

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Sandwell Training Association
Date of visit: 11 March 2009

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in December 2007 at which all aspects of Sandwell Training Association's (STA) apprenticeship were judged to be satisfactory and all aspects of Train to Gain were judged to be good. STA's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve were judged as satisfactory. STA provides apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship training for young people and Train to Gain programmes for adults. At the time of the monitoring visit, 124 apprentices and 423 Train to Gain learners had enrolled. The number of Train to Gain learners increased substantially in 2008/09. The main training areas are business administration, engineering and construction. STA contracts with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council for its apprenticeships and with the Black Country Training consortium for Train to Gain. Two sites provide training in the Sandwell area. Eighteen full-time staff provide training and assessment. Training is also subcontracted to two local colleges.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving achievement and remedying slow progress?	Reasonable Progress
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STA has made reasonable progress in improving achievement and remedying slow progress. Overall success rates for all apprentices have improved since the previous inspection. For engineering apprentices, the success rate is nine percentage points above the national average for 2007/08. Timely success rates for all apprentices have improved. The timely success rate for apprentices in engineering is significantly above the national average. Success rates for apprentices from minority ethnic groups have improved and are now similar to or better than STA's overall success rates. Success rates for Train to Gain programmes continue to improve. Overall success rates and timely success rates for advanced apprentices have improved but are still below the national average. STA has not identified this as an area for improvement in its self-assessment report.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving initial assessment?	Reasonable progress
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STA has made reasonable progress in improving initial assessment. The introduction of new procedures for Train to Gain learners has improved the way initial assessment takes place. It is too early to judge the impact of this on learners' progress. All work-based learners take a computer-based assessment of their skills during recruitment, the results of which are recorded on an individual development plan. Learners' training plans are then developed using the results of this assessment. Staff development has raised the quality of initial assessment. Staff attend good practice events that have contributed to improvements in initial assessment. STA has developed appropriate information, advice and guidance arrangements. It has achieved external accreditation for the standard reached.

How much progress has STA made in improving target-setting?	Reasonable progress
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STA has made reasonable progress in improving target-setting for learners. Reviews of learners' progress now follow clear procedures that emphasise the importance of target-setting. Regular meetings with learners review and revise targets. Managers check all progress reviews and discuss areas for improvement with staff. Discussions lead to revised targets, where necessary. Staff take part regularly in training on the progress reviews. Good practice that STA has developed through its training and development sessions for information, advice and guidance has contributed to improvements in progress reviews and target-setting.

Leadership and management

How much progress has STA made in the implementation of quality assurance procedures?	Reasonable progress
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STA has made reasonable progress in the implementation of quality assurance procedures. STA makes good use of its intranet to display the current policies and procedures to all staff. Staff working off-site can download the latest versions of documents for use with learners. Strengthened procedures for working with subcontractors are in place. STA has implemented new and improved service level agreements that include best practice clauses. The two colleges provide regular progress reports. The arrangements to quality assure the quality of teaching and learning provided by subcontractors are insufficiently thorough.

How much progress has STA made in the promotion of equality of opportunity?	Reasonable progress
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STA has made reasonable progress in the promotion of equality of opportunity. Staff attend appropriate external training events. Regular staff team meetings share good practice. Staff benefit from good internal communication relating to topical equality and diversity matters. The introduction of a standard bank of questions used during progress reviews and on other occasions with learners promotes discussion and reinforces understanding. The current self-assessment report does not contain an analysis of STA's promotion of equality and diversity. STA does not have a plan for the further promotion of equality and diversity.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has STA made in improving the self-assessment and improvement planning processes?	Reasonable progress
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STA has made reasonable progress in improving the self-assessment and improvement planning processes. STA involves all the relevant stakeholders and collects and analyses feedback closely. Managers adopt a more critical approach during the regular reviews of management performance. The use of specific targets and frequent progress monitoring has increased accountability. Internal audit processes are thorough and lead to quality improvement. STA makes effective and thorough use of data to review performance. However, the self-assessment report does not compare STA's performance against national averages. Satisfactory aspects of provision do not feature as areas for improvement. Improvement plans lack sufficient actions to raise the overall and timely success rates of advanced apprentices.