

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: SIGTA
Date of visit: 15 July 2008

Context

Sigta Limited (SIGTA) is a group-training organisation that specialises in providing work-based learning for the engineering and manufacturing sector. SIGTA also operates a learndirect centre and offers a comprehensive range of commercial courses to local and national employers. Four Sussex-based engineering companies established the organisation in 1964. Its member companies are located mainly in the south of England, most of them in Sussex and Surrey.

Since the previous inspection, the chief executive has retired but taken up a new part-time role as a quality improvement manager. The new chief executive was previously the organisation's general manager.

At the previous inspection SIGTA's overall effectiveness was satisfactory. All aspects of its provision except for quality improvement were satisfactory. Inspectors found the arrangements for quality improvement to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

What progress has SIGTA made in raising success rates in engineering and learndirect programmes?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection although success rates in engineering were satisfactory, raising them was identified by inspectors as a key challenge for SIGTA. Overall success rates were around the national average. Outstanding success rates for apprentices employed by one international aeronautical employer were masking unsatisfactory rates for other employers. Since then SIGTA has made significant progress in raising success rates. The number of early leavers has fallen sharply. In 2006/07 the overall success rate for all engineering apprenticeships was 70%, 5.5% above the national average. So far in 2007/08 the overall success rate has risen further to 90.3%, significantly above the national average. SIGTA has focused strongly on quality improvement initiatives to raise success rates. Initial advice and guidance have been improved for both employers and potential apprentices. Other successful changes include a thorough review process, improved support arrangements for additional learning needs, improved monitoring of staff

performance and better planning of individual training. Success rates on learndirect programmes have also risen steadily since the previous inspection. For quarter one of 2007/08 the overall success rate was 79%. This represents a significant improvement on the same period the previous year when the success rate was 49%.

Quality of education and training

Has the monitoring of learners' progress improved?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, improving the monitoring of learners' progress was one of the key challenges identified. At that time learners' reviews were not thorough and target-setting was weak. SIGTA has made significant progress towards meeting this key challenge. SIGTA now maintains good records of each learner's progress that show the percentage achievement of each unit. Assessors take these record sheets to reviews and ensure that they are up-dated regularly. In addition, assessors use an electronic traffic light system to highlight those learners at risk of falling behind with their studies or even leaving the programme altogether. Senior managers take prompt action to support any learners identified as at risk. During the final year of the programme the progress records are posted on the wall providing a visual reminder to all of learners' progress and their targets for achievement. Learner reviews are now thorough, target-setting is effective and progress is monitored carefully.

What progress has SIGTA made in rectifying the weaknesses in internal verification?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, internal verification systems were inadequate and there were insufficient qualified internal verifiers. SIGTA has made reasonable progress in improving its arrangements for internal verification since the previous inspection and it is now satisfactory in all subject areas. SIGTA has made substantial improvement in health and social care in the last year. SIGTA recruited a new internal verifier in June 2007 and since then two assessors have achieved their assessors' qualification. A comprehensive assessment and verification system has been implemented. Health and social care assessors meet with the internal verifier monthly to discuss learners' progress and to standardise assessment decisions. SIGTA has recruited an additional internal verifier for engineering and this has improved the consistency of assessment decisions. On all programmes, verification procedures have improved. All aspects of the programmes are now verified effectively and all assessors are observed regularly. SIGTA now has a comprehensive operating procedures manual, which assessors and verifiers can refer to and follow.

Leadership and management

Has the monitoring of subcontractors improved?	Insufficient progress
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The previous two inspection reports identify the monitoring of subcontractors as an area for improvement. SIGTA has yet to address this fully. Service level agreements have improved but they are not formally monitored. SIGTA identify this in their self-assessment report and recognise that the implementation of previously identified actions has been too slow. SIGTA does receive copies of some quality monitoring forms completed by subcontractors but this is not consistent for all subcontractors and when forms are received, they are not formally evaluated. In June 2007 the new management structure resulted in the appointment of a quality manager but so far the management of subcontractors has not changed. Training officers visit the subcontractors regularly and observe the training learners receive. If any problems are identified these are addressed effectively. Colleges do produce reports about learners' progress and attendance and send them to the employers and to SIGTA. Although training officers read these reports, they do not evaluate them, or collate, analyse and use the information to improve provision.

What progress has SIGTA made in improving the use of data for management and improvement	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, inspectors identified improving the use of data for management as a key challenge for SIGTA. At that time, SIGTA did not have a business or strategic plan. It did not monitor the performance of its staff sufficiently and the transfer of data from an existing database to a newly purchased commercial system was proving difficult. Since then SIGTA has made significant progress in addressing these areas for improvement. SIGTA now has a well written business plan, which clearly identifies priorities for the training programmes. Difficulties with the accuracy of data in the new management information system are fully resolved and the database is proving a useful tool for management purposes. Staff use the system to monitor learners' progress and can identify those learners at risk of falling behind with their studies. Senior managers now monitor the performance of staff systematically and regularly. Where they identify difficulties, action is prompt and effective.

Has the speed of quality improvement initiatives improved?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the arrangements for quality improvement were inadequate. The implementation of actions to bring about improvement was slow. SIGTA had failed to resolve a number of significant weaknesses identified at its previous inspection. Since then SIGTA has made reasonable progress in addressing these serious failings of its quality improvement systems. The previously wide

variations in the success rates of learners employed by different engineering companies have narrowed. Success rates for engineering apprentices have risen and they are now above the national average. Success rates on learndirect programmes have also increased steadily and are now around the national average. SIGTA has made significant progress in improving the arrangements for monitoring learners' progress. Internal verification, which was a weakness at both of the two previous inspections, is now satisfactory. Further work is required to improve the arrangements for monitoring the performance of subcontractors, which was an area for improvement at the last two inspections.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

Has SIGTA improved the rigour and accuracy of self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, inspectors found that the self-assessment report lacked detail and many of the strengths claimed were normal practice. SIGTA has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of its self-assessment. The most recent reports for engineering and learndirect have an appropriate level of detail. The judgements are well supported by evidence and areas are identified appropriately as strengths or areas for improvement. Although the accuracy of the reports cannot be judged from this inspection visit, the reports appear to represent a critical and evaluative summary of SIGTA's work. Currently SIGTA has separate self-assessment reports for engineering and its learndirect contract and there is no overall summary of the whole of SIGTA's provision. While the learndirect report is very detailed, the engineering report still does not address all of the key questions in sufficient detail. For example, too little reference is made to the quality of teaching and learning. The quality improvement plans for both self-assessment reports are appropriate for the areas identified. Actions and targets are clear and likely to bring about improvement.