

Elmfield Training Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 59038

Name of lead inspector: William Baidoe-Ansah HMI

Last day of inspection: 29 July 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Unit 2
Cinnabar Court
Daresbury Park
Daresbury
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 4GE

Telephone number: 01925 703971

Information about the provider

1. Elmfield Training Ltd (Elmfield), established in 2002, is one of the largest vocational training providers in the United Kingdom. It delivers learning programmes to high numbers of learners employed by large organisations, the biggest of which is the national retailer Wm Morrison PLC (Morrisons).
2. Training is funded through an ongoing contract with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) which in 2010/11 is worth over £40 million. There are currently 26,654 learners on training programmes with the company.
3. Learners receive specifically managed on-the-job training from their employers. Elmfield provides learners with specialist assessment and accreditation services which include assessment, key skills and technical certificate delivery, internal verification and progress reviews.
4. Elmfield has not been inspected as a provider by Ofsted previously, having only received an SFA contract in the last 18 months. Elmfield has been inspected by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate as a subcontractor in previous inspections for Pearsons, Phones 4u and Vodafone. Each inspection achieved an overall grade 2.
5. Elmfield provides training on behalf of a number of employers including:
 - British Home Stores
 - DHL
 - Pearsons
 - Phones 4u
 - Vodafone

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	13,448 learners
Apprenticeships	2,518 apprentices

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		2
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		3
Subject Areas		
Retail and commercial enterprise		3
Business, administration and law		2

Overall effectiveness

- Elmfield Training Ltd is a satisfactory provider. It has a good capacity to improve, having maintained good outcomes for learners in a period of very rapid growth. Learners gain confidence and skills through the training and feel safe. Learners make good progress. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Assessment and training are satisfactory in retail and good in business, administration and law. Programmes successfully meet the needs of learners. Partnerships with employers are good. They are supported by good communication and programmes are specifically tailored to meet their training and business needs. Support for learners is inadequate in retail and good in business, administration and law. Induction, initial assessment and the provision of additional support are all underdeveloped. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Good strategic leadership drives forward ambitious plans. Elmfield prioritises safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity appropriately. The self-assessment report is accurate and quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory.

Main findings

- Overall success rates across all provision in 2009/10 were high and well above the national average. Programme completions within the planned period were also high. The most recent in-year data for 2010/11 show continued improvement in success rates.
- Learners make good progress on the programme and gain confidence and self-esteem which enhance their work. They develop good work-related skills and practices and produce good standards of work. Learners feel safe and use safe working practices.
- At Morrisons, learners access a training programme that is well structured. The quality of assessment is satisfactory overall, with learners in business, administration and law benefiting from well-planned assessment. Retail employees undertake a timely initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs but the results are not always used to develop their individual knowledge further.
- The provision adequately meets the needs of retail learners. They are very positive about the qualifications they achieve. However, progression routes are underdeveloped. Elmfield successfully meets the needs of its business, administration and law learners. Many of them obtain employment at the end of their programme.
- Elmfield has developed a particularly strong partnership with Morrisons that focuses on meeting business needs and developing the workforce. Communication is good and learners' progress is reviewed well. In business, administration and law, Elmfield works successfully with the academy call centre employers who are often closely involved in agreeing optional units for learners.
- The quality of information, advice and specialist support for retail learners is not adequate. Induction does not provide enough programme information to prospective learners. Elmfield's strategy for providing specialist support is also underdeveloped. Learners undertaking the business, administration and law qualification benefit from particularly good guidance and pastoral support.
- Business planning processes are good in business, administration and law programmes. A sound project plan is enabling the provision to reach young people that are hard to engage and who are most disadvantaged.
- Elmfield has strong ambitions for the development of the business and has managed the corporate infrastructure well to respond to the significant increase in the size of the business. However, the ambition for learners in retail programmes is not sufficiently challenging.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are satisfactory overall and good in business, administration and law. In recent months safeguarding has been given a significantly high priority. All staff have either had Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks or are awaiting completion of the process. The company has appointed fifteen designated safeguarding officers and all staff have received recent training.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Most learners achieve in line with the average. However, the performance of different groups of learners who enter the business, administration and law programmes and differences in success in retail and commercial enterprise programmes are not analysed sufficiently. Recent initiatives have improved staff and learner understanding of equality and diversity.
- The self-assessment process is satisfactorily informed by staff and employer feedback. However, the analysis of learner and employer feedback is underdeveloped. The commentary in the current report is broadly accurate but the grade profile is over-generous. Elmfield has introduced many recent quality improvement initiatives including a new quality cycle and changes to the observation of teaching and learning processes. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new systems.

What does Elmfield Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of portfolios by ensuring that retail learners and managers have a more thorough understanding of the standards required and by personalising witness testimonies in business, administration and law sufficiently to ensure assessors can confirm individual competence more extensively.
- Improve the quality of support and guidance by improving the effectiveness of the induction and further developing the arrangements for advice, guidance and specialist support in the retail programmes.
- Further develop the promotion of equality and diversity by improving the analysis of the participation and success of different groups of learners and by increasing staff and learner knowledge of equality and diversity topics.
- Continue to develop the quality improvement processes by strengthening the observation of teaching and learning and the analysis of learner and employer feedback to drive improvements forward.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly and approachable assessors
- the chance to gain a nationally accredited qualification
- learning at work
- the good encouragement which has developed their confidence
- the celebration of success with managers and colleagues.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more information at the beginning of the programme
- more visits from assessors

- more time to learn
- more opportunity to practice key skills on computers.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the excellent communication with Elmfield assessors
- the Elmfield assessors feeling part of Morrisons and fitting in very well with both staff and managers
- staff enjoying key skills once they start them.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the training that can seem rushed due to the time constraints of the business
- better organisation on training development days.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. Elmfield's capacity to improve is good. Since the commencement of programmes in 2009, outcomes for all learners have been good. Success rates continue to improve in the current year, despite a very substantial expansion in learner numbers. Elmfield sets demanding targets for its programmes and sound business planning, particularly in business, administration and law, is enabling the programmes to meet local and national priorities well. Elmfield has recently invested in high-quality management, staff, information and communication technology (ICT) and learning resources in order to improve its programmes. These investments are beginning to have a positive impact on the promotion of equality and diversity and safeguarding and on the development of key skills and other learning resources in retail programmes.
8. Elmfield's self-assessment process is satisfactory. It identified that its quality improvement processes require further development and it has established a sound annual quality assurance cycle in order to promote more improvements. The recently revised development plan is detailed and identifies suitable actions for improvement. The directors have a strong vision for Elmfield and all staff can contribute to improvement through good staff communication processes. Elmfield is very responsive and has a good track record in responding to requests and needs for improvement.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

9. Overall success rates across all provision in 2009/10 were high and well above the national average. Apprentice completions within the planned period were also high. The most recent in-year data for 2010/11 show continued improvement in success rates. Train to Gain data show that the percentage of learners achieving their qualification within the planned duration of the programme was outstanding for 2009/10 and good for the most recent period in 2010/11.
10. Out of the eight main geographical regions in which Elmfield operates, four have success rates above the company average, one is equal to the average and three are below the average. Male learners perform very slightly better than female learners overall and older learners perform better than learners aged 16 to 18. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is low and most achieve in line with the average. However, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not succeed as well as other learners.
11. Learners make good progress on their programmes, with most achieving their qualifications rapidly. Additionally, learners on all programmes gain in self-esteem and confidence. Learners in business, administration and law have high aspirations and enjoy their training. In retail, the good workplace skills gained

through Morrisons' training are supplemented well by Elmfield. Learners in business, administration and law gain skills which make them highly employable. Learners feel safe. They train in a safe working environment and are aware of health and safety practices.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

12. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory overall. In retail, learners access Morrisons' well-structured training programme. They also undertake an early initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs, but the results are not always used to extend their knowledge. Key skills are satisfactory, although individual learning plans do not always suggest how less-able learners will be supported. Assessment in retail is satisfactory overall, but portfolios contain little evidence of personalised learning. Learners in business, administration and law benefit from good teaching and assessment planning. They receive very effective, individualised coaching at the workplace. Assessors are based in the same call centre allowing for closer monitoring of their progress and prompt identification of support. Business, administration and law assessors use good techniques to teach key skills but, because of the amount of work learners do on a computer, their written skills can sometimes be underdeveloped.
13. The provision meets the needs of retail learners adequately. They are very positive about the qualifications they have achieved; for many it is their first accredited qualification. Morrisons have a comprehensive training and development programme but many employees have not felt sufficiently confident to apply for managerial training until they have completed their apprenticeship. Accredited progression routes for retail learners are underdeveloped, although Elmfield is planning to offer advanced courses soon. Elmfield meets the needs of its business, administration and law learners well. A significant number of young learners in the Synapse and Route 2 Employment programmes have obtained employment by the end of their programme.
14. Elmfield has very effective partnerships. It has a particularly strong partnership with Morrisons, sharing with them a vision of creating a learning environment that supports the development of employees' knowledge and skills to enhance the future development of the retailer. Communication is good, with Elmfield structuring its training management team to reflect that of Morrisons. In the business, administration and law programmes, Elmfield works successfully with academy call centre employers to identify opportunities for assessment, which increases the speed of progress and achievement of many learners. Learners are placed in employment with high-profile companies in the banking, facilities and services industries.
15. The information, advice and specialist support that Elmfield offers in the retail area is weak. Induction does not provide adequate programme information to ensure prospective retail learners understand the components of the programme they are undertaking sufficiently or the support available

throughout the qualification. Induction is very brief and often assessors are not able to develop learners' understanding of safeguarding and equality and diversity sufficiently. Retail learners do not receive sufficient information at the end of their programme on further opportunities for study beyond Morrisons. The provision of specialist support is underdeveloped in retail. Learners undertaking business, administration and law qualifications benefit from particularly good guidance and pastoral support. Assessors and managers ensure that appropriate support is provided by external specialist agencies when a need is identified. Elmfield is currently evaluating the quality of a specialist counsellor intervention that was offered for the last six months in one of its academies.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

16. Elmfield has closely aligned its business to national and local priorities in the promotion of qualifications within and for employment. Strategic planning is good and communicated well through the Ambition plan. Elmfield has set high standards for itself with demanding targets which it is meeting through strong performance management. Elmfield has significantly improved its management information systems which are now strong. Resources and support for staff training are good. However, the challenge for a minority of learners in retail programmes is too low, particularly in key skills development.
17. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Health and safety and the promotion of safe working practices are good in business, administration and law and satisfactory in retail. Elmfield applies its safeguarding policies and procedures appropriately to protect all learners. All staff in contact with learners have either been, or are in the process of being, CRB checked. Elmfield keeps a satisfactory central record of these checks. All staff have received recent training, which is enhanced for the fifteen designated safeguarding officers. A dedicated focus group produces good learning and support materials for learners and staff.
18. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory and improved by recent work. Very useful case histories help staff reinforce equality and diversity during the review process. Training is also further increasing staff understanding. However, learners' understanding is underdeveloped. Most groups of learners achieve as well as each other. However, there is insufficient analysis of the recruitment and performance of different groups of learners in business, administration and law and insufficient action planning to ensure differences in learner outcomes are minimised in retail programmes. Elmfield promotes social inclusion well. The apprenticeship is the first formal qualification for nearly half of the learners in retail. Many business, administration and law learners are from areas of high disadvantage with very little previous work experience.
19. User engagement is satisfactory overall and good in business, administration and law. Elmfield collects the views of all learners at least three times during

their programmes. However, it does not analyse this information sufficiently. In business, administration and law, learners have the opportunity to participate in a focus group which meets regularly to exchange views with tutors and managers. Elmfield ensures that it seeks Morrisons' views regularly and acts on them at a variety of levels throughout the organisation. Elmfield is very responsive to feedback that it receives and there are many examples of how it has improved elements of the programmes as a result of the information collected.

20. Self-assessment is satisfactory. The process appropriately includes analysis of management information and contract performance data. A recently introduced quality improvement cycle is improving the process further. The report is broadly accurate and mirrors inspection findings. However, some aspects are over-graded. Development planning is thorough and closely aligned to the self-assessment report. However, actions are not always sufficiently prioritised and accountability for actions is not always clear.
21. Value for money is satisfactory overall and good in business, administration and law. Most learners make good progress and develop good skills. Elmfield has recently invested significantly in staff, ICT and learning resources for the benefit of learners.

Subject areas

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 3

Context

22. Currently 22,843 learners are apprentices and 239 learners are on Train to Gain programmes working towards an intermediate retail qualification. All learners are employed by Morrisons in their retail outlets. Elmfield staff provide key skills training and assessment; they assess and verify learners' work and review their progress. Their work builds on Morrisons' training by mapping the competencies learners gain to the national retail standards and awarding body requirements.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Learners achieve high success rates. A high proportion of apprentices and learners on Train to Gain programmes complete their programmes within the planned period. Learners make good progress through their programmes. Morrisons tracks the learning and progression of its employees well and there are several examples of promotion from assistant up to senior management level.
- Learners gain good retail skills through their employer's training. Elmfield staff help learners to build their self-confidence. Learners take great pride in achieving their qualifications. Morrisons' health and safety training is comprehensive; learners feel safe in their workplace. However, not all learners understand the wider aspects of safeguarding covering staff or customers who may visit the stores.
- The quality of learning and assessment is satisfactory. Morrisons structure job-focused training well. Learners have a clear understanding of the training they will undertake during their induction, which lasts for four weeks, and in the following 13 weeks. When a learner transfers to a new department or supervisory role, the training record reflects their new training requirements well.
- Initial assessment is satisfactory. However, the results are not always used effectively to increase learners' literacy and numeracy levels. Although key skills development is satisfactory, Elmfield places unrealistic expectations on some learners, expecting them to complete both key skills tests and the full portfolio of evidence in one day. The employer's training rooms do not have computers on which learners can practice or learn independently.
- Assessment and progress reviews are satisfactory overall. Assessors and personnel managers work together to assess and confirm learners' competence. However, portfolios display little evidence of individual learning that specifically relates to learners' previous experience and competence; in some cases evidence is missing. Opportunities to use technology to promote learning are not fully utilised.

- Elmfield meets the needs of learners adequately. Learners and employers are very positive about the programme. Assessors work flexibly to take account of the employer's needs, including shift work and seasonal fluctuations. For some learners, the qualification is their first accredited award since school. Morrisons celebrates the success of its learners well through newsletters and award presentations by the store managers.
- There are no progression routes to higher accredited qualifications for successful apprentices. However, Morrisons provides a comprehensive development route through in-house training. Elmfield is working very effectively with Morrisons to introduce advanced apprenticeships.
- Elmfield has developed a very strong partnership with Morrisons. Communications are good and Elmfield's training structure has been developed to match that of Morrisons' retail structure. There are regular meetings between managers at each level to monitor targets and discuss progress. Morrisons appreciates the training experience that Elmfield contributes to the partnership.
- Care, guidance and support are inadequate. Inductions are weak and fail to ensure learners have sufficient understanding of their qualification. Initial advice and guidance are not thorough; most learners are unclear about the components of their apprenticeship programme or the units that make up the retail qualification. At the end of the programme, learners do not receive impartial advice on the range of learning programmes available to them beyond Morrisons.
- Learners' specific support needs are not addressed early in the programme. There are few specialist support tutors and only one qualified specialist Skills for Life tutor. Elmfield's staff have a very basic knowledge of literacy and numeracy development and are unaware of how many of their learners have additional support needs.
- The operational management of the retail programme is satisfactory. Key performance indicators focus on learners' success and assessors monitor individual learner progress well. The programme is subject to comprehensive quality audits. Teaching and learning observations are carried out but the work of observers lacks consistency. Internal verification is satisfactory. A dedicated team ensures that the requirements of the awarding body are met.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Policies and procedures are in place to protect learners. However, induction, resources and reviews do not adequately introduce or reinforce current safeguarding legislation. The promotion of equality and diversity is also satisfactory, but assessors do not reinforce it sufficiently during progress reviews. Elmfield has recently developed a toolkit to extend learners' understanding.
- The self-assessment process is broadly satisfactory and adequately involves staff, who also contribute to the quality improvement plan. However, employer personnel at store level have little or no knowledge of the self-assessment process. There is insufficient analysis of learners' satisfaction.

What does Elmfield Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of support and guidance by improving the effectiveness of induction, information, advice, guidance and specialist support.
- Improve the quality of portfolios by ensuring that they adequately reflect learners' previous experience and competencies.
- Improve the checking of learners' understanding of safeguarding and equality and diversity during progress reviews by using a greater range of questions to check and improve learners' knowledge.
- Improve staff understanding of the quality improvement agenda by communicating key performance indicators more effectively.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

23. Of the 747 learners working towards qualifications in customer service, 716 are employed by Synapse and 31 by Route 2 Employment. Three-hundred and seventy-five learners are apprentices and 372 are advanced apprentices. All learners work as advisers in call centres.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Overall success rates are above the national average and most learners achieve within their planned timescales. Learners are enthusiastic and make very good progress. They develop an enhanced understanding of how call centres operate, which increases their confidence and communication skills when dealing with difficult and challenging clients. They benefit from good support to improve their employability prospects further.
- Learners develop very good work-related skills and engage with customers effectively. The standard of their work is good. A number of learners have been promoted, taken on additional responsibilities or gained additional units by coaching and mentoring other learners. Learners have a good understanding of company and individual targets which they often exceed. Employers are very positive about the added benefits that learners bring to their organisations.
- Learners feel very safe, use safe working practices and have a good understanding of health and safety. They know who to contact if they have health and safety or safeguarding issues. Opportunities for learners to make a positive contribution to the community are good and link well to local and national charities.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good overall. Assessors and workplace team leaders provide effective individual coaching and training. Employers regularly monitor the quality of learners' performance, providing feedback and targets for improvement. Some learners benefit from unplanned support offered by assessors based in the call centre academies. Progress reviews are frequent and lead to clear targets which link to individual workplace objectives.
- Assessment practice is satisfactory and meets awarding body requirements. Assessors plan visits and record assessments clearly and in most workplaces they involve learners and employers effectively. They use an appropriate range of assessment methods, including observation of workplace performance. However, the documentation used to provide expert witness testimonies from employers does not focus sufficiently on the performance of the individual.
- Assessors have good, relevant vocational experience and they benefit from regular professional development updating. However, evidence to support the technical certificate units is not always checked sufficiently. Key skills assignments are imaginative and make good use of relevant, work-related

projects. However, while learners demonstrate good oral communication skills, their written skills require further development.

- Partnerships with employers are effective and well established. Arrangements for meeting the needs of learners and employers are good. Elmfield works successfully with academy call centre employers to identify good assessment opportunities and employers are often closely involved in agreeing optional units for learners. Synapse and Route 2 Employment work closely in partnership with large employers, who provide work trials and employment opportunities.
- Assessors and employers provide good support for learners. Assessment arrangements are flexible and responsive. Learners attribute their high levels of satisfaction with the programme to the support they receive. Induction is satisfactory and includes advice and guidance on equality and diversity and health and safety. Good progression information is given to learners prior to the completion of their qualification. Learners benefit from focused individual key skills support.
- Programme management is very strong. Teamwork is good and supported by a range of relevant training and development. Assessors have clear targets that link closely to learners' success. They work very closely with employers to monitor learners' progress. Elmfield has planned the development of the existing programme well, taking into account learners' differing ability levels and the business needs of local employers.
- The safeguarding of learners is given a high priority and arrangements for safeguarding are good. All appropriate staff have completed CRB checks and training in safeguarding. Good use is made of links with external organisations to provide support.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners have an appropriate knowledge of bullying and harassment and know who to contact if they have any concerns about the way they are treated. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is at least satisfactory, but assessors do not record discussions about equality during progress reviews in sufficient detail.
- Self-assessment arrangements are satisfactory and the self-assessment report is broadly accurate in identifying strengths and some of the areas for improvement. Staff and employers make a good contribution to the self-assessment report.

What does Elmfield Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Fully record the discussions on equality and diversity, health and safety, and safeguarding topics during progress reviews to develop learners' knowledge and understanding further.
- Ensure that there are opportunities to develop learners' written skills further so that they are able to progress into other customer service roles.

- Ensure expert witness testimonies are sufficiently personalised to confirm individual competence and that the assessment record for the technical certificate units is accurate.

Information about the inspection

24. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by Elmfield's operations director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of Elmfield's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
25. 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)**Elmfield Training 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		
Full-time learners	26,654	26,654
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
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	3	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?	3	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	4	
Leadership and management	3	3
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>	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?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
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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Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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