

Standguide Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58520

Name of lead inspector: Mike White HMI

Last day of inspection: 11 March 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Standguide Ltd, established in 1990, is an independent training company based in Manchester. All of its work as a training provider is government-funded provision, managed through contracts with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Greater Manchester Skills Funding Agency (SFA). SFA contracts include Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes across the North West, Response to Redundancy across the North West and Merseyside, and Work Focused Training in central, west and east Manchester. This inspection focused on the Train to Gain and apprenticeship provision.
2. Standguide has 27 Train to Gain learners. It provides National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training at levels 2 and 3. Most learners are working at level 2. Fourteen learners are following customer service programmes, four are on business administration, six on retailing and three on management programmes. Twelve customer service apprentices are under subcontract arrangements from the National Business College. This is Standguide's first inspection of this provision.
3. Standguide employs three members of staff, two full-time and one part-time, to provide these programmes. Each government-funded training contract has a dedicated manager who reports to the senior management team each month for performance meetings.
4. Standguide provides training on behalf of the following provider:
 - National Business College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	57 learners 12 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 4
Capacity to improve		Grade 4
Aspect	Grade	
Outcomes for learners	4	
Quality of provision	4	
Leadership and management	4	
Safeguarding	3	
Equality and diversity	3	
Subject Areas		
Business administration, management and law	4	

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of Standguide's provision is inadequate. Outcomes for most learners are poor. Too many learners do not complete their programmes or fail to achieve them within the planned timescales. The planning of learning and support is weak. Arrangements to support those learners with literacy or numeracy support needs are insufficient. Employers value the training as an opportunity to recognise learners' skills. However, too many learners are recruited to Train to Gain programmes without the full commitment of both learner and employer. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory as is the promotion of equality and diversity. Learners feel safe and show a good understanding of both safeguarding and health and safety. Leaders and managers are not successful in setting and using challenging targets to promote a culture of high ambition. Standguide's capacity to improve is inadequate.

Main findings

- The outcomes for Train to Gain learners are poor and well below national averages. However, for customer service apprentices success rates are satisfactory.
- Learners enjoy their learning and value the skills and knowledge they acquire during their programmes. They develop practical skills which increase their effectiveness in the workplace. Employers recognise the increase in their self-confidence and enthusiasm in their work.

- Learners feel safe, demonstrate safe working practices and have a good understanding of health and safety. Apprentices understand the process for referring safeguarding concerns. Assessors use progress reviews effectively to confirm learners' understanding of health and safety information provided at induction.
- Apprentices enjoy the off-the-job training sessions. Trainers use a good range of techniques to stimulate learners' interests. However, when planning training sessions they fail to provide a full range of learning activities to challenge and support all learners appropriately.
- Assessors use a narrow a range of assessment methods for Train to Gain learners. Insufficient use is made of technology to carry out assessments across both apprentice and Train to Gain programmes. Assessors often plan and carry out key skills assessments too late in apprentices' programmes.
- Progress reviews are effectively used to monitor and record the progress learners make. However, the frequently set targets do not have enough detail to provide clear guidance for learners. Although employers generally participate in reviews, some are reluctant to use these opportunities to identify appropriate training or assessment activities.
- The planning of learning and support is weak. Individual learning plans fail to provide learners with clear milestones for achievement. Insufficient use is made of information gathered during initial assessment, for example to show how basic or key skills development needs will be supported for individual learners. Train to Gain learners do not receive structured support to develop the literacy skills that would help them make good progress and achieve their NVQ.
- Standguide staff respond flexibly to ensure that training and assessment meet the needs of learners and employers. However, information given to employers at the start of programmes does not provide adequate guidance about the part Standguide expects them to play in their employees' development.
- Learners receive good practical support and care, which helps them to overcome barriers to learning. However, much of this support is not planned, lacks structure and goes unrecorded. The arrangements to support and promote improvement do not provide sufficient depth of feedback to contribute fully to quality improvement. Standguide has introduced changes to improve initial information, advice and guidance. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangements on success rates.
- The use of management targets to promote a culture of high ambition is insufficient. Too many targets concentrate on the achievement of contractual requirements and not enough on improving learners' outcomes. Too many learners, recruited without ensuring both their own and their employers' full commitment, left their programmes without achieving.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners and for promoting equality and diversity are satisfactory. Learners confirm feeling safe. Staff are appropriately trained and learners receive useful information during their induction. The good contextualisation of equality and diversity discussions during progress reviews enable learners to see the relevance to themselves and their workplaces.

Learners know how to recognise abuse or harassment, how to report it and how to protect themselves.

- Arrangements to engage with users to support and promote improvements are unsatisfactory. The methods used do not provide sufficient depth of feedback to contribute fully to quality improvement.
- Insufficient use is made of learner performance data during the self-assessment process and the report is overly optimistic in its grading. The quality improvement plan does not include actions for improving the low Train to Gain success rates. The management information system does not provide accurate analysis of data and the tracking of learners' progress is poor.
- Standguide provides inadequate value for money. Success rates are poor and well below the rates achieved nationally. Staff are well-qualified and experienced and resources to support learners are satisfactory.

What does Standguide Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Agree and set challenging targets for improving success rates and closely monitor progress towards their achievement through the monthly performance management process.
- Improve the planning of learning and support by making better use of the information gathered during initial assessment to ensure that training and assessment support the needs of individual learners.
- Increase the range of assessment methods used across both programmes, making better use of technology to speed the assessment process and to offer better support to learners.
- Involve employers more in the development of their employees through ensuring that they have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities and routinely invite them to identify and plan training and assessment opportunities.
- Develop a user engagement strategy to collect, analyse and use learner, employer and stakeholder views and increase their involvement in decision-making as part of continuous improvement.
- Make better use of learner performance data to contribute to the self-assessment process and make judgements on outcomes for learners leading to clear and challenging actions.
- Implement the planned management information system to provide timely and accurate data for tracking learner progress, informing management decision-making and improving success rates.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the fun training sessions and the opportunity to meet other apprentices
- the help from assessors
- the way the assessors understand support needs
- learning how to deal with customers and gaining confidence on the telephone
- flexibility in the training time to meet the job role.

What learners would like to see improved:

- less paperwork to complete
- more support with qualifications from employers
- more training on the till
- more use of recordings for assessment.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the helpful and supportive staff
- the opportunities that increase their employees' feelings of self-worth
- on-the-job training improving abilities to carry out job duties
- the quality of the feedback to learners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- less paperwork to complete by both themselves and the learners.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

6. Standguide has insufficient capacity to make and sustain improvements. Overall success rates are poor and too many learners fail to complete within planned timescales. For current learners, there is little improvement other than on the retail NVQ programme. Learner and employer views measure satisfaction but are not used in a meaningful way to contribute to self-assessment or quality improvement activities. Strategic and business planning responds well to local and national priorities but business plans make insufficient reference to Train to Gain or apprenticeship programmes. Most targets and key performance indicators are insufficiently challenging and concentrate on the achievement of contractual requirements.
7. Standguide does not use the self-assessment process sufficiently to improve its provision. The process involves staff but makes little use of the views of users. The Train to Gain programme did not have a self-assessment report produced in 2009. The current self-assessment report fails to make use of learners' performance data to contribute to judgements on their outcomes. The quality improvement plan does not include actions to improve the poor success rates on Train to Gain programmes. Many of the grades in the report are overly optimistic, although inspectors agreed with the grades for safeguarding, and equality and diversity.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 4

8. Outcomes on Train to Gain programmes are poor. In 2009/10 the number of learners who completed their NVQ at both level 2 and level 3 within the planned timescales was well below the national average. For retail, business administration, and customer service learners' success rates were also well below the national average. For the small group of customer service apprentices who all completed their programmes in the current year the provider data indicate a satisfactory success rate. There are no significant variations in the performance of different groups.
9. Learners enjoy their learning. They are positive, well-motivated and value the skills and knowledge that they acquire during their programmes. Apprentices gain a good understanding of the customer service sector. All learners develop practical skills which increase their effectiveness in the workplace.
10. Learners benefit from opportunities for personal development during their programmes. Employers recognise the improvement in the self-confidence of learners demonstrated through increased enthusiasm in their work. For many adult learners this is the first formal qualification that they have achieved which increases their sense of self-worth.
11. Learners feel safe and demonstrate safe working practices. Apprentices have a good understanding of both health and safety and safeguarding which assessors

regularly reinforce during off-the-job training sessions. Apprentices understand the process for referring safeguarding concerns. Assessors use reviews satisfactorily to check learners' understanding and recall of the health and safety information covered at induction.

The quality of provision

Grade 4

12. Staff provide interesting and enjoyable training sessions. They use a good range of techniques to stimulate learners' interest and plan sessions to accommodate learners' personal and social support needs. However, they fail to take account of learners' literacy levels when planning training and do not provide a full range of learning activities to challenge and support individual learners appropriately.
13. Assessors visit learners frequently to maintain their levels of motivation. Portfolios contain a satisfactory standard of work although most are organised by the assessors with learners having little involvement. Apprentices' portfolios contain an appropriate range of assessment methods although assessors use a narrow range of assessment methods with Train to Gain learners. Insufficient use is made of technology, including cameras, across both programmes.
14. Assessors use progress reviews effectively to monitor and record progress. However, the frequently set targets lack the detail needed to provide clear guidance for learners. Assessors use reviews to inform employers about planned coaching and assessment. However, some employers are reluctant to participate in the identification of training or assessment opportunities and to further the links between on- and off-the-job learning.
15. The planning of learning and support is weak. Individual learning plans fail to provide learners with clear milestones for achievement. Assessors do not use the information gathered through skill-scans or discussions with learners sufficiently to plan completion dates for individual units. Apprentice learning plans do not show deadlines for the completion of each element of the framework. Assessors often do not record key skills and technical certificate progress on apprentices' records.
16. Assessors make insufficient use of the information produced through literacy and numeracy initial assessments. Individual learning plans do not show how assessors will provide additional support where required. Train to Gain learners do not receive structured support to develop the literacy skills that would help them to make good progress and achieve their NVQ. Some assessors offer such a high level of support to compensate for learners' low literacy levels that portfolios do not adequately demonstrate the learners' own abilities.
17. Assessors often plan and carry out key skills development too late in learners' programmes. They do not effectively integrate the development of numeracy skills within apprentices' work roles.

18. Assessors ensure that training and assessment meet the needs of learners and employers. For example, they amend selected optional units as learners' work roles and employers' business demands change. Convenient locations ensure that apprentices from across Greater Manchester can access training sessions. The timing of assessments is flexible and can take place outside normal working hours to maximise naturally occurring assessment opportunities.
19. Standguide has established productive working links with employers, Connexions and other local training providers. Employers value the training as an opportunity to recognise learners' skills. However, information provided at the start of their employees' programmes does not provide adequate guidance about their roles and responsibilities, and fails to gain their commitment to supporting their learners sufficiently.
20. Assessors understand learners' personal support needs and provide them with good practical support and care, helping them to overcome barriers to learning. However, much of the support is not planned. Assessors do not record the support given and do not evaluate its effectiveness during progress reviews.
21. Standguide recruited too many of the learners onto Train to Gain programmes without sufficiently gaining the full commitment of both learners and employers. Many learners left without completing their programmes. Recognising this, Standguide has recently appointed an employer engagement officer but it is too early to judge the impact of this appointment on success rates. Records of information, advice and guidance offered to Train to Gain learners lack detail.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

22. Standguide has gone through, and is presently going through, periods of considerable change due to alterations in its contracting arrangements. This has taken significant management effort and time. Leaders and managers have not set sufficiently challenging targets to promote a culture of high ambition for the training provision. Performance management targets concentrate on contractual requirements and are insufficiently focused on improving success rates.
23. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. The safeguarding policy is appropriate to both children and vulnerable adults. All staff receive enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks, with disclosure details recorded in a central register. All have completed basic safeguarding awareness training and most have completed a mandatory higher-level programme. The company has an appropriately trained designated safeguarding officer. Learners receive useful safeguarding information during their induction. Both staff and learners show a satisfactory understanding of safeguarding and arrangements for reporting incidents. Staff routinely complete health and safety risk assessments of training centres and employers.
24. Arrangements for promoting equality and diversity are satisfactory. Standguide has appointed a designated officer to manage the future development of equality and diversity across the company. Policies are comprehensive and informative. Standguide has recently introduced a single equality scheme and

equality impact assessments. The regular training for staff and learners is satisfactory. Assessors generally contextualise equality and diversity discussions during learners' progress reviews, ensuring that learners understand the relevance of topics covered. Learners know how to recognise and respond to abusive treatment or harassment. The company used its links with a wide range of community and other organisations to promote both the Train to Gain and apprentice provision. Standguide recognises the need to improve its analysis of data across all of its programmes and is presently implementing a system to assist this development.

25. Arrangements for the involvement of users in supporting and promoting improvements are unsatisfactory. Standguide does not have a strategy to involve users. Questionnaires used to collect the views of learners and employers, while measuring degrees of satisfaction, do not provide the depth of feedback required to contribute fully to quality improvement.
26. The provision and use of management information is inadequate. Present arrangements do not provide an accurate analysis of data to identify and develop actions for the improvement of success rates. Internal data provided during the inspection had inaccuracies not recognised by Standguide. The process for tracking learner progress is poor and relies too heavily on using the evidence in learners' portfolios. Standguide has recognised the need to improve its management information and is introducing a new system across all programmes.
27. Value for money is inadequate. Standguide monitors the financial viability of programmes closely. However, both completion within planned timescales and success rates on Train to Gain programmes are poor. Staff are well-qualified and experienced. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory in meeting the needs of learners.

Information about the inspection

28. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's operations, quality and training director, 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 bodies, and data on learners and their achievement.
29. Inspectors used 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 the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Standguide Ltd

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		
Part-time learners	27	27
Overall effectiveness	4	4
Capacity to improve	4	
Outcomes for learners	4	4
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	4	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	4	
How well do learners progress?	4	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3	
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	4	4
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	4	
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?	4	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	4	4
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	4	
<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?	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?	4	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	4	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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