, is being reintroduced.

21. SIGTA's training centre has good access and includes toilet facilities for people with restricted mobility. The computer training suite and other training rooms are all located on the ground floor and a ramp is in place at the front entrance. Access onto learndirect courses for learners with hearing impairments is being improved and includes the provision of a hearing loop system within the centre.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 4

22. The implementation of actions to bring about improvements is slow. A number of significant weaknesses in the apprenticeship programme and leadership and management identified at the previous inspection have not been adequately resolved. There are wide variations in the success rates of learners employed by different engineering companies. Good practice in assessment at one employer, where learners' success rates are good, is not shared among the training team.

23. Important business procedures are monitored through an international quality assurance standard. However, the quality assurance manual does not adequately explain how the quality assurance of the training programmes is carried out and it does not make sufficient reference to the learndirect programmes of subcontracted college provision. The accompanying procedures manual does not contain detailed procedures for different parts of the training programme, such as induction and progress reviews. There is no distinction between the procedures for the different training programmes. SIGTA does not have an internal audit procedure to review individual training activities. Learners' files are not sampled to check whether important paperwork is completed correctly. The provider does not have a quality assurance calendar or framework to identify when key quality assurance activities should take place, how they should relate to each other or how they should be used to ensure quality improvement.

24. The quality improvement arrangements for learndirect programmes are weak. The provider has set ambitious targets to improve success rates for the apprenticeship programmes by 2009, but these targets are not broken down into short-term, measurable targets for the next three years. SIGTA does not formally identify how these long-term targets will be met. Very few observations of training are carried out and the collection of

learners' feedback is not sufficiently systematic. The quality of support for learners who visit the training centre is not monitored. No observations of subcontracted training on the apprenticeship programmes are carried out by SIGTA's staff and no information on the quality of learning sessions is supplied by subcontractors. Feedback on the apprenticeship programmes is collected regularly from learners and employers. However, the response rate for employers is poor. SIGTA does not carry out an overall evaluation of learners' or employers' feedback to identify what actions are required. The feedback form for learners is not designed sufficiently well to ensure that learners' individual comments are collected.

25. The internal verification process at SIGTA is inadequate and was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. The provider has a detailed internal verification policy and procedures and has implemented an annual sampling plan. However, there are insufficient staff qualified to carry out internal verification. Very little internal verification has been carried out recently. The main focus of internal verification is on sampling learners' completed portfolios before submission for certification. There is insufficient ongoing internal verification of the different types of assessment or stages of the training programmes. Internal verification sampling forms do not contain sufficient feedback or identified actions. Learners are not routinely interviewed as part of the internal verification process. Some weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, such as poor assessment practices and poor monitoring of learners' progress have not been rectified.

26. The self-assessment process and report are adequate. SIGTA carries out an annual self-assessment and currently writes separate self-assessment reports for its learndirect and apprenticeship programmes. The process is inclusive and all staff are involved in the development of the report. Feedback from learners and employers is used as a source of information, but no formal feedback is collected from subcontractors. The final self-assessment report is not ratified by the board of directors. The report for the apprenticeship programmes is insufficiently detailed. The evidence for some of the strengths and weaknesses in leadership and management and the area of learning does not adequately explain how the judgements were made. Inspectors' judgements matched those of the provider to some extent. The self-assessment report for the learndirect provision identifies a number of strengths which were not substantiated by the inspection team.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Engineering		3
Apprenticeships for young people	127	3

27. There are 127 learners on engineering programmes. Of these, 103 are on advanced apprenticeships in mechanical and electrical engineering, engineering maintenance and aeronautical engineering maintenance. The remaining 24 are on apprenticeships in similar skill areas. Most learners complete key skills training, technical certificate requirements and a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in full-time or part-time study during their time at a number of further education colleges. A small number complete their NVQ at level 2 in their company, the technical certificate at a further education college and key skills qualifications at SIGTA. Most learners are employed by a range of local engineering employers, although a significant number are employed by a major international airline. During the work-based phase of their training, learners are supported by a team of six work-based assessors and internal verifiers.

Engineering

Strengths

- good development of workplace skills
- well-established and effective working relationships with employers
- very effective on-the-job training

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough reviews and use of targets for learners
- unsatisfactory assessment practice for some learners
- inadequate use of data and monitoring of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

28. Overall success rates for apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes are now satisfactory. In 2003-04, overall success rates were 42 per cent. In 2004-05 they fell to 29 per cent but improved to 50 per cent for 2005-06. This matches the national framework rate of 50 per cent. The overall success rates for apprentices employed by a major international airline are outstanding with a 100 per cent success rate for 2005-06. Success rates for other apprentices on the programme are unsatisfactory. Retention is also satisfactory. For the past three years retention has been consistently around 75 per cent.

29. Development of learners' practical skills is good. Many learners are given significant responsibility at an early stage in their apprenticeship and carry out complex engineering tasks. The best portfolios are well produced and contain a wide range of evidence

including technical drawings, digital images, work records, witness testimonies and job write-ups.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	20	85	57	65	46
		timely	23	30	34	26	27
	2004-05	overall	15	27	57	20	45
		timely	20	5	33	0	5
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	11	36	48	9	32
		timely	10	10	22	0	13
	2004-05	overall	4	25	52	25	41
		timely	6	0	27	0	19
NVQ training for young people	2003-04	overall	9	78	47	0	0
		timely	9	44	32	0	0
	2004-05	overall	4	25	57	0	0
		timely	9	11	37	0	0

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

30. Working relationships with employers are well established and effective and employers take great interest in the progress of their apprentices. SIGTA's staff have considerable specialist experience in the engineering environment and their knowledge and skills are valued by employers and learners. SIGTA has a strong employer base, many of which have a long-established relationship with the provider.

31. When learners transfer to the workplace many employers operate a comprehensive, planned training programme giving them an insight into all aspects of the company activities. This is supported by comprehensive written information on the framework requirements provided by SIGTA, which learners and employers find very useful.

32. Support for learners is satisfactory. Training officers carry out regular visits to the workplace. Learners are able to contact training officers for assistance and advice between visits, by e-mail or by mobile phone, while working on background knowledge requirements.

33. There are opportunities for many learners to take additional courses as part of their apprenticeship in topics including abrasive wheels, welding, power press setting and hydraulics. Other learners attend additional academic courses leading to qualifications such as higher national certificates or part-time degrees.

34. The selection and recruitment process is structured well. All apprentices are assessed for literacy and numeracy needs and occupational skills before being invited to join the programme. All young people receive a two-day induction and an introduction to

equality and diversity and health and safety. There is also an occupational induction in the workplace with a high emphasis on health and safety, the requirements of the framework and workplace processes and procedures. The identification and provision of additional learning support once learners embark on their apprenticeship is insufficiently rigorous. The system relies on the individual training officers identifying a need and then following up this with SIGTA's management on an informal basis.

35. Progress reviews are insufficiently thorough and many do not contain detailed targets. Learners are reviewed very regularly but there is little reinforcement of health and safety and equality and diversity on reviews. Some reviews indicate that there has been insufficient time for any discussion of equality of opportunity. Where targets are set, progress against them is checked at the next review. Some reviews, however, do not contain any specific targets, while others refer to targets set on assessment documents or on a separate sheet which is not filed with the review documents. An employers' copy of the review is not routinely provided, although some reviewers take a photocopy and give it to the company representative.

36. NVQ assessment practices for some learners are unsatisfactory. There is no written strategy for the delivery and assessment of NVQs, and no written assessment plan. There is also no recording on assessment plans of the assessment methods used on assessors' visits in an easily identifiable form. Where witness testimony is used there is insufficient identification and verification of the expertise of witnesses. Some logbook entries were signed a considerable period after the NVQ activity had taken place, and a small number were unsigned.

37. The use of data to monitor learners' progress and to monitor the achievement of framework components is unsatisfactory. Training officers have developed their own systems for monitoring learners' progress, and additional information is now becoming available from the management information system. At the present time, however, the information is insufficiently detailed. It is not possible easily to monitor the progress of individuals or groups of learners and monitor assessment and review visits, NVQ unit progress and college courses. The general progress of learners is reviewed at monthly staff meetings and staff receive a printout from the management information system. The results of these reviews are not formally recorded, clear targets are not set, and the review is not part of the international quality assurance standard that SIGTA operates. The strategy to deal with the progress of learners who have exceeded their funding period and to help them to complete their frameworks is not fully developed.

38. Arrangements for monitoring the further education colleges are unsatisfactory. Service level agreements are not regularly updated and for some colleges service level agreements do not exist. Meetings between SIGTA and the further education colleges are not formally recorded and no action points are agreed between the two parties.

Leadership and management

39. Several newly appointed members of staff are now making a significant contribution to improving the management of the provision. They are working towards their internal verification qualifications and are helping to develop the management information system. Communications are satisfactory. There are monthly staff meetings of training officers, assessors, internal verifiers and managers. Not all meeting activities are formally recorded nor are clear action points identified. There is regular contact with employers.

40. The self-assessment process includes all members of staff who contributed to the draft report. The self-assessment report is not detailed enough. It provides insufficient information and justification for the strengths and weaknesses. Some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report were found by inspectors to be no more than normal practice and some additional strengths and weaknesses were not previously identified.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Access programmes		3
learndirect	176	3

41. The SIGTA learndirect centre, which is part of the SIGTA training organisation, is located in Portslade. The centre is based on the ground floor of SIGTA's centre in a residential area of the town. It is accessed by a ramp and has toilet facilities for people with restricted mobility. The centre has 10 computers with scanning, printing and other peripheral equipment. It is open between 0900am and 1630pm Monday to Friday. The centre provides skills for life courses in literacy, numeracy and language, as well as, ICT courses and some business and management programmes but does not offer the full learndirect catalogue of courses. Inspection focused on the skills for life, ICT and business and management provision. Since August 2006 there have been 176 enrolments on skills for life courses, 42 enrolments on ICT courses and 23 enrolments on business and management courses. Most ICT learners take examination-based courses. Some who are following a period in employment or short work placement take NVQs. Skills for life learners generally follow short courses with the opportunity to take national tests in literacy and numeracy. Most business and management courses are linked to practical work experience.

42. The centre is managed by the chief executive, who is assisted by a general manager. There are three tutors at the centre, although due to other duties the staff comprises one full-time qualified tutor and one tutor undergoing training. The centre has one outreach centre but this was not operational at the time of the inspection. A further outreach centre is planned but this has not yet begun to recruit learners.

Access programmes*Strengths*

- good links with employers
- good integration of learndirect with national vocational qualification programmes

Weaknesses

- weak recording of learners' progress
- inadequate quality assurance

Achievement and standards

43. Skills for life learners who attend the centre progress at a satisfactory rate, gain new skills and increase their familiarity with using computers. Their standard of work and levels of attainment are satisfactory. Learners gain confidence, are well motivated and have a good expectation of completing their courses through achieving literacy and numeracy qualifications. Many learners progress to further courses either with learndirect or with the providers of other programmes.

44. Since August 2006 the skills for life programme has enrolled 176 learners, of whom 78 have completed and only 4 per cent have withdrawn before completing. The success rate is 42 per cent. This is significantly below regional and national averages. The ICT and business and management courses have had small numbers of completions and it is not possible to draw conclusions and make judgements on these programmes.

The quality of provision

45. SIGTA has strong links with national and local employers. The provider's training staff regularly visit employers to consult them on their requirements and how these can be met by learndirect. Employers are encouraged to use learndirect to meet the skills for life, ICT and other needs of their staff. The requirements of employers are quickly responded to and learndirect programmes are examined to identify the most suitable programme. SIGTA's website contains details of learndirect programmes and is extensively used by local employers.

46. The provider makes good use of integrated learning strategies for two groups of learners. For one group an induction to care learndirect course is linked well with an NVQ care programme. Learners bring the knowledge and skills learnt in programme, such as sensitive and empathetic communication, and manual handling, into their practical work in care homes. Another group of learners follows a skills for life course and brings new literacy and numeracy skills to a practical lift truck training course, also offered on the provider's premises. The learners value the new skills gained and the increased confidence which results from achieving a literacy and numeracy qualification at level 2.

47. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Learners have access to appropriate and sufficient resources to support learning. Skills for life learners are on courses at the right level to meet their needs and interest and improve their literacy and numeracy. Skills for life learners attending the centre receive satisfactory individual support from their tutors.

48. The provider's premises are conveniently located on a bus route and learners appreciate the welcoming environment. Staff provide good initial information, advice and guidance. Induction is satisfactory and learners who have not achieved general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above in English and mathematics receive an adequate initial assessment and appropriate diagnostic tests. Their skills are then effectively mapped to suitable literacy and numeracy programmes. Individual learning plans are satisfactorily completed, together with learning agreements which contain comprehensive target completion dates and learning goals.

49. The recording of learners' progress is weak. SIGTA has no comprehensive system for routinely identifying learners' progress. Reviews are not carried out and recorded at regular intervals, but are limited to a comment on the learning plan on the completion of each learning module. Twenty-three per cent of learners have not accessed their programme for at least 30 days and there is no record of measures taken to resolve this. Learners are not always withdrawn from the programme in a timely manner. Progression to other courses is not routinely measured.

Leadership and management

50. An effective operating plan is in place that provides clearly defined strategies for meeting the objectives and targets of the centre. These include broadening the scope of

the provision without loss of quality. Recent strategies have been developed to widen participation. The current management structure does not provide for a centre manager as the role is partly filled by both the chief executive and the general manager. Staff have a clear focus and are particularly enthusiastic and motivated to help learners achieve higher levels of success. Tutors attend staff training events which provide opportunities for sharing good practice and lead to appropriate qualifications.

51. Quality assurance arrangements are weak. With the exception of the care learners, SIGTA has insufficient arrangements to collect feedback from learners to make quality improvements possible. Although feedback forms are available they have not been used to evaluate learners' perceptions nor analysed to guide improvement strategies. Insufficient observation of training and support takes place. Only four observations have been completed in the past 12 months. Support for the 21 remote learners who periodically visit the centre is not sufficiently monitored.

52. The self-assessment report and the centre development plan outline a greater number of strengths than found by inspectors. However, they do identify most of the contributory elements which were incorporated into the weaknesses.

