

L.I.T.S. Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53069

Name of lead inspector: Deavon Baker-Oxley HMI

Last day of inspection: 17 June 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. L.I.T.S. Limited (LITS) is a private training provider, founded in 1981. The company provides specific support and assessment services to engineering companies on a national basis. LITS works predominantly with employers in the lift industry and holds a Skills Funding Agency contract for advanced apprenticeships in engineering and also a Train to Gain contract for adults. All learners are aged over 16.
2. LITS currently has 288 learners on programme, of whom 101 are apprentices and 187 are Train to Gain learners. LITS employs 12 training advisers, each being responsible for managing different regions. All training advisers have a portfolio of learners who are in employment across the United Kingdom. Learners' programmes are delivered in distinct parts. Initially, learners attend college for the technical certificate aspect of their programmes and then LITS undertakes assessments and reviews following completion of the technical certificate. Key skills tests are normally completed at the end of the learners' programmes.
3. The company currently provides a training and assessment service for over 100 organisations which range from international 'blue-chip' companies to small family-run businesses and the self-employed. Approximately 60% of the company's income is from the private sector and 40% is government funded.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	187 learners
Apprenticeships	101 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 4
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Capacity to improve	Grade 4
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	4
Quality of provision	4
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	4
Equality and diversity	4

Subject Areas	Grade
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	4

Overall effectiveness

4. The number of learners who complete their courses successfully is inadequate. Although outcomes for learners have improved and are satisfactory for the current quarter, historical data highlight low success rates and very slow achievement of qualifications for most learners. Slow achievement remains an issue. Those learners who do achieve improve their economic well-being through increased work-related skills. Learners' awareness and understanding of health and safety meet the requirements of the engineering and manufacturing industry well and all learners feel safe.
5. The quality of assessment and learning is inadequate. Employers provide learners with a suitable range of experiences and support them well in the development of their skills and knowledge. However, little on-the-job development is planned or structured by LITS, although a few employers take the initiative to do this themselves. Arrangements to identify and support literacy, numeracy and language support are weak. Training advisers have not been trained to recognise the signs of additional learning needs such as dyslexia. Assessment is inadequate. The use of first-hand evidence, such as observation by a qualified assessor, is insufficient. Assessment is inflexible and does not take account of individual learners' needs or their circumstances. Progress reviews are weak; reviews rarely involve the employer and are not conducted in private. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of the opportunities available within the industry and further opportunities to study.

6. At a senior managerial level, LITS' response to rectify the weak areas identified in previous inspection findings has been insufficient and slow. LITS does not sufficiently prioritise the safeguarding of its learners; its monitoring of safeguarding arrangements, along with the promotion of equality and diversity, is inadequate.

Main findings

- The number of learners who complete their courses successfully are inadequate. Success rates are variable between different groups. Learners on apprenticeships achieve better than learners on Train to Gain programmes who make slow progress and do not achieve within their planned end date.
- Learners who achieve improve their economic and social well-being effectively. Opportunities for progression are good. LITS offers additional higher-level industry qualifications and many learners take advantage of opportunities to progress to foundation degrees and university-level programmes. Train to Gain learners, who achieve, progress well in moving from assistant to qualified-engineer status and many achieve improved employment terms and conditions as a result of their studies.
- Learners feel safe and readily apply safe working practices in the workplace. Safety underpins learners' everyday activity in a potentially hazardous industry where safety expectations are high. Safe working practices are strongly reinforced by LITS and its employers. Learners are confident in raising potential health and safety hazards. Adult learners on Train to Gain programmes now reflect more on deeper aspects of safety procedures, questioning why they are in place rather than merely adhering to them.
- Assessment is weak. The insufficiency of assessment by direct observation of learners in the workplace continues to be weak; an issue identified at previous inspections. Responsibilities for providing additional support are unclear. Assessment decisions rely too heavily on the production of learners' written work. Insufficient emphasis is placed on other forms of evidence including direct observation of learners.
- Initial assessment tests are mainly used for recruitment and selection, or to place learners on the correct level of technical certificate, and are not used to inform learner programmes. Not enough is done to identify additional learning needs. In some cases, learners who have specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, still have to present a large amount of written work for their portfolios. Few alternative ways of producing evidence have been considered. This was identified as an area for improvement at previous inspections.
- Progress reviews are ineffective. Learners who are making slow progress do not always have effective actions for improvement. Where targets are set they refer mainly to the progress of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and do not refer to other aspects of the programme. Employers are rarely involved in learner reviews. In addition, assessors do not check learners' understanding of equality and diversity sufficiently during their reviews.

- Planning of learning by LITS is inadequate. It is not individualised to reflect the prior experiences and individual circumstances of learners or their opportunities in the workplace. Some employers, however, have structured programmes of training where learners move to different departments to gain wider experience and cover the range of qualification requirements. Responsibilities for filling gaps in learners' knowledge are unclear.
- LITS' senior managers' response to rectify areas for improvement identified in previous inspection findings has been insufficient and slow. A number of key areas remain critical areas for development and were identified at the two previous inspections.
- LITS gives insufficient priority to the safeguarding of its learners. The provider uses clear employer pre-placement and review assessment documentation, which covers health and safety comprehensively and checks that the employers have equality of opportunity documentation. However, the provider does not check employers' arrangements for the safeguarding of learners.
- LITS' monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity are inadequate. This was identified at the previous inspection. LITS's equality and diversity policy does not reflect current legislation. Learners are made aware of equality and diversity at induction, but their understanding is not reinforced in their learning programme. Training advisers have infrequent briefings and inadequate access to good training on equality and diversity matters.
- Insufficient systems are in place to gather feedback from learners and employers. Questionnaires are occasionally sent out, but responses are very low and not enough alternative ways of collecting user feedback have been considered. Learners give informal feedback to their assessors on the quality of their training, but this is not systematically analysed to identify strengths and possible improvements to the provision.
- Self-assessment is weak and not enough is done to quality assure key processes of the learner experience, particularly aspects of the off-the-job training. The underdeveloped quality-improvement process was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspections and, as yet, has not been sufficiently addressed.

What does L.I.T.S. Limited need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all learner groups achieve within their planned time by more effective planning of assessment in the workplace and better target setting against all aspects of the programme during progress reviews.
- Increase the amount of direct assessment by observation in the workplace in order to make better judgments on learners' competence and reduce the burden of paperwork and written evidence.
- Ensure that progress reviews focus on all aspects of the programme including key skills and the technical certificates. Set measurable targets for learners and involve employers more so they understand the progress of learners better.

- Improve the use of initial assessment to plan learning more thoroughly so that clear responsibilities for resolving gaps in knowledge are assigned and learners can benefit from the full range of opportunities available to them. Clearly record additional support needs, and plans to meet these, on learning plans.
- Ensure that senior managers take prompt action to fully analyse recent inspection reports, identify key areas for improvement and develop a comprehensive quality improvement action plan. Set key milestones and allocate responsibilities for each aspect of the plan. Focus on progress against actions during team meetings and on setting targets with training advisers.
- Ensure that all learners are fully safeguarded by implementing best practice in the promotion of safeguarding to employers, monitoring their response and taking appropriate action where concerns are raised.
- Ensure that all equality and diversity policies and procedures are updated in accordance with the latest legislation, have action plans informed by equality and diversity data and engage learners and staff in the effective promotion of equality and diversity.
- Improve the collection, analysis and use of learners' and employers' views to inform the self-assessment process and improve the quality of the provision. Ensure that self-assessment is inclusive and informed by the views of all users.
- Develop and implement a robust self-assessment process to quality assure and improve every aspect of learner provision by ensuring the critical evaluation of performance by the use of data and the setting of challenging targets for improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the level of support from employers and LITS advisers
- the variety of jobs and learning new skills
- the high levels of work experience and job knowledge of training advisers
- the opportunity to gain new skills and additional awards and progress to higher qualifications
- the development of greater confidence and communication skills.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more assessment by direct observation in the workplace to reduce the amount of paperwork
- more support from LITS staff in improving college provision
- the time taken to complete NVQs at level 3 (Train to Gain)
- more flexible methods of assessing portfolio evidence
- more opportunities to formally capture group views and feedback.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- good working relationship with LITS
- the high level of knowledge and flexible approach of advisers in working effectively with production priorities
- the focus on health and safety at work
- the long standing relationships with LITS.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the effectiveness of managing the provision of local colleges
- more involvement in the learner review process.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

7. A number of significant areas for improvement, identified at previous inspections, have seen little or no improvement. Although outcomes for the current quarter are satisfactory, overall success rates for apprentices have remained below the national average for the previous three years. Over the past two years the number of Train to Gain learners who completed their programme in the planned time has been 16 percentage points below the national average.
8. The self-assessment process is inadequate. The report is mainly descriptive and fails to identify any of the areas for improvement identified during the inspection, particularly with regard to weak assessment, poor initial assessment and inadequate safeguarding of learners. Involvement of staff and other users in the self-assessment process is insufficient. The arrangements for collecting useful feedback from learners and employers are insufficient to inform the outcomes and to improve the quality of the provision. Development plans are not clearly focused on identified areas of poor performance.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 4

9. The proportion of learners who complete their courses successfully have remained below the national average for the previous three years across all programmes. In 2009/10, apprenticeship success rates were 9 percentage points below the national average. However, in-year data for 2010/11 show an improvement to just below the national average. In the previous three years, too few apprentices completed within the planned time for their programme. In 2009/10 less than half of apprentices completed in the planned time. In-year data for 2010/11 suggest that this has now risen to just above the national average. Train to Gain success rates in 2010/11 have risen but are 7 percentage points below the national average.
10. Learners enjoy their training and many are well supported by their employers. LITS gives the health and safety of learners on work premises a high priority. Learners feel safe and have a clear understanding of safe working practices which is strongly reinforced by LITS and its employers. Some employers ensure that learners attend an advanced driver safety programme before providing a company van. Employers speak positively about the skills learners develop through working with experienced engineers in the workplace. Many learners gain additional, relevant qualifications and, in the better employers, have the opportunity to progress to higher-level qualifications. Some Train to Gain learners develop new and higher levels of skill and are working towards enhanced job roles.

The quality of provision

Grade 4

11. Training and assessment are inadequate. Many employers provide learners with an appropriate range of experiences and support them well in the development of their skills and knowledge. However, little on-the-job development is planned or structured by LITS, although a few employers take the initiative to do this themselves. Learners work alongside experienced engineers who are effective in imparting their skills and knowledge.
12. Assessment of learners' work is inadequate. Learners' portfolios contain up to 130 separate written reports of tasks the learners have undertaken which are referenced against the qualification. The only validation of the learners' performance is the signature of a company engineer. The use of first-hand evidence, such as observation by a qualified assessor, is inadequate. Assessment is inflexible and does not take account of individual learners' needs or their circumstances. In one case, a learner with dyslexia was required to produce a high number of written reports, with little support from his employer or LITS, and little consideration of other ways he could be assessed.
13. Arrangements to identify and provide literacy, numeracy and language support are weak. All learners undertake an initial assessment. However, little structured support is arranged for those with identified needs. For apprentices, any support is left to the local college to provide during the technical certificate training. Train to Gain learners do not have adequate access to additional support for literacy and numeracy skills and the results of initial assessment are not used effectively to plan for this. Some Train to Gain learners, who have no previous qualifications, have not had an adequate assessment of their literacy skills before starting a level 3 award. Training advisers have not been trained to recognise the signs of specific learning needs such as dyslexia.
14. Internal verification satisfies the requirements of the awarding organisation. However, it fails to promote the use of a wider range of evidence and reinforces the continued over emphasis on learners' own written work. Reports from the new roving internal verifier have begun to identify some weaker aspects of progress reviews and assessment, but these practices still exist in some parts of the organisation.
15. Progress reviews are weak. Learners' progress is reviewed regularly by their training adviser. However, these reviews rarely involve the employer and are not conducted in private. Learners' progress with their NVQ is established by the volume of work learners have completed, without reference to a plan or structure which might prioritise their work. Insufficient attention is given to checking learners' welfare. Opportunities to check and to extend learners' knowledge of their rights and responsibilities are not taken. Reviews do not adequately consider learners' progress in their apprenticeship as a whole and training advisers do not have sufficient information about progress at college or more generally about attendance and other relevant employment behaviours. Employers are inadequately involved in the review, with some employers only being informed of the outcomes by email.

16. The planning of individual learning is weak. All apprentices, regardless of their circumstances and prior experience, have a four-year completion target. The results of initial assessment do not inform a clear and coherent individual plan of support and few learners have a structured plan for their on-the-job training. Any planning that takes place is overly focused on the collection of written evidence rather than the opportunities to develop skills and knowledge and opportunities to provide alternative evidence. Some apprentices do not have the opportunity to develop basic engineering skills away from the workplace, as expected by the engineering apprenticeship framework.
17. Train to Gain programmes are used well to provide qualifications and to extend skills and employment opportunities for those learners who achieve. LITS works to address the high demand from employers for relevant engineering and manufacturing qualifications and skills that exists.
18. LITS has partnerships with employers and relevant sector organisations such as the industry trade association. Employers provide good opportunities for learners and support them well. Formal links between LITS training advisers colleges where apprentices attend, are in the early stages of development
19. Care, guidance and support are inadequate with many learners making slow progress and those with identified literacy and numeracy needs are poorly provided for. All learners are employed and most employers give adequate time for learners to complete their portfolios and meet with their assessor. Arrangements for careers advice and guidance are too informal. However, most learners have a satisfactory understanding of the opportunities available within the industry and further opportunities to study.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

20. LITS has a clear vision of its purpose. Communication across the organisation is satisfactory. Frequent informal meetings between assessors and managers are beginning to have a positive impact on learners' progress. Assessors are managed satisfactorily by planned reviews of performance, which include learners' progress on programme. Assessors are appropriately qualified. At a senior managerial level, LITS' response to previous inspection findings has been insufficient and slow. Over a number of years key areas, such as assessment by direct observation and the lack of sufficiently rigorous assessment by expert witness within the workplace, remain critical areas for development that were identified at the two previous inspections.
21. LITS gives insufficient priority to the safeguarding of its learners especially on employers' premises. The provider uses comprehensive health and safety employer pre-placement review and assessment documentation, and checks that employers have equality of opportunity documentation. However, the provider does not check employers' arrangements for the safeguarding of learners. The provider has recently provided training for its assessors, but the named safeguarding person has yet to receive additional training appropriate

for the position. The majority of the provider's assessors have not had Criminal Records Bureau checks and no formal written risk assessment is undertaken to safeguard learners.

22. Monitoring and the promotion of equality and diversity are inadequate. LITS's equality and diversity policy does not reflect latest legislation. No evidence is available to demonstrate that LITS' policies and procedures have been impact assessed or formally evaluated. Action planning is insufficient to enable the effective promotion and monitoring of equality and diversity. There continues to be insufficient collation of data that enables LITS to review equality of opportunity effectively. Action plans inadequately identify the underlying reasons for the variation in learners and their performance. Learners are made aware of equality and diversity at induction, but this awareness is not reinforced further during reviews. Training advisers and full-time staff have infrequent briefings and inadequate access to good training. Recently, all learners have been issued with useful self-study equality and diversity packs, but it is too soon to comment on the effectiveness of these.
23. Quality improvement arrangements remain inadequate since being identified during previous inspections. The collection of learners' and employers' feedback and the observation of key aspects of the programme to improve the provision are poorly planned, with no comprehensive quality-assurance arrangements in place. The self-assessment process lacks rigour. The process does not include the wider views of stakeholders; the report is insufficiently evaluative to support accurate judgements and grades, and managers do not use quality improvement planning effectively to drive continuous improvement.
24. Although learners in the current quarter are now making satisfactory progress, too few learners have completed their programmes over the last three years and resources available to LITS have been insufficiently well utilised. LITS does not provide effective value for money.

Information about the inspection

25. Two of her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's training director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. 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 the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

L.I.T.S. 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	288	288
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?	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>	-	
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?	4	
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?	4	
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>	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	4	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	4	
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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