

Stockport Engineering Training Association

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Jan Smith HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 18 Hammond Avenue
South Reddish
Stockport
SK4 1PQ

Telephone number: 0161 480 9822

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Stockport Engineering Training Association (SETA) is a private training provider established in 1966 to offer training services to small and medium-sized engineering companies in the Stockport and Manchester area. SETA has a government-funded contract to provide apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes in engineering and manufacturing technologies. Currently there are 111 work-based learners, including 7 apprentices and 104 advanced apprentices, 24 Train to Gain learners and ten 14-16 year old young apprentices.

SETA was inspected in June 2006 and was found to be inadequate. At reinspection in June 2007, overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. Leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality improvement and engineering and manufacturing technologies, were also found to be satisfactory.

Over the last year, a number of changes have affected the day-to-day operation of the company. These include the appointment of a new chief executive, a reallocation of staff responsibilities and a reduction in staff hours.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has SETA made in improving the effectiveness of self-assessment to bring about improvements?	Insufficient progress
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SETA has made insufficient progress in developing the self-assessment process. At the time of the reinspection, inspectors had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment and the accuracy of grading. However, the company has made too little use of self-assessment to drive improvement since that time. The self-assessment report (SAR) of December 2008 lacked evaluative detail, was unclear in parts, and did not lead to effective planning for improvement. There has been a significant delay in producing the next self-assessment report, which was finally completed in April 2010. The self-assessment process is now more systematic and links to a quality improvement plan that incorporates business development priorities. It draws on well-structured consultation with staff, and on learner and employer views. However, the evidence for some key judgements is insecure. The report bases judgements for learner outcomes on inaccurate and misleading success rate data. Judgements on teaching and learning are not supported by evidence from teaching observations as none has been carried out for the past year. In view of its very recent publication date, it is too early to judge its impact on bringing about improvements.

What progress has been made in the use of learner and employer feedback to drive improvement?

Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made in the use of feedback from learners and employers. The reinspection report noted that SETA did not collect adequate feedback from learners to help improve the provision. There was not enough detail in the responses and insufficient analysis of the responses. The provider has introduced more systematic arrangements to gather feedback from learners and employers. The response rates have improved and the outcomes are incorporated into the self-assessment report. Apprentices are asked to complete a simplified evaluation form twice a year. These are analysed and discussed at senior management team meetings. In addition, SETA has reintroduced learner committee meetings and placed complaints and suggestions boxes in the centre to encourage feedback. Learners report that SETA responds quickly to complaints and suggestions. However, these changes are too recent to judge the impact on bringing about improvements.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made with improving outcomes for learners?

Insufficient progress

SETA has made insufficient progress in improving success rates for learners. At the reinspection, achievement and standards overall were satisfactory. Since then, success rates on frameworks have declined to 55%, well below the national average. Success rates on apprenticeships are particularly low at 40%. Timely success rates on frameworks have also declined to around 43% which is well below the national average. Success rates and timely success rates for adults are very high.

However, success rates show signs of improvement in 2009/10. Of the eight learners who had left programmes in 2009/10, seven had successfully achieved their qualifications. Many learners continue to progress to higher education qualifications. Since September 2009 SETA has been successful in gaining employment for four learners who suffered redundancy. In addition, of the 10 learners who started apprenticeships in 2009, SETA has managed to gain employment for eight. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Employers continue to support their learners in the achievement of additional qualifications and skills which improve their effectiveness at work.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made towards improving the use of targets at progress reviews? Insufficient progress

The quality of target setting at reviews is too variable and many targets do not encourage learners to progress at an appropriate pace. Many targets remain too vague and lack detail or sufficient focus, leaving learners unclear about what is required of them. Often there is insufficient monitoring of learners' progress towards meeting their targets. Since the reinspection SETA has introduced observations of learner reviews as a quality measure, but none has taken place since October 2008. All learners receive reviews every eight weeks. Managers check that reviews take place as scheduled but there are no formal procedures in place to evaluate the quality of reviews or the effectiveness of the targets in driving timely completion. Questions on health and safety and on equality and diversity are used during reviews. However, staff do not accurately record learner responses to these questions and sometimes leave errors uncorrected. Managers recognise that the review process and the quality monitoring of reviews need to be improved.

What progress has been made towards raising participation by under-represented groups? Reasonable progress

The reinspection team identified that the provider did not give a sufficiently high priority to raising participation by under-represented groups. Since that time, SETA has improved the focus on recruitment of a diverse range of learners by visiting most schools in the locality to talk to staff, and offering to talk to learners. Since September 2009, SETA has responded to 11 requests from schools to speak to prospective learners. Three successful women apprentices from SETA have attended these events, acting as positive role models to promote engineering. The number of women apprentices has increased from two at the time of reinspection to six. The general manager analyses recruitment from under-represented groups, including women, minority ethnic learners and those with disabilities. Staff review this information at centre meetings under a standing equality and diversity agenda item.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made towards the successful reintroduction of Train to Gain?

Reasonable progress

Since the reinspection SETA has carefully managed the reintroduction and subsequent growth of its Train to Gain programme. Most Train to Gain learners are employed by ten companies who have used SETA's commercial training courses. Sixteen of the current 24 learners are from one company. SETA has suitable quality control procedures in place to ensure that it meets contractual requirements for delivery of the programme. The company anticipates a period of consolidation before introducing any further growth in learner numbers. Success rates in 2008/09 on Train to Gain programmes were 75%, which is 8 percentage points lower than the national average. Timely success rates in 2008/09 were very low at 44%, approximately 25 percentage points below the national timely success rate on Train to Gain programmes. However, current in-year overall success rates are almost 88%. SETA has continued to maintain productive partnerships with employers, schools and local colleges to ensure that it meets local training needs.

What progress has been made towards meeting government requirements for safeguarding?

Reasonable progress

Safeguarding has a high priority at SETA. Health and safety is well promoted throughout the company and learners show a good understanding of safe working practices. Managers have included safeguarding in the self-assessment process and in the quality improvement plan. The company has suitable policies in place covering safeguarding and child protection. These clearly identify roles and responsibilities at all levels and provide appropriate guidance on actions staff should take in the event of disclosures. The policies are easily accessible to all staff and learners. Posters identifying the designated responsible officer are prominently displayed throughout the training centre. All staff have received initial awareness training in safeguarding and the level of understanding among most staff is satisfactory. The designated responsible person has registered with the Independent Safeguarding Authority and undertaken formal training in safeguarding. All staff who are in regular contact with learners have undergone Criminal Records Bureau checks and SETA maintains a suitable central register. It has carried out satisfactory risk assessments and learners feel safe. SETA meets government legislative with respect to safeguarding.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
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