

# Start Training Limited

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 58187

**Name of lead inspector:** Bob Busby HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 15 June 2011

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** Wesley House  
Wesley Street  
Swinton  
Manchester  
M27 6AD

**Telephone number:** 0161 728 2438

## **FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Start Training Limited (Start) is a private company established in 1983 employing 19 staff. The company operates from a centre in Swinton. It offers apprenticeships and Train to Gain provision in management, administration, customer services, information and communication technology, dental nursing and literacy and numeracy. Most of the provision is on employer premises. Learners are in permanent employment mainly within the Greater Manchester area with smaller numbers of learners located within Merseyside, Lancashire and Cheshire.

Currently in 2010/11, 93 of the 194 learners following apprenticeship programmes are advanced apprentices. An additional 65 learners are on Train to Gain programmes at National Vocational Qualification levels 2 and level 3.

The most recent inspection report was published in June 2008. Inspectors judged the provider's overall effectiveness, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management to be good. The provider's arrangements for equality of opportunity were judged to be satisfactory, as was its capacity to improve. Two curriculum areas were inspected: health, public services and care, and business administration and law; both were judged to be good.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

<b>What progress has been made in improving self-assessment and quality improvement planning, so that managers can identify weaknesses at an early stage and take swift action to tackle them?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
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As at the time of the previous inspection, the self-assessment process is inclusive with arrangements to involve all staff. Self-assessment draws on a wide range of evidence, including quantitative data, learner views, employer views and teaching observations. Although the provider collects the views of learners and employers, response rates to questionnaires are low. The provider recognises that responses do not supply sufficient qualitative information to contribute effectively to self-assessment. In some cases, the feedback to learners and employers after they have expressed their views on actions taken to improve provision is given too late.

Self-assessment, frequent file audits and the improved use of data throughout the year, to monitor performance, are helping the provider to identify and promptly address areas of concern. Staff have shared good self-assessment practices. The report is self-critical and evaluative and addresses closely the criteria of the Common Inspection Framework. It clearly identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Self-assessment is used well to drive quality improvement planning. Progress against the development plan is reviewed at monthly management meetings and disseminated for discussion by all staff at team meetings. The monthly

monitoring meetings between assessors and department managers are used effectively to monitor staff performance. However, the targets set through appraisal are not sufficiently linked to driving improvements in learner outcomes.

## Outcomes for learners

**What progress has been made in ensuring the continued improvement in success rates and to address the low timely achievement on dental programmes?** **Reasonable progress**

The provider has continued to improve overall success rates and the proportion of learners achieving within the planned timescale on apprenticeships and Train to Gain provision since the last inspection. Success rates on apprenticeships have continued to rise and are above national rates. Success rates for apprentices are very good. On Train to Gain programmes, overall success rates and the proportion of learners achieving within planned timescales are very good, rising to well above the national rate. The period 9 data for 2010/11, indicates that the high success rates are being maintained.

On dental nursing programmes, the low proportion of learners achieving within planned timescales, at the time of the previous inspection, has been improved to above the national rate of 60%. The period 9 data for 2010/11, + indicates that the improving trend continues. However, overall success rates on dental nursing programmes have remained static at around 71% for the last two years and remain below the national rate. These low success rates are partly attributable to Start taking over a failing provider in 2007. The period 9 data indicates a trend of improvement which, if it continues, will lead to improved overall SR in 2010/11.

Start uses data well to monitor its performance trends and is aware of where success rates need to be improved and is taking appropriate action. More robust initial assessment and diagnostic testing procedures have been introduced. All staff have received training in the delivery and assessment of key skills and good practice is shared effectively. Focused specialist support is readily available for learners when necessary. Learners make good progress towards attaining their qualifications and develop good vocational skills.

## Quality of provision

**What progress has been made in introducing and embedding effective measures to improve lesson planning to meet learners' needs?** **Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection Start has made a number of improvements regarding the planning of learning. It has improved the initial assessment process well, to better support learners with literacy or numeracy needs and all assessors have had satisfactory training. It has re-organised well the teaching of key skills to embed them within the curriculum. Learners' key skills pass rates have improved.

Some learners benefit from the use of an on-line e-portfolio system and both learners and employers value being able to track learners' progress. All learners still benefit from the regular and productive assessment and review meetings. Employers, assessors and learners plan training together well to maximise assessment opportunities. Assessors make good use of both taped material and holistic observations that they match competently to qualification standards.

Start has invested in a range of interactive resources and staff training in teaching and learning to improve one-to-one sessions. Session plans now direct assessors to use more interactive materials; however, they do not refer sufficiently to assessment methodologies or learners' individual preferred learning methods. Although the quality of workbooks is improved, assessors rely too much on workbook completion for assessment.

The observation process is carried out regularly and observers gather some useful information to share practice. However, the observers still pay insufficient attention to commenting on learning.

## **Leadership and management**

<b>What progress has been made in continuing the good focus on providing good and effective performance monitoring?</b>	<b>Significant progress</b>
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As at the time of the last inspection, performance management of staff is good. Monthly individual meetings between assessors and managers are very effective in monitoring learner progress and ensuring that learners achieve within anticipated timescales. A revised performance monitoring form has been produced and is used very effectively to provide focus and record discussions. Managers and assessors agree very prompt and appropriate actions to improve performance and support learners. The clear focus on learners who are within four months of their end date has ensured targeted support to enable learners to achieve within anticipated timescales. Consequently, the number of learners who are no longer funded has reduced from 29 at the time of the last inspection to 14 currently.

Data are now used very well in management meetings and shared with all staff. The development plan is very effective in identifying areas for improvement and progress against actions is very closely monitored and shared throughout the company. Individual meetings and appraisals are very effective in identifying the development needs of staff and have led to comprehensive staff training in the delivery and assessment of key skills and in the effective use of new technologies for teaching and learning to benefit learners. The frequent individual meetings between assessors and managers are used very well to evaluate thoroughly, performance against set criteria, making good use of data. Underperformance by staff is managed very rigorously. The introduction of good practice meetings has ensured that successful practice is identified and shared effectively across the organisation.

**What progress has been made in embedding the arrangements for safeguarding?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection the procedures for safeguarding learners met government requirements but were not graded separately. Start has comprehensive health and safety arrangements. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and thoroughly. Staff take effective measures to protect learners where they identify employers who do not comply with agreed health and safety action plans.

The provider has improved considerably its arrangements for the monitoring of individual safeguarding issues. Staff have all undertaken regular and appropriate staff development and training and have a good understanding of the processes to follow. Individual support for learners is good. Procedures for reporting to the senior management team are satisfactory, as are the arrangements for maintaining a central record.

Partnerships with other providers to share practice on health and safety and safeguarding are developing well, though relatively new. Links with the Local Children's Safeguarding Board are satisfactory.

Start gives comprehensive information on safeguarding to both employers and learners in the induction pack and additional information for employers. However, it does not sufficiently check or reinforce how well learners or employers understand the issues, including internet safety. Assessors use reviews appropriately to reinforce learners' understanding of health and safety issues but do not sufficiently assess their understanding of safeguarding.

**What progress has been made in improving the good and effective partnerships with employers?**

**Reasonable progress**

Employer partnerships were a strength at the last inspection. Start continues to plan training well with employers, and staff have maintained their understanding of the individual needs of employers and learners. Employers are highly supportive of learners and have a good understanding of the qualification requirements to help learners plan their work efficiently. Employers have a clear understanding of learners' targets.

Employers value the flexibility and professional competence of the assessors. Visits are regular with good reports made to employers on learner progress. Employers are very happy with the learners' increased confidence to take on new tasks. However, some employers want more information to keep them up-to-date on the funding of training or on changes to the qualification standards.

Employers support Start by attending events such as recruitment evenings and charitable projects. Start works well with dental practices to construct good learning packages. These bring together dental and customer service awards with key skills to ensure learners develop skills for both dental work and reception duties.

Employers are very loyal to Start and many have worked with the provider for a number of years. A few employers left the provider through a staffing issue that has now been successfully resolved.

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