

# Skills Training UK Ltd

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		17-21 September 2012
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-Grade 3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-Grade 3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-Grade 3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-Grade 3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-Grade 3

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider requires improvement because:

- Overall success rates for business administration learners were satisfactory in 2010/11 but the rate at which learners completed their programmes within planned timescales, while improving over time, remained low. However, learners' current progress towards completion is now generally in line with expectations; learners are enjoying their programmes and employers are positive about the impact of the apprenticeship.
- The range and depth of learning is not sufficiently broad, although learners' practical skills do improve. More teacher training and a wider range of resources are required to enhance learning and encourage the development of independent learning, notably by learners on advanced level programmes.
- Initial assessment and diagnostic testing are not linked to individual learners' literacy and numeracy or key skills development.
- Leadership and management developments in the practice of self-assessment and quality improvement action planning are very much work in progress. The evaluation and improvement of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been insufficient.

#### This provider has the following strengths:

- Skills Training UK's strong and focused operational and strategic management has ensured the company has been able to undergo very substantial organisational change and achieve ambitious redevelopment plans that include a range of new Access to Apprenticeship programmes to better complement the existing employer provision.

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## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Enhance learning by better exploiting the skills and ideas of current staff, through training for staff without a teaching qualification, and better identification and sharing of good practice between assessors.
- Develop the content and use of training and reference materials to support teaching, learning and assessment, and in particular help all learners achieve their full potential by encouraging more independent learning, particularly on advanced-level programmes.
- Expand the detail of progress reviews to ensure that all learners and employers are clear about the overall programme structure and the likely sequence and completion dates of the various elements so they may take more control of their learning.
- Use the results of diagnostic testing of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills to inform and plan individual learning, particularly the development of English, mathematics and functional skills.
- Rapidly develop and implement the rigorous self-assessment and systematic quality improvement system already identified by Skills Training UK as central to the foundation of its future quality improvement actions and planning, including the introduction of a rigorous observation of teaching, learning and assessment system to support individual and collective improvement of practice.
- Implement a systematic and confidential method of regularly collecting, analysing and responding to learners' and employers' views of their experience of the quality of the programme to complement the currently largely informal approach.

## Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In 2011/12, the first full year of the new business administration apprenticeship programme, data indicate that the overall profile of learners' success rates is in line with national rates overall, but low for those completing within their planned timescale. In the same period, learners aged 25 and over on intermediate programmes had significantly lower success rates than intermediate learners aged 19 to 24. Learners on the improving operational performance programme have not yet finished their course, but most appear to be progressing satisfactorily.</li> <li>■ Inappropriately short timescales for completion were set for learners when Skills Training UK (STUK) began offering the apprenticeship programme. The approach to the setting of timescales has since been revised to be more realistic and achievable, but any impact is not yet visible through the data available.</li> <li>■ The relatively small number of advanced apprentices have better success rates than intermediate apprentices. The numbers of learners completing in this period were otherwise too small to allow a meaningful analysis of the performance of differing groups by their ethnicity and gender.</li> <li>■ STUK's Train to Gain programme, completed by summer 2011, had persistently low success rates for learners completing within their planned timescale but generally satisfactory overall success rates.</li> <li>■ All learners are already in employment and employers are increasingly recognising that the apprenticeship programme is having a positive impact on their business with examples of staff being given positions of increased responsibility.</li> </ul>	

- The majority of business administration learners effectively develop and then apply new professional and personal skills in the workplace. Learners on improving operational performance programmes also develop their employment skills well and assist effectively in enhancing their employers’ business through some innovative projects. For instance, learners have helped increase efficiency at one employer by demonstrating that one employee’s good operational practice could be applied company-wide to speed up a basic process.
- The progress towards completion being made by the majority of business administration learners is good, but a small minority of learners had not had a visit from an assessor in the two summer months prior to the inspection which hindered their progress. Although the apprenticeship programme is relatively new, a number of business administration learners have already progressed onto higher level qualifications. Learners on improving operational performance apprenticeship programmes are making satisfactory progress.

**The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Requires improvement

- Separate STUK assessor teams provide coaching and support to business administration and improving operational performance learners, and there are strong similarities in the respective teams’ areas of strength and aspects which require improvement. Strengths lie mainly in the depth and flexibility of support provided to learners, founded mainly on close working relationships and a good knowledge of each learner’s business, while close links are maintained with most employers.
- Inspectors saw examples of assessors’ effective coaching, but teaching and learning practice lacks depth and breadth, with too little exploration of theory and management practice to help all learners achieve their full potential. The resources already available to assessors and learners require further development and use, not just to support learning outside of formal sessions but also to help develop independent learning.
- Assessors’ use of questioning and discussion with learners to explore unfamiliar themes and subjects is not well developed. Assessors’ written feedback to learners frequently lacks depth and detail and learners do not always know how to improve.
- Learners and employers have a generally good understanding of the content of their programmes, although not all are sufficiently clear on what needs to be done, or when, in order to achieve within planned timescales. Initial assessment and diagnostic testing are not being used to identify how best to develop learners’ English, mathematics and key skills.
- Equality and diversity are promoted adequately during learners’ progress reviews with assessors.

**Engineering**

Apprenticeships  
Learning programmes for 19+

Requires improvement

- STUK assessors focus strongly on ensuring that learners acquire and apply relevant skills and knowledge which are then used to make improvements in their working practice. Most learners are making at least adequate progress and many employers interviewed by inspectors stated that, where learners had instigated improvements in the workplace, the impact was generally good. Learning programmes are very carefully planned and often tailored closely to meet the needs of particular employers.
- Assessors provide effective coaching and support to learners, responding quickly to learners’ queries with helpful responses and ensuring that the timings of their visits fit with learners’ schedules. Project work is planned well to reflect the context of learners’ experience and workplaces. Assessors provide effective assistance to learners whose first language is not English and who have difficulty comprehending technical vocabulary.

- STUK has developed some good self-learning materials which are distributed on computer disc. These are valued and used frequently by learners outside of formal learning sessions to help them answer knowledge-based questions. Assessors use good quality teaching packs to develop learners’ knowledge for the formal delivery of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units.
- Whilst assessors work closely with learners to develop their knowledge and skills, some aspects of teaching and learning require improvement. One workshop session observed was dominated by the assessor with little opportunity for interaction, and in another there was too little discussion about unfamiliar themes in a set of questions in a workbook and learners were simply steered towards correct answers. Assessors’ written feedback in portfolios was often too brief.
- The outcomes of an initial assessment of learners’ literacy and numeracy skills are used effectively to predict if applicants are likely to succeed on their chosen programme. However, the outcomes of subsequent diagnostic tests are not discussed with learners to identify individual learning needs and develop individuals’ literacy and numeracy, or to influence the delivery and assessment of the key skills elements of the programme.
- Assessors check learners’ progress against previously set targets and new targets set for the period ahead which are mostly specific, measurable and time bound. Assessors’ reviews of learners’ progress observed did not include a clear measurement or indication of each learner’s progress against where they should be at that particular stage in their programme.
- Whilst employers are briefed on the outcomes of assessors’ reviews with learners they are not always directly involved in the process. Assessors are able to record clearly when each element is completed, but some employers and learners are not sufficiently clear about their learners’ progress on the programme, what they need to do and when to complete a full unit or meet the overall planned completion date.
- Learners receive a thorough initial briefing about their apprenticeship at the beginning of the programme. Similarly thorough briefings are provided for employers. Employers and learners have a sound understanding of the programme.
- Assessors promote equality and diversity adequately during learners’ progress reviews using pre-prepared reference sheets and prompts for questions and answers. Relevant topics are covered during induction and a well-produced student handbook includes clear statements about equality and diversity practice. Assessors do not have access to data on the relative performance of different groups of learners in their caseload.

**Business, Administration and Law**

Apprenticeships

Learning programmes for 19+

Requires improvement

- Learners are achieving and making appropriate progress relative to their personal learning goals and career aspirations, although not all learners complete within their planned timescale.
- Employers value the effect of the training on the performance of learners in their work and many employers identified positive impacts on their business. Learners enjoy their programmes and a reasonable proportion of those who have completed their course have progressed on to further apprenticeship programmes, promotion or a change of job roles within their organisation.
- Effective coaching by assessors enables learners to develop useful and relevant employability skills such as management techniques, business planning and effective customer service. Programmes support the development of learners’ communication skills, particularly in team

leading and management, and have been at the heart of some instances of business development and improvement. Feedback to learners is generally constructive and the range of knowledge and skills being taught is adequate to meet the basic requirements of the framework.

- Assessors are not challenging or supporting learners sufficiently to develop a broader knowledge and understanding of work and employment. Fundamentally, the programme relies too heavily on an assessment-only model with limited training beyond the confines of the framework to extend wider knowledge and understanding, particularly of business and management theory. The teaching resources available to support the training of new business concepts and theory are limited.
- Learners' folders of work are mostly well organised and they support learners' progress and tracking against the framework, but the format is too formulaic and does not inspire individual expression or thinking.
- Assessors set high expectations of learners and in the better sessions actively involve employers in the planning and setting of targets. Assessors visit regularly, often timing their visits to match learners' schedules and are easily contactable between sessions. Assessors have good up-to-date and relevant vocational knowledge, and act as role models.
- All learners complete timely initial and diagnostic assessment, including skills scans and learning styles questionnaires. However, the results of initial assessment, such as the diagnostic results for literacy and numeracy, are not routinely used to inform the learning programme, to identify additional support requirements such as dyslexia or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), to plan delivery or identify suitable teaching and learning resources.
- STUK has recently recruited a specialist functional skills tutor who provides appropriate additional support to a small number of learners following referrals from assessors. The process for referring learners and the methods of support being used are under development and the full potential impact of this initiative has yet to be either evaluated or realised.
- Assessors' completion of standardised documentation lacks consistency. Written comments to support and clarify learners' progress throughout their programme is scant. Marked work and other written work from learners often contain insufficient feedback from assessors to support the development of learners' literacy and language skills.
- Advice and guidance for learners are sufficient to ensure they are enrolled on an appropriate programme at the right level. Recent changes in enrolment practice are ensuring a more timely allocation of learners to assessors, helping to overcome some less-than-timely inductions in the recent past.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is adequate. Learners and assessors explore a set topic during reviews and discuss its application in the workplace, for example bullying and harassment. In the better sessions observed this supported learners' understanding of equality and diversity and their practical application at work.
- The range of additional resources to support teaching and learning is insufficiently broad to reflect the diverse range of individual learning styles. Assessors do not have access to data reports identifying any differences in achievements between groups of learners in order that they may recognise and plan for potential obstacles to learning and achievement.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- STUK has experienced a highly turbulent operating period over the past 18 months, during which time its strong and focused strategic management has made very substantial organisational changes whilst achieving ambitious redevelopment plans. A range of new

programmes is now being introduced, most complementing the ongoing apprenticeship programme. Its very recent Access to Apprenticeships programme shows some promising early success with four of its eleven starters gaining employment by only halfway through their six-week programme.

- STUK is in a transition period which has occupied significant senior management time and energy. Consequently, the apprenticeship programme has not been subject to full-scale or systematic continuous improvement. Nevertheless, STUK has been well aware that a number of aspects of the programme require improvement and has implemented some appropriate initiatives.
- There has been a good focus on improving elements of teaching and learning, including recruiting new, well-qualified assessors and a functional skills specialist, developing some new teaching and learning resources, and revising the way in which learning is planned to provide greater flexibility and tailored programmes. However, there has been insufficient focus on evaluating and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- Appropriate professional development has been provided for staff following performance reviews against set targets. However, planned teacher training for the minority of assessors who do not have appropriate qualifications has been slow in its implementation. Rigorous performance management of assessors' effectiveness in the field is hindered by the lack of a suitably evaluative formal teaching, learning and assessment observation system.
- STUK is completing the introduction of a new management information system. The data now available are fit for purpose and are extending significantly STUK's ability to produce detailed performance management and monitoring analysis and reports on learners' progress and achievement. Its plans to further develop online learner tracking and introduce electronic portfolios for learners are at an early stage.
- STUK recognises that self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements are a key area for improvement. STUK has very crisply identified what it needs to do to improve self-assessment and quality improvement planning against the Common Inspection Framework 2012, but has not yet started to do so. Previous self-assessment reports focused heavily on business process and programme delivery arrangements, but lacked sufficient evaluation of teaching and learning.
- STUK assessors work very closely with learners, and senior managers maintain close working relationships with employers; communications between them are very good. Learners and employers are generally very happy with the programmes and any concerns are dealt with promptly; however, STUK does not have any formal, systematic means in place to gather and respond to learners' or employers' views which might help promote improvement. An online learner survey was quickly conducted during the course of the inspection, the feedback analysed and the outcomes useful, but it is the first of its kind.
- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. The few disclosures by learners have been managed well. The designated person and assessors require update training.
- Equality and diversity arrangements are generally adequate. STUK's policies, handbooks, procedures and reviews are all fit for purpose. However, a lack of detailed historical data means that a comparative analysis of the performance of differing groups by a range of criteria is not possible and no equality and diversity impact measures have been set.

### Record of Main Findings (RMF 2012)

**Skills Training UK**  
**Learning types:**  
**Apprenticeships**

<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider’s performance:</b> 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	Apprenticeships
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3

Subject areas graded for quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Engineering</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Business administration and law</b>	<b>3</b>

## Provider details

<b>Provider name</b>	
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17-21 September 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Nicholas Crombie HMI
<b>Type of provider</b>	<b>Independent learning provider</b>
<b>Age range of learners</b>	19+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	380 in 2010/11
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Mr Martin Dunford
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	November 2010
<b>Website address</b>	www.skillstraininguk.com

<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>				
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<b>Total number of full-time learners excluding apprenticeships</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Apprenticeship level</b>				
	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Higher</b>	
<b>Number of apprentices</b>	232	86	N/A	
<b>Age of full-time learners</b>				
	<b>14-16</b>	<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>	
<b>Total by age</b>	N/A	12	306	
<b>Number of part-time learners</b>	<b>N/A</b>			
<b>Number of main sites</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)			
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following subcontractors:<sup>1</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ None</li> </ul>			

<sup>1</sup> The main subcontractors only



## Additional socio-economic information

Skills Training UK Ltd's (STUK) head office is based in Wembley, West London. It offers apprenticeship programmes to learners based in companies around the coastal and central areas of the south east of England, much of London and as far north as Tamworth in the West Midlands. The large majority of learners are adults, and over half are aged over 25. Approximately half of learners are female. Around two thirds of current learners are from a White British ethnic background and about a quarter are of Indian or Pakistani heritage.

## Information about this inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Director of Skills, as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements on a range of programmes over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews to gather the views of learners and employers. These views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Subject inspectors looked in detail at a sample of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in programmes for Improving Operational Performance (engineering) and various programmes including customer service and team leading within business administration and law.

## What inspection judgements mean

Provider		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding provider is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its learners' needs. This ensures that learners are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good provider is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its learners' needs. Learners are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A provider that requires improvement is performing less well than it might be reasonably expected in one or more of the key areas. This provider will receive a full inspection 12-18 months after the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A provider that is inadequate is one where the provider is failing to give its learners an acceptable standard of education and/or training and the provider's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the provider. This provider will receive a re-inspection within 12-15 months after the date of this inspection.

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