

Seetec

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 50193

Name of lead inspector: Andy Harris HMI

Last day of inspection: 16 December 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Seetec has been in business since 1984. The company now employs around 530 staff working across England, with 75 offices and around a £57 million turnover. Much of the company's work is linked with the Department for Work and Pensions' employability services provision and some commercial work including new retail academies. However, this inspection concentrated on the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) supported apprenticeships, and the almost completed Train to Gain programme. That work accounts for around 2% of Seetec's overall business.
2. About 30 staff are directly involved in the inspected provision, with 14 learning and development coordinators (LDCs) working routinely with apprentices. The apprenticeship programme has been in existence for many years but is now expanding significantly with just over 500 learners on programmes at the time of the inspection. The main subject areas, with around 320 learners, are administration and customer service; this provision was directly inspected. Other provision includes apprenticeships in information and communication technology (ICT), warehousing, management and retail, and around 100 learners completing Train to Gain programmes.
3. The apprenticeship programme is a national contract, but current learners are mainly in Essex, with others in London, the North West and the West Midlands. Seetec's main office is in Essex, with regional offices supporting local apprentices.
4. Seetec has no arrangements for sub-contracting provision.

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11 |
|----------------------------|--|
| Employer provision: | |
| Train to Gain | 824 learners |
| Apprenticeships | 195 apprentices |

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 3 |
| Capacity to improve | Grade 2 |
| | Grade |
| Outcomes for learners | 3 |
| Quality of provision | 3 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| Safeguarding | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 3 |
| Subject Areas | Grade |
| Business, administration and law | 3 |

Overall effectiveness

- Seetec satisfactorily meets the needs of its learners. In some of its work, such as the Train to Gain and warehousing programmes, learners' achievements have been at outstanding levels. In the customer service and administration apprenticeship programmes, which are now the main part of Seetec's work, outcomes have been at, or slightly below, the standard expected. However, results are improving, particularly in customer service courses and in most courses there have been substantial improvements over several years in learners completing their qualification by their planned end date.
- The assessment of learners' work, an important part of the qualification, is carried out satisfactorily, with a good range of evidence used to show learners' competence. An increasing amount of individual training is satisfactory. Technology is used well to help the great majority of learners to communicate with their LDC, build up their portfolio of evidence and access additional training. LDCs support their learners well, and routinely have good working relationships with employers which improve the quality of the provision.
- Seetec has a good approach to managing its provision. Monitoring of learners' progress is thorough and, along with good use of data, is leading to improvements for learners. Staff are experienced, generally well trained and are properly encouraged through regular meetings, appraisals and bonus schemes to pay particular attention to the needs of their learners. Seetec promotes the

safeguarding of learners well, with satisfactory promotion of equality and diversity. A comprehensive and effective approach to quality assurance is helping with the continual improvement of the provision, as is an annual self-assessment and action planning process that fully involves all staff.

Main findings

- Overall, Seetec learners achieve their qualifications in a satisfactory manner. The previously large Train to Gain programme had outstanding outcomes in 2010/11. However, the main apprenticeship programmes, administration and customer service, performed below national averages in 2010/11. Provider data indicate that customer service learners are performing well in the current year, although learners on administration programmes are still underperforming.
- In the smaller programmes learners on warehousing apprenticeships have had outstanding results for several years. The results for ICT courses declined from outstanding levels in 2008/09 to satisfactory levels in 2010/11 but again provider data indicate good levels of success in the current year. Learners across all programmes are making at least satisfactory progress, with progress good in ICT.
- Learners develop good personal and practical skills. The integration of their learning programme and their routine employment is good. Learners generally enjoy their programmes and welcome the close, professional support offered by the LDCs which helps improve their work performance.
- Assessment and training are satisfactory. Training, mainly done on an individual basis, is now beginning to extend learners' knowledge and understanding beyond the confines of assessment. Induction is satisfactory, although a few learners remain unclear about the scope of their apprenticeship. Technology is used well to support learning for the great majority of learners.
- The programmes meet the employment needs of the learners well. However, insufficient attention is given to the circumstances of individual learners, with limited challenge for the more able learners. Setting and reviewing of long-term learner targets is insufficiently thorough.
- Partnerships are good, particularly with employers. The good working dialogue with learners' managers helps make the programmes better suited for both employers and learners. At a company level Seetec participates well with a variety of local and national organisations in order to understand, and influence, current and developing training programmes.
- Support for learners is good. LDCs have close, but professional, relationships with their learners and respond effectively and promptly to any concerns. Visits are well organised at times that reduce potential pressure on learners. Additional visits are made when there are specific problems. Communication technology, used well, ensures that problems are quickly resolved. Seetec works effectively with employers to support learners with personal problems.
- Seetec is well organised with effective strategic and business planning. Staff regard learner success as a high priority. A thorough annual appraisal process

and staff rewards are linked to learner success. Staff training, appropriately linked to business objectives, is mainly good.

- The particularly well managed information on learners is supported through Seetec's investment in reliable computer systems. The organisation and learners benefit from analysis of clear reports on learners' progress. Analysis of performance is linked well with individual LDCs and learners, but analysis of subject areas is normally restricted to the self-assessment report and trends are not readily identified. Communication across Seetec's dispersed centres is good.
- Promotion of safeguarding is good, and promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Relevant policies and procedures give staff and learners clear direction. Learners are treated with respect. Seetec's analysis and good action planning lead to better success rates for underperforming groups. Staff updates on equality issues are uninspiring. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity, although satisfactory, is not routinely stretched or challenged.
- A well-resourced quality improvement department manages the detailed quality improvement plan effectively and there are a number of recent improvements which directly influence learners' performance. Internal verification is satisfactory and good practice is shared across centres. Observations of staff concentrate on assessment, but there are appropriate plans to extend this to observations of teaching and learning with the aim of improving the provision.
- The competently managed self-assessment process includes input from well-structured surveys of learners, employers and staff. Drafted by the quality manager, the report is critically reviewed and graded by the quality board. All staff have a copy of the annual report and they readily implement resulting improvement plan actions. The report is concise, and contains many judgements identified by inspection. However, grading was over generous.

What does Seetec need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners have a better understanding of what their apprenticeship programme includes, and that long-term targets are set and reviewed in a more effective way, to assist learners' successful completion of their course.
- Use initial information, and subsequent reviews, to make each learner's programme better adapted to individual needs, experience and ability, providing challenge or increased support where appropriate.
- Fully implement the plans for more thorough observation of teaching and learning to assist staff in improving their training sessions.
- Extend the thorough monitoring of individual staff activity and learner progress to include a routine analysis of performance by subject areas in order to ensure that any underperformance across a programme is recognised quickly and remedial action is taken.
- Extend the training for staff in equality and diversity to make it more inspiring and challenging in order to increase staff understanding of the subject and so improve their work on the topic with learners.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the flexible approach by LDCs to meeting individual circumstances and employment needs
- the good rapport and ease of contact with supportive LDCs
- detailed verbal feedback from LDCs
- the opportunity to do a vocational qualification to improve working practices
- helpful material on Seetec's virtual training centre and the electronic portfolios
- clear advice on professional and personal matters provided by the LDCs
- the interesting booklet on equality and diversity.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more help for some learners to access online material efficiently
- the amount of time LDCs can spend with learners
- better organised work books
- making some of the course material more interesting
- less disruption, particularly at the start of the programme, with changes in LDCs.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the support their learners receive from LDCs
- Seetec's professional approach
- the close working relationship between LDCs and employers
- the relevance of the programmes to business needs
- the setting of additional projects to help learners understand the business
- being able to monitor learners' progress.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more information at the start of programmes on some of the details, such as payments
- ensuring that programmes for individual learners start promptly and effectively.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. Seetec's capacity to improve is good. Although overall outcomes are currently satisfactory there have been significant improvements over the past three years. For example, Train to Gain success rates, inadequate in 2008/09, increased to outstanding in 2010/11. Completion rates within planned timescales for apprentices have improved over the same period at a much faster rate than national trends to an overall good level. The customer service programme, which in 2010/11 was the largest subject area, has had an improvement in overall success rates from a level of nearly 20 percentage points below the national average to a current position that indicates they are now around five percentage points above the national average. Where there have been specific areas of underperformance, such as the rates for completion within planned timescales for young learners, Seetec has successfully dealt with those concerns.
9. Staff are set challenging targets for learner success and are motivated in achieving them. A reorganisation within the last year has led to a well-resourced quality department. The quality system, and in particular the improvement plan, have led to recent improvements for learners. The views of employers and learners are regularly and effectively used in the self-assessment process. The use of data to provide a variety of reports and influence performance management is good. Although inspection grades are lower than those from the 2007 inspection, it would appear that performance fell away soon after that inspection and Seetec has been improving well over recent years.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Outcomes are satisfactory overall. The previously large Train to Gain programme, which is close to finishing, improved from unsatisfactory levels of timely success rates in 2008/09 to an overall good position, with outstanding timely rates in 2010/11. Customer service apprenticeships' success rates improved from unsatisfactory levels to a satisfactory level in 2010/11 and provider data indicate continuing improvements in the current year. Conversely, administration apprenticeships' success rates have declined over the last two years from satisfactory to inadequate levels. The rates for completion within planned timescales for all areas have improved well over the last four years to above or near national averages. The relatively small warehousing programme has had outstanding results for three years. ICT success rates have varied from outstanding to inadequate, but currently are satisfactory, with an increasingly large cohort of learners now making good progress.

11. Learners are making at least satisfactory progress on business administration programmes. The standard of learners' work is good for the majority of learners.
12. Learners develop good personal and vocational skills. They improve their confidence and ability to deal with such things as resolving complex customer related situations in the workplace. Learners are properly encouraged to use independent research in their learning. Employers appreciate the improvement in their competencies.
13. Learners have a good understanding of safe working practices which are covered well at induction. They know what to do if they have concerns regarding health, safety and welfare issues. However, learners are not well informed about internet safety.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

14. Assessment practices are satisfactory and meet relevant standards. Appropriate assessment methods are used with a good range of evidence types, including digital voice recordings, observations, professional discussions and witness testimonies. A small proportion of assessment planning is not helpful to learners, such as stating that an assessment will cover all units. Training, which is currently limited to individual work with LDCs or direction to independent study, is satisfactory.
15. Technology is used well to support learning. Many learners regularly access Seetec's systems to upload work, check on progress, keep in touch with their LDC or access a good range of learning materials. A few learners have difficulties accessing the internet, or do not have enough helpful direction on how to use learning resources effectively.
16. Resources are satisfactory. Staff are experienced with appropriate qualifications for the vocational training requirements. Additional literacy and numeracy support, when required by learners, is provided by their LDCs. However, most LDCs do not have the qualifications or expertise to provide this support fully effectively.
17. Induction for learners is satisfactory, covering a good range of topics. However, the explanation of exactly what is required in an apprenticeship programme is not sufficiently clear, and a few learners are confused about their framework requirements.
18. Generally, programmes meet the needs of learners and employers well. However, Seetec does not focus sufficiently on learners' individual needs. Programme lengths are fixed, regardless of individual circumstances, partly to ensure that sufficient time is available for the full range of guided learning. However, little account is taken of the results of initial assessment, learners'

previous qualifications or experience, any additional support needs or assessments of preferred learning styles. The more capable learners have insufficient challenge in their training.

19. Employer partnerships are good. LDCs work well with workplace managers and supervisors, keeping them informed of learners' progress with many actively involved in planning work-related activities to support learning. Seetec is also responsive to employers' needs for specific work or training. For example, in providing extra courses on telephone techniques to improve practice at work.
20. Support for learners is good. LDCs are flexible, supportive and sensitive in meeting individual learners' needs in learning and personal issues. Visits are organised to fit in with work patterns, particularly in large organisations and surgeries where busy learners need support at specific times. Learners have good contact with LDCs between visits, with good use of technology to aid planning and feedback. LDCs respond rapidly when learners contact them, either online or with an impromptu visit.
21. Reviewing and setting of learners' long-term targets is insufficiently thorough. Although assessment documents provide an effective system of managing short-term action plans, they are less helpful in reviewing learners' progress against their individual learning plan, or for setting and reviewing targets beyond the next assessment visit.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

22. Seetec has a well-organised management structure with clear roles and responsibilities. Strategic and business planning are very effective, with a strong emphasis on learner performance. Staff are motivated and committed to company values and learner success. They benefit from a thorough annual appraisal process with firm targets relating to learner progress. Pay bonuses are appropriately linked to learner success. Staff have good opportunities to develop and attend training, some of which is through a useful online system. All staff training is mapped into a corporate training plan linked to the business plan.
23. Data are particularly well managed. Investment in computer systems and data control has been significant, with a positive impact on learners. Clear reports on learners' progress are readily available and used by managers to good effect. Reports on performance in subject areas are not considered at regular intervals. Meetings are regular, well recorded and communication across Seetec's dispersed centres is good.
24. Safeguarding arrangements are good and meet current legal requirements. Seetec has links with local safeguarding boards and maintains a register of contacts. Staff are regularly trained and have a good understanding of safeguarding, and give health and safety a high priority. The virtual training

centre has an effective section on safeguarding for staff and learners, and learners use a helpful safeguarding booklet. Employers undergo thorough checks when a learner joins them.

25. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Seetec has a good single equality and diversity scheme, and policies and procedures clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Seetec uses data well to monitor the performance of different groups and, where necessary, produces good action plans leading to better success rates for underperforming groups such as 16 to 18 year olds or male learners. Staff receive regular update training, but this is uninspiring. Seetec's learners receive a thorough induction and a clear workbook on equality and diversity, which are reinforced in the vocational programme. Seetec has links with organisations that deal with disadvantaged people, and some learners benefit from working with them. Although LDCs refer to equality at progress reviews they rarely stretch or challenge a learner's generally satisfactory understanding.
26. Seetec has good partnership arrangements with many external organisations, some resulting from its Department for Work and Pensions contracts. Seetec directors work closely with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers through meetings, events and direct liaison. This work, and other discussions between Seetec and national and local organisations, improve provision for learners in Seetec, and positively influence programmes elsewhere.
27. Arrangements for quality improvement are good. The well-resourced quality improvement department manages the process effectively. The quality improvement plan contains detailed targets; its quarterly review leads to improvements which directly impact on learners' performance. Internal verification is thorough. Observations of assessors take place and lead to improvements. However, the increasing number of teaching sessions are not routinely reviewed, although Seetec is about to introduce a relevant scheme.
28. The self-assessment process is well organised and includes input from structured surveys of learners, employers and staff. Drafted by the quality manager it is critically reviewed and graded by the quality board. All staff have a copy and they accept responsibility for resulting improvement plan actions. The report is concise, and contains many judgements identified by inspection. However, grading was over generous with too much concentration on improvements rather than current provision.
29. Value for money is satisfactory. Physical resources are generally well managed. Investment in computers and digital media has been significant and is aiding learner success.

Information about the inspection

30. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's head of quality improvement as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
31. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas Seetec offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Seetec

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall | Employer responsive |
|--|----------|---------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | | |
| Full-time learners | 0 | 0 |
| Part-time learners | 524 | 524 |
| Overall effectiveness | 3 | 3 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 | |
| Outcomes for learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 3 | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 3 | |
| How well do learners progress? | 3 | |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 2 | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 3 | |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i> | n/a | |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | n/a | |
| Quality of provision | 3 | 3 |
| How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development? | 3 | |
| How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users? | 3 | |
| How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners? | 2 | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 2 | |
| Leadership and management | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 2 | |
| <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i> | n/a | |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners? | 2 | |
| How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap? | 3 | |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement? | 2 | |
| How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners? | 2 | |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 3 | |

*where applicable to the type of provision

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