

Skills Training UK Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 54414

Name of lead inspector: Anthony Ward HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Skills Training UK (STUK) operates in London and South East England and was formed in 1992 to provide a range of programmes and skills development seminars. Today it operates out of 11 locations and employs 225 staff. STUK has offered Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funded provision for Train to Gain in business administration and law since 2008/09. STUK is a Prime Contractor to the DWP for Flexible New Deal and New Deal. Train to Gain provision is managed and run by a small team comprising a manager and six staff. It supports mainstream Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contracts by providing training and qualifications for adult learners moving into employment. STUK also works with learners who are established in the workplace and would benefit from additional training to help support their work and ongoing development.

2. At the time of the inspection, 113 learners were on Train to Gain programmes, the vast majority on programmes leading to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in customer service. A few learners were taking qualifications in team leadership or management. Train to Gain learners work for a range of public and private sector employers. Learners' assessment and training take place at employers' premises. STUK recruits learners from London and South East England. These include areas of relative prosperity and of high deprivation. The population in this region is similarly varied and diverse.

1. STUK does not provide Train to Gain provision on behalf of any other provider, nor do other organisations provide Train to Gain provision on behalf of STUK.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Train to Gain	131 learners

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	2
Subject Areas	Grade
Business administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

3. Learners enjoy their experience and the vast majority gain their qualification, although nearly half take longer than expected. Current learners are generally making at least satisfactory progress and value the benefit they get from the programme. They develop increased confidence and improve their working practices. The assessment process is effective. However, many learners are not sufficiently involved in managing their own learning. Assessors are flexible to the needs of the learners and their employers and offer good support. Learners are guided appropriately to the most suitable programme. Learners feel safe and are treated with respect, and inappropriate behaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. Operational management has been strengthened and has significantly improved the quality of the programme. However, some quality systems are still to have full impact on the learners' experience and managers are aware that some systems still require further development.

Main findings

- Learners enjoy their programmes. Overall success rates have improved greatly since 2008/09 and are now higher than the national average at nearly 90%. However, current timely achievement is too low with nearly half the learners achieving after their planned date.

- Learner progress has improved and is now satisfactory. Learners are aware of planned completion dates and anticipate timely completion. However, a few learners are unaware of their progress and many are not sufficiently involved in planning their learning.
- Good skills development is taking place with assessor support. Learners clearly express the value of gaining a qualification in terms of personal development and improved performance in their jobs.
- Assessment practice is at least satisfactory. Assessment takes place at regular intervals, at least monthly, and learners are informed about what to prepare for assessment. Appropriate initial assessment is carried out but it is too often not used effectively to plan learning.
- Observation of assessors is an integral part of the quality improvement process, but the systems used do not consistently capture good practice and effectively disseminate it to the assessment team.
- STUK is flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of learners. The range of programmes on offer meets the requirements of learners. Information and advice are good and inductions are comprehensive and ensure that learners are on the right programmes. Progression routes are clear and understood by learners.
- Directors and managers raise expectations and promote ambition well throughout the organisation. Strategic leadership is good. The programme fits closely with both government and company priorities.
- Improved operational management has impacted well on the quality of the programme and managers use data effectively to monitor programme performance. Communication within STUK is good.
- Learners feel safe. Safeguarding is a priority and current arrangements are good. The safeguarding training provided is good and gives staff confidence to handle safeguarding issues. Recruitment practices are now good. Action taken when issues or concerns are raised by learners is swift and appropriate.
- Arrangements for equality and diversity are good and have a high profile within the company. A high proportion of learners are from disadvantaged areas and from minority ethnic groups. STUK promotes equality and diversity well through induction and it is monitored during reviews.
- STUK engages effectively with learners to improve their programme. Feedback from learners is taken seriously and acted upon. Employers' feedback is less effective, but this is recognised and improved evaluation systems are being developed. A few employers are not sufficiently involved in the programme.

What does Skills Training UK need to do to improve further?

- Increase involvement of individuals in the planning, assessment and progress of their learning to improve timely success rates.

- Improve the use of the results of initial assessment to better plan, support and personalise learning and to include details on how any additional learning support might be provided.
- Involve more employers and workplace supervisors in programme planning and delivery to improve their understanding of the detail of what is required and their ability to support learners towards timely completion.
- Further develop systems to capture good practice within the training and assessment process, including the use of technology, to enhance learners' enjoyment and progress.
- Develop mechanisms to obtain and use effectively employer feedback to improve and tailor the programme to better meet all employers' and learners' needs.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the NVQ is something that will help in their careers
- the good assessors
- the encouragement they receive to overcome barriers
- the support being available when needed
- high levels of support
- the chance for personal and professional development
- the improvement in their own working practice.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the provision of additional learning materials.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the flexibility of assessors
- the benefits gained by the organisation
- the communication and support received
- the availability of advice at any time
- the support for learners with little confidence
- the feedback on learner progress
- the close, open and transparent relationship.

What employers would like to see improved:

- their knowledge of the programme
- the provision of additional places for their employees.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

4. STUK has made substantial improvements during the past year. It has set ambitious targets for learner outcomes and overall success rates have improved from a low level in 2008/09 to well above the national average in 2009/10. STUK has a very clear vision and strategy to take the programme forward and continue to raise its quality. The process of self-assessment is inclusive and reflects the views of users. The quality mechanisms are effective and have led to obvious and significant improvement. Recent structural change has provided an improved and appropriate management structure. Staff at all levels are committed to sustained improvement and the success and well-being of their learners. Although the programme is a very small part of the whole operation, support and oversight by directors are very good. Arrangements for both safeguarding and equality of opportunity have improved and are good. Senior staff recognise the improvements made but are aware of those areas where work is still required.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

5. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates have improved greatly over the last year and are now higher than the national average. On business administration and law programmes the overall success rate is high at nearly 90%. However, current timely achievement is too low at just over 50%. There are no notable variations in outcomes for different groups of learners.
6. Progress for most learners has improved and is now at least satisfactory. Learners are aware of target dates to complete their programme and anticipate timely completion. However, some learners are unaware of the extent of their progress. Monitoring of learner progress is satisfactory and is recorded on a range of different documents and in different systems.
7. Learners develop good knowledge and skills relevant to their job roles and enjoy their programmes. Learners recognise the improvement in their personal development and improved performance in their job roles. Learners look forward to the achievement of a nationally recognised qualification which will enhance their prospects and career development. A significant proportion of learners on the programme have progressed from DWP provision.
8. All learners feel safe and are able to give examples of following safe working practice. STUK promotes safeguarding well, providing learners with information at induction, discussion at review and carrying out vetting of health and safety of employers' premises. Learners have a clear understanding of safeguarding issues such as bullying in the workplace and what to do if such issues are encountered.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

9. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Assessment practice is satisfactory and learners provide an adequate mix of evidence to meet the requirements of the qualification. Assessment takes place at regular intervals, at least monthly. Assessors inform learners clearly about what they need to prepare for assessment in terms of preparation for discussion or written work. Learners have a good rapport with their assessor. The assessors are approachable and provide good and flexible support to further help learners between visits. Assessors provide clear guidance through discussion and review, helping learners to develop and understand the breadth of their own skills and how to prepare for their next assessment. Voice recorders are used to record question and answer assessments but there is little use of other technology to support learning.
10. Planning of learning focuses on what the learner must do between one assessment and the next rather than on longer-term targets that allow the learner to manage their own learning. Learners rely too much on their assessor, which leads to insufficient involvement in the planning of learning.
11. Response to the needs and interests of learners is good. STUK is flexible and responsive, with assessors available by telephone and email between visits. A range of NVQs meets the needs of learners by providing learning in different skills and at different levels according to the learner's job role. Assessors carry out initial guidance and inductions which are comprehensive and ensure that learners are on the right programmes.
12. Employers are committed in principle to supporting learners through their programmes. Assessors inform employers about the progress of their learners and invite them to participate in reviews with learners. However, few employers take an active part in supporting learners through the NVQ. Some attend reviews and sign off paperwork but are not involved in target setting or in ensuring that the programme relates to events or training in the workplace. Employers are not encouraged sufficiently to make a contribution to assessment judgements on learners' workplace skills or to contribute to planning of future assessment.
13. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Assessors have very supportive relationships with learners and offer flexibility in arranging visits to meet the working patterns of learners and employers. Assessors have a sound knowledge of the range of business administration, customer service and management skills. Learners are well informed about progression opportunities to further NVQ training. Assessors understand their learners' needs and provide ongoing support. However, learners are not sufficiently encouraged to take ownership of their learning programmes. Appropriate initial assessment is carried out for all learners at the start of their programme. However, it is not always used sufficiently effectively to plan learning.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

14. Directors and managers in STUK raise expectations and promote ambition well throughout the organisation. Strategic leadership is good. The programme fits closely with both government and company priorities. Strategic partnerships with other providers are supporting future programme development. Managers set challenging targets for improvement and have put in place a coherent and effective organisational structure. Improved operational management has had a good impact on the quality of the programme and managers use data effectively to monitor programme performance. Communication within STUK is good and employers now value a responsive and professional relationship.
15. At a senior level, safeguarding is prioritised and current arrangements are good. The safeguarding task group reports directly to the chief executive. STUK holds a central list of checks on all its staff. The safeguarding awareness and online training provided is good and gives staff confidence to handle safeguarding issues. Two senior managers, who are designated safeguarding officers, have completed higher level training and are trained safeguarding facilitators. Specialist organisations deliver training that is highly valued by staff and enables them to understand how substance abuse, mental ill health and the difficulties faced by lone parents can affect achievement and what support is available. Satisfactory arrangements to safeguard staff are in place including a code of practice, a personal safety policy and appropriate risk assessments. Recruitment practices have improved and are now good. All new staff are vetted using a two-stage interview process that looks at an individual's work history, a self disclosure, reference check and an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Effective action is taken when issues or concerns are raised by learners.
16. Arrangements for equality and diversity are good. The equality agenda has a high profile within the company. Managers closely monitor and have a good understanding of data on specific target groups. These data show few differences between their success rates and those of all learners. A high proportion of learners are from disadvantaged areas and over 40% are from minority ethnic groups. Employers highly value the support given to learners from minority ethnic groups in their companies to overcome their barriers to learning. STUK promotes equality and diversity well in induction and through good booklets. Staff undertake appropriate training and have good awareness of equality and diversity. Employers' equality arrangements are checked before learners start their programme. Offensive or inappropriate behaviour is challenged and issues are dealt with quickly and effectively. Learners' understanding is reinforced during reviews. However, this is not always of sufficient depth. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is at least satisfactory.
17. STUK engages effectively with learners to improve their programme. Feedback from learners is taken seriously and acted upon. Information given to learners is comprehensive and informative. STUK asks employers for formal feedback but managers recognise that the response rate is too low and improved

evaluation systems are being developed. A few employers are not sufficiently involved in the programme.

18. The self-assessment process is effective. The actions taken as a result of self-assessment have greatly improved the outcomes of the programme over the past year. Staff are aware of the areas for improvement found during the inspection. The self-assessment process includes the views of staff and learners. Judgements in the report are evaluative. However, the grades awarded in some areas reflect the progress made rather than the current position. Internal verifiers prepare sampling plans which outline learners and units to be verified on a regular basis. Paperwork is regularly checked and discrepancies identified. Assessors participate in frequent reviews with their line manager where progress of learners is discussed, and regular meetings ensure good communication within the team. Observation of assessors takes place but is not sufficiently systematic to consistently capture good practice and disseminate it to the assessment team.
19. STUK offers satisfactory value for money. Overall success rates are high, outcomes are satisfactory and most learners make at least satisfactory progress. Systems for budgetary control and financial probity are sound. Staff are suitably qualified and attend appropriate development activities. Most learners have developed increased confidence and work skills from their programme.

Information about the inspection

20. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Senior Continuous Improvement 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 learners and their achievement.
21. 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 assessments and progress reviews and examined a wide range of documentary evidence.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Skills Training UK 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	113	113
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? How well do learners progress?	3 3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<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>		
Quality of provision	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?	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?	3	
Leadership and management	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>		
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?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
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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