

# Happy Computers

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 58502

**Name of lead inspector:** Nic T Brown

**Last day of inspection:** 8 October 2010

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** Cityside House  
40 Alder Street  
LONDON  
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## Information about the provider

1. Happy Computers was formed in 1990 with the expressed aim of delivering information and technology (IT) training and to be the highest quality provider in the market. Over the years, several prestigious national awards have been won. It is frequently the provider of choice for many employers. Happy Computers employs 32 permanent staff and operates from its training centre in Aldgate, East London. Less than 10% of its income is from the publicly funded London Central Skills Funding Agency.
  
2. In 2008, Happy Computers started to offer IT adult apprenticeships, based around a new diploma, having piloted the qualification with the sector awarding body. The diploma's approved assessment criteria enables assessment to take place in the classroom based on simulated work, and almost all training follows this pattern with little contact with employers. Public bodies and private companies employ the apprentices across Greater London. Two members of staff are involved in all aspects of the delivery of the apprenticeship framework, with support from an external consultant who provides some internal verification and advice to the team.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
<b>Employer provision:</b> Apprenticeships	40 apprentices

## Summary report

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

<b>Subject Areas</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Information and communication technology for users	2

## Overall effectiveness

3. The overall effectiveness of Happy Computers' provision is good. Success rates for apprentices are good and steadily improving. Apprentices make good progress and they develop good employability and IT skills. The quality of provision is good. The teaching in the centre is very good, using very good resources, and apprentice classes have only six learners in each. There is good individual attention. Many apprentices are over 25 years old and nervous about starting training, but they quickly gain confidence and improve their self-esteem whilst gaining a useful qualification. However, the use of initial assessment is insufficient and most apprentices follow a preset pattern of lessons at the same rate.
4. Apprentices receive very good support, care and guidance from their trainers and assessors. Positive encouragement and adaptive technologies are provided for apprentices with learning difficulties. After completing the training, Happy Computers provides apprentices with a telephone helpline for a further two years and a free day's extra training.
5. Happy Computers has a chief executive who leads the organisation to aspire to excellence. Happy Computers has won many significant prizes, for example the Institute of IT Training gold medal winner of 2009, and it has been rated in the Financial Times top 20 small places to work for the last five years. There is a

strong focus on apprentice achievement. Arrangements for safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory.

## Main findings

- Overall success rates for apprentices are good, above national averages and consistently rising. For 2008-09, overall success rates were 75% with timely completion rates of 68%, which compares favourably to national averages of 71% and 59% respectively. Some apprentices drop out of training.
- Apprentices develop good vocational skills and make good progress. Apprentices' involvement and participation in their training is good. They develop good employment skills, including confidence and improved self-esteem, contributing to their economic and social well-being.
- Teaching and learning are very good; both the teaching facilities and learning resources are also very good. Effective planning of training sessions ensures apprentices receive individual support. Apprentices enjoy developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Teachers make good use of technology. Training rooms offer a good learning environment with good IT facilities. Adaptive technologies are available to support apprentices who may need them.
- Assessment practices are satisfactory, frequent and meet awarding body requirements. Apprentices progress at the same pace and there is little differentiation to extend learning. Employers are not engaged in the assessment process and there is insufficient use of workplace evidence.
- On joining, apprentices complete an IT skills assessment, which is used to identify skills gaps. However, the initial assessment process does not effectively inform individual learning plans. Target setting is not individualised or linked to initial assessments. Targets are often too vague and not measurable.
- Provision meets the needs of users well. Apprentices quickly gain in confidence and self-esteem and acquire good skills to be more effective in their workplaces. Employers often select Happy Computers as their provider of choice. They support their apprentices by allowing time off for study sessions. However, there is little communication between the trainers, assessors and employers.
- Apprentices receive very good support, care and guidance from their trainers and assessors. Happy Computers provide positive encouragement and adaptive technologies for apprentices with learning difficulties. After completing the training, Happy Computers provides apprentices with a telephone helpline for a further two years.
- Happy Computers has a chief executive who leads the organisation to aspire to excellence. Happy Computers has won many significant prizes. There is a good, open and supportive culture where staff contribute to, and understand, the vision and strategy of the organisation with a strong focus on apprentices' outcomes.

- Staff training in equality and diversity is good and there is an open, supportive and welcoming culture. However, trainers do not promote equality and diversity sufficiently at induction, during training or at progress review sessions.
- Happy Computers has good quality improvement processes. Success rates have consistently risen to a high level. There are comprehensive and frequent surveys of apprentices' views. However, apprentices' exit and employers' views are not captured. The self-assessment process is good and inclusive of staff and apprentices' views. The quality improvement plan is satisfactorily reviewed at quarterly staff meetings.
- There is good partnership working. Happy Computers has a good reputation amongst employers, IT bodies, such as the institute for IT Training, the sector skills council and funding body. Happy Computers is often asked to speak at conferences and pilot new framework initiatives. It is the provider of choice for many employers.

### **What does Happy Computers need to do to improve further?**

- Get closer to employers to increase opportunities for real work assessment, to improve the dialogue to identify potential drop outs from the apprenticeship, and match training even better to business needs.
- Increase apprentices' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity, and health and safety during induction and the review process.
- Improve initial assessment to more ably inform individual learning plans and add challenge and pace to the programme.
- Increase the scope of surveys to include apprentice exit questionnaires and employers' views.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What learners like:**

- knowing that anything asked will be treated seriously and not feeling like an idiot
- the knowledgeable, approachable and friendly staff who are very caring and supportive
- the relaxed and friendly atmosphere and environment in the training centre
- developing new skills such as learning keyboard shortcuts
- the professional and high standard learning environment
- the high quality and well organised training
- the small classes and individual attention where there is time to ask questions without being rushed.

**What learners would like to see improved:**

- flexibility to choose different modules, for example Lotus Notes, bullet text.

**Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

**What employers like:**

- the very supportive environment, making it easy for staff to learn
- that staff have dramatically improved their IT skills
- being able to leave staff to work on their own initiative more frequently
- the improved productivity for my company
- the excellent access to ongoing support even after the training programme has been completed.

**What employers would like to see improved:**

- nothing.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 2**

6. Happy Computers has a good capacity to improve. This is the first full inspection of Happy Computers, although it was included as part of a European Social Fund inspection two years ago. Outcomes for apprentices are high and rising. The chief executive leads the organisation to aspire to excellence. Happy Computers has won many significant prizes and there is a strong focus on apprentices' outcomes.
7. Overall, quality improvement arrangements are good and a number of effective improvements have been implemented contributing to success for apprentices. In particular, learning resources are outstanding and the observation of teaching has led to improvements. Happy Computers has recognised the need to carry out exit surveys of apprentices to improve the retention even further. The self-assessment report contained strengths and areas for improvement mostly agreed by inspectors. However, some of the grades given were too ambitious. The resulting action plan was realistic and has led to improvements and increased success rates.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 2**

8. Outcomes for apprentices are good. There are high success rates with a consistent improving trend above national averages. For 2008-09, overall success rates were 75% with timely completion rates of 68%, which compares favourably to national averages of 71% and 59% respectively. This year, success and timely rates have continued to rise, remaining higher than national rates which themselves have risen.
9. The development of vocational skills is good and apprentices make good progress. Apprentice involvement and participation in their training is good. All apprentices are motivated to succeed. They develop good employment skills, including confidence and improved self-esteem, contributing to their economic and social well-being. Apprentices produce work of a high standard, are very proud of their achievements and take pleasure in demonstrating their work. Most apprentices can apply their skills well to activities in the workplace.
10. There is an effective regard for the development of safe working practices within the centre. Workstations are well spaced and designed, and there is positive encouragement to take frequent and regular short breaks. Refreshment and relaxation areas are freely available. The food provided includes suitable healthy eating options. Apprentices feel safe in the centre and at work.

### The quality of provision

**Grade 2**

11. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are very good, and both the teaching facilities and learning resources are also very good. Effective planning of training sessions ensures apprentices receive individual support.

Trainers have positive relationships with apprentices to facilitate progress. Apprentices enjoy developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. Apprentices are highly motivated, enthusiastic and keen to learn during training sessions. Adaptive technologies are available to support apprentices who may need them. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff are well qualified and experienced and make very effective use of high quality learning materials developed in-house.

12. Assessment practices are effective. Assessment is frequent and meets the requirements of the awarding body. It takes place in the training centre with very little use made of workplace evidence, and employers are infrequently engaged in the assessment process. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Apprentices progress at a similar pace through the modules and there is insufficient differentiation to extend or enhance learning. Individual learning plans insufficiently record progress and achievement. Internal verification is satisfactory with appropriate feedback to assessors and standardisation meetings.
13. Initial assessment is satisfactory. This was recognised as good in the self-assessment report. The IT skills assessment completed by apprentices is used to identify skills gaps. However, the initial assessment process does not effectively inform individual learning plans. Target setting is not individualised nor linked to initial assessments. Targets are often too vague and not measurable. Too few extension activities or challenging targets are set to further develop skills.
14. Provision meets the needs of users well. Training arrangements offer some flexibility to meet the needs of apprentices and employers. Many of the apprentices are mature returners to learning and often lack confidence. The trainers demonstrate good empathy with these apprentices and are sensitive to their needs. Apprentices quickly gain in confidence and self-esteem and acquire good skills to be more effective in their workplaces. Employers often select Happy Computers as their provider of choice. They support their apprentices by allowing time off for study sessions. However, there is little communication between the trainers/assessors and employer representatives and little engagement by employers in the assessment process. This was not recognised during self-assessment.
15. Apprentices receive very good support, care and guidance from their trainers and assessors. Recognition of this is included in the self-assessment report. Happy Computers provides positive encouragement and adaptive technologies for apprentices with learning difficulties. After completing the training, Happy Computers provides apprentices with a telephone helpline for a further two years. Additionally, apprentices on successful completion of the apprenticeship are offered a free further day's training on a topic of their choice. Arrangements for information, advice and guidance are satisfactory.



## Leadership and management

## Grade 2

16. Overall leadership and management are good, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Happy Computers has a chief executive who leads the organisation to aspire to excellence. Happy Computers has won many significant prizes, for example the Institute of IT Best Trainer of 2009, and it has been rated in the top 20 small places to work for the last five years. There is a good, open and supportive culture where staff contribute to, and understand, the vision and strategy of the organisation. There is a strong focus on apprentices' achievements and staff are set challenging targets including apprentice outcomes and satisfaction. Much of the day-to-day management of the apprenticeship is informal in this small provider, but there are effective monthly review meetings and quarterly staff meetings.
17. Happy Computers has good quality improvement processes. There are comprehensive and frequent surveys of apprentices' views. However, apprentices' exit and employers' views are not captured. The self-assessment process is good and inclusive of apprentices' views. As well as a formal quarterly review of the improvement plan, improvements arise from good communications and the effective discussions in monthly meetings. The training manager drafts the self-assessment report which is then reviewed and moderated by the chief executive and other staff.
18. Equality and diversity are satisfactory. There is a satisfactory range of policies and procedures. Staff training is good and there is an open, supportive and welcoming culture. The provider has won many awards, such as Women in IT and Best Small Place to Work. There have been some initiatives to encourage ethnic minority apprentices into the provision. However, there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity with apprentices. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Trainers do not promote equality and diversity well at induction or during training sessions. There are missed opportunities to develop apprentices' knowledge and understanding during progress review sessions. Management information is not used effectively to monitor the performance of different groups of apprentices.
19. There is good partnership working. Happy Computers has a good reputation amongst IT bodies such as the institute for IT Training, the sector skills council and funding body. Happy Computers is often asked to speak at conferences and pilot new framework initiatives.
20. Happy Computers' arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. A training course has satisfactorily raised the awareness amongst key staff of safeguarding issues. All apprentices are employed, and most are aged 25 years or over. A nominated safeguarding officer has been appointed. Happy Computers treats safe working practices seriously in the training rooms and circulation areas. However, usually they do not visit apprentices in the workplace.

21. Happy Computers provides good value for money. Overall success rates are good and improving, resources for learning are good and the financial processes are good. A free, healthy lunch is given to staff and all learners.

## Information about the inspection

22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's apprentice manager, 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, and data on apprentices and their achievement.
23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of apprentices and employers. They also looked at questionnaires apprentices had recently completed for the provider. They observed a learning session, and assessments.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Happy Computers**  
**Learning types: Employer responsive: apprenticeships**

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Employer responsive</b>
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b> Full-time learners	40	40
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2	
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	2 2	
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>	-	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	-	
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>	
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>	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
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?	2	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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