

Steadfast Training Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58277

Name of lead inspector: Gerard McGrath HMI

Last day of inspection: 24 August 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Steadfast Training operates from three locations; Spalding in Lincolnshire, Peterborough in Cambridgeshire and Kings Lynn in Norfolk. Two directors own and run the company. Since starting in 2005, it has grown rapidly. Steadfast Training contracts with the Skills Funding Agency for the provision of Train to Gain programmes, apprenticeship training and very recently adult skills training related to employability. Government funded training accounts for almost all of the company's business.
2. Steadfast Training offers training currently in health and social care, food manufacturing technology, leadership and management, business administration and information technology (ICT). Most training is delivered in the workplace. The majority of the provision is in the health and social care sector, in East Midlands and East of England regions.
3. The number of learners has greatly increased since the previous inspection. Of the 677 learners currently 299 are on a Train to Gain programme, 139 are working towards a Diploma in health and social care and 43 are following a business administration programme. Apprenticeship programmes in health and social care and business administration and law account for 215 learners, and 34 learners are on employability programmes.
4. At the previous inspection in August 2008 outcomes for learners were judged to be good. The health and social care programmes, leadership and management, the quality of the provision and the arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory, while the provider's capacity to make improvements was inadequate.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider:
 - Astute Minds (customer service)
 - Workforce Development and Training (food manufacturing)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	350 learners 225 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 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Health, public services and care	3
Business administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

6. Steadfast is a satisfactory provider of work-based learning. It has maintained the satisfactory quality of the provision and good outcomes for learners since the previous inspection. Success rates on Skills for Life and NVQ only courses are high. The great majority of learners make good progress and complete their programmes within the planned time. Learners enjoy their training. Many learners go on to higher levels of training or gain promotion at work.
7. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Individual coaching from workplace assessors as well as the training provided directly by employers in the workplace are effective and help learners to develop good occupational and work-related skills. Training and assessment are adequately planned and learning resources are satisfactory, but assessors make too little use of ICT to support learning. Steadfast's programmes meet the needs of learners and employers well.
8. The range of programmes, development and career progression routes appropriately meet the needs and interests of learners.

9. Steadfast works effectively with employers and funding bodies to promote learning that meets national and regional priorities to provide useful training which supports the personal and social development of learners.
10. The care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Steadfast staff provide effective individual programmes of support, especially for those with social barriers to learning and employment. Little use is made of the results of initial assessments to plan support for individual learners.
11. Leaders and managers promote ambition satisfactorily and maintain good outcomes for all groups of learners. Data analysis has improved since the previous inspection, to provide better oversight of the provision. However, planning for the introduction of new programmes is insufficient to ensure a consistent, high quality of provision for all learners.
12. Steadfast makes satisfactory use of the feedback collected from employers and learners to make improvements to the provision. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory, but two key staff posts are vacant and not all planned actions have been carried out. Self-assessment processes are well established.

Main findings

- Success rates on the majority of courses are high as are the proportions of business administration learners who achieve in the planned duration of their training. Achievement rates of qualifications on employability related courses are very high. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these programmes.
- Learners enjoy their training, progress well and develop good occupational skills. Business administration learners take on additional workplace tasks and responsibilities. Learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills satisfactorily. The standard of learners' work is good and many gain promotion at work or progress to higher levels of training.
- Learners feel safe at work, understand their rights and responsibilities well and the large majority demonstrate appropriate, safe working practices. Learners on health and social care programmes act as effective advocates for the vulnerable people in their care.
- Most training and assessment sessions are well-planned to meet the needs of most learners. However, teaching is insufficiently challenging for more able learners. Assessment is increasingly supported by the use of ICT but assessors use a limited range of assessment methods. The quality of assessment is poor for a small number of learners.
- The outcomes of initial assessment are not recorded on individual learning plans and are used insufficiently to support planning to meet the needs of individual learners. Few formal progress reviews involve employers sufficiently. Assessors have not held formal progress reviews with a small number of

learners. Coordination of all parts of apprenticeship frameworks is insufficient and links with employer provided training is inadequate.

- The provision meets the needs of employers very well. Qualifications are well matched to learners' job roles and employers' business objectives. Many employers provide very useful additional training for learners. Assessor visits are well planned to meet workload demands and learners' child care and personal circumstances.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are effective. Assessors provide useful pastoral support to learners and help them to cope with the joint demands of working and learning. Learners clearly understand their potential career progression routes. Some business administration and law learners are on programmes at too low a level for their needs.
- Directors give clear direction to the development of the provision and are responsive to changing demands of employers and funding bodies. The provider has introduced successfully a number of new programmes since the previous inspection. However, their planning for the introduction of new programmes has not ensured that appropriate quality improvement arrangements are in place, particularly in subcontracted provision.
- Safeguarding arrangements exceed current government requirements. Learners' concerns and questions are responded to well. Links with the local safeguarding board and other specialist practitioners are well established. However, Steadfast relies on self-declaration of concerns by learners and has not yet introduced robust arrangements to identify their most vulnerable learners.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. There are no significant gaps in the achievement rates of different groups of learners. Learners on health and social care programmes often develop a good understanding of relevant equality and diversity topics. However, equality and diversity is not sufficiently reinforced with all learners during formal progress reviews.
- Good working relationships with employers and learners are used well to make improvements. Employers' views are collected by either questionnaire or during assessor visits. Very careful analysis is undertaken of their views and swift programme adjustments are made. Steadfast is very responsive to requests for improvement.
- Insufficient actions relating to quality assurance of the provision are carried out. A significant proportion of quality assurance activities have not been completed in the months preceding this inspection due to staff absence and vacancies. Planned observations of assessors work have not been carried out omitted. Directors give insufficient priority to monitoring the quality of subcontracted provision.

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

- Overcome the variation in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through the promotion of examples of best practices identified by the consistent application of rigorous observations of teaching and assessment, including subcontracted provision.
- Ensure the outcomes of initial assessment are used appropriately to plan a wider range of teaching and assessment strategies that meet the individual needs of learners, including their literacy, language and numeracy skills.
- Ensure that formal progress reviews are carried out at the planned intervals, that they include employers and support the accurate setting and monitoring of learning objectives.
- When introducing new programmes ensure that quality improvement arrangements, evaluations of effectiveness and success measures are agreed during the planning process to support improved monitoring of all aspects of performance.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What users like:

- improving their confidence at work
- developing the skills needed to progress their careers
- developing the knowledge they require to better understand their job roles
- assessors who are reliable and knowledgeable
- the flexibility of assessment to accommodate their shift patterns and their availability
- the quality of coaching and support from assessors
- being treated as adults
- learning how to access learning resources and materials online
- the use of voice recording for evidence collection.

What users would like to see improved:

- more time in the work place for evidence collection, coaching and assessment
- opportunities to learn in groups
- wider range of opportunities to build evidence for their portfolios.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- that their business needs are met and learners benefit from training
- well organised and very reliable assessors
- the flexibility of assessors and support visits to fit in with care home schedules
- staff achieving qualifications
- being involved in the learning process
- the good communication with assessors.

What employers would like to see improved:

- to be included in planning assessor visits
- occasional group teaching sessions
- to meet Steadfast managers
- more opportunities to feed back about the quality of the programmes.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

13. Steadfast has improved the provision over time. Senior managers have maintained the good outcomes for learners during a period of substantial change for the company. Steadfast's strategic and improvement plans provide an effective framework for improvement and include appropriate performance and quality improvement actions. Steadfast has made satisfactory progress towards achieving these targets. The appropriate learning resources are used satisfactorily to support learning. Outcomes for learners remain good. A high proportion of learners achieve their learning objectives while developing good work-related skills.
14. Managers use self-assessment effectively as a quality improvement tool. They make satisfactory use of their arrangements to consult with learners, employers and other staff to evaluate accurately and improve the provision. Most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, including the safeguarding arrangements, management information system and data analysis have improved.
15. Managers and staff make good use of their intimate knowledge of individual learners' and their comments to make adjustments to the training programme. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The coaching and support by employers is effective in helping learners to progress and achieve. Staff assess the learning and support needs of learners accurately. The recording and use of the results of initial assessments to support planning of individualised learning support is inadequate to support the more able learners achieve more quickly by building on their prior levels of learning and abilities.
16. Managers identify clearly the need for greater oversight of all programmes, including subcontracted provision. However, two quality-related staff posts are vacant and many quality assurance actions have not been carried out in the months running up to this inspection.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

17. Success rates on Skills for Life programmes are consistently high at around 94% for the two years leading up to this inspection. Success rates on NVQ only programmes have also risen steadily and are high at both level 2 and 3. The proportion of those who gain their qualifications within the planned duration of their training has also risen steadily, although not as quickly.
18. Success rates for the largest groups of apprentices are above national averages, as are the proportions of these learners who achieve during the planned duration of their training. While apprenticeships in manufacturing technology and ICT programmes also had high success rates, none of the very

small numbers of learners working towards apprenticeships in hospitality and catering programmes achieved their qualifications.

19. All learners on the recently introduced employability-related programmes have gained their intended qualifications. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these programmes in helping learners into employment.
20. Current learners make good progress and the proportion of those completing within their planned duration in the current year has improved further. Learners enjoy their learning and demonstrate good work-related skills, standards of written work and improved confidence at work. Learners feel safe and enjoy their learning.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

21. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is satisfactory. Individual coaching in workplaces is very effective. Accommodation and learning resources in training centres are satisfactory. Formal group sessions for those on employability skills programmes do not meet the needs of all learners as the learning activities are not differentiated sufficiently.
22. Assessment is fair and increasingly supported by the use of ICT but assessors make use of a limited range of assessment methods. Assessment practice varies considerably. In a small number of cases assessors coach learners to provide written answers to questions. Formal progress reviews do not involve employers sufficiently. Coordination of all parts of apprenticeship frameworks is insufficient to make best use of links with training provided by employers.
23. The provision meets the needs of learners and of employers well. Qualifications are well-mapped to learners' job roles and employers' business objectives. Many employers provide very useful additional training and supervision for learners. Workplace assessments are well planned to meet workload demands and avoid disruption to businesses.
24. Partnerships are satisfactory. Those with employers are strong and benefit learners well. Communication is very effective, frequent informal meetings between assessors and employers maintain a close focus on learning and ensure that learners receive the support that they require. Assessors work particularly well with work place supervisors to ensure that training meets their needs and those of their customers.
25. Care, guidance and support for learners is effective. Learners are typically aware of career and training development routes. Learners receive advice about their courses at the start of their training, but, some business administration and law learners are on programmes which are at too low a level for their needs.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

26. Directors and managers provide effective leadership in all aspects of Steadfast's work. They have communicated the purposes of the provision and their ambition for learners to staff and employers effectively and provide strong direction for the company, linked clearly to national and regional priorities. Directors and senior managers have managed the successful introduction of new qualifications and frameworks since the previous inspection, while maintaining good outcomes for learners and the satisfactory quality of training. However, the quick development of additional courses is not supported by the inclusion of robust quality monitoring and improvement arrangements.
27. Operational management of training programmes is satisfactory. Managers and staff use management information satisfactorily to monitor learners' and staff performance and to plan provision. Managers and staff regularly review the performance of learners and the effectiveness of the support that they receive.
28. Steadfast has improved the safeguarding arrangements for learners significantly since the previous inspection and they exceed current government requirements. Steadfast undertakes criminal records bureau checks on all new staff. Relevant policies and arrangements are in place for safeguarding. Learners have an appropriate understanding of issues and all have received sufficient training in using the internet safely. In particular health and social care learners demonstrate good awareness of the need to protect the vulnerable people in their work settings.
29. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. All staff receive adequate training and development on the relevant company policies and procedures. Learners also develop an appropriate understanding of equality and diversity issues relevant to their work roles, especially in regard to the support requirements of people with disabilities. However, assessors discuss and reinforce these issues insufficiently during formal reviews.
30. Steadfast has appropriate arrangements to collect the views of learners, employers and staff to support improvements to the provision. Managers use surveys to evaluate the provision. Managers and staff have a clear, informal understanding of learners' views and respond quickly to any comments or suggestions.
31. Quality assurance is inadequate because quality assurance-related staff vacancies mean that managers have insufficient accurate information about the current provision to plan improvements effectively. Insufficient observations of teaching, learning and assessment are being carried out to inform managers about the training. Steadfast has robust and appropriate quality assurance arrangements which are not applied currently. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the report broadly accurate.

32. Steadfast manages its resources well and provides satisfactory value for money. Managers use appropriate strategies for performance management and quality improvement. Steadfast manages risk well. It adequately monitors the effectiveness of its provision and reacts effectively to changes in national, regional and local priorities. Resources are generally satisfactory but insufficient use of information technology and key staff vacancies are affecting the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Health, public services and care

Grade 3

Context

33. At the time of inspection there are 273 learners of whom 129 are working towards Diplomas in health and social care at level 2 and 10 at level 3. Some 88 are on intermediate apprenticeships and 42 are working towards advanced apprenticeships. No health and social care delivery is subcontracted to other providers. All training and assessment is delivered in the workplace. The majority of learners are female.

Key findings

- Success rates on NVQ only programmes have improved steadily since the previous inspection and are good. The proportion of those who complete during the planned duration of their training has also steadily improved and was above the national average in 2010/11. Success rates for the few learners on apprenticeship programmes were low in 2010/11, but have improved significantly in the first months of the current academic year.
- Learners enjoy learning. They make good progress and attain their planned learning goals. The quality of learners' written work and their ability to demonstrate their improved care skills and understanding of theoretical principles is good. Learners improve and make satisfactory progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Learners make significant improvements to their economic and social well-being through learning. Learners increase their employability and benefit from the additional training and qualifications provided by their employers. Most learners develop increased confidence. Many receive work promotions and are given increased responsibility and higher pay upon gaining their qualification.
- Learners feel safe at work. They adopt safe working practices and in almost all instances, have good awareness of health and safety guidance and procedures. The vast majority of learners have a good understanding of their responsibilities in creating a safe environment in a variety of work settings. Learners show high levels of respect for each other, service users and the wider-community.
- The quality of training and assessment is satisfactory. Staff have high levels of skills and expertise and provide effective assessment, information and support services for learners. Technology is used increasingly effectively to record progress and collect evidence of learning. However, the majority of assessors use a narrow range of assessment methods.
- Progress reviews are satisfactory. Assessors ensure learners have a good understanding of their progress and what they need to do to improve. Individual learning plans are not adequately supported by the results of initial assessment and targets do not address individual needs or wider learning goals sufficiently. Most employers support learning well although few are involved actively in planning and reviewing learners' progress.

- Resources for learning are satisfactory. However, a few assessors do not sufficiently encourage learners to access additional materials and resources to extend their learning and promote the development of independent learning and research skills.
- The provision meets the needs and interests of users well. Assessors advise employers and learners on the appropriate academic units, qualification levels and assessment opportunities that are relevant to their work and career goals. Provision is planned to provide coherent progression routes wherever possible. The vast majority of partnerships with employers are good. Learning opportunities are frequently identified and promoted to motivate learners and support success. Assessment visits are flexible to suit learners' and employers' needs.
- The care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to attain their learning goals is satisfactory, however support for literacy and numeracy skills is not sufficiently well planned to meet the needs of all learners. Assessors provide good individual care and support which helps learners achieve their potential. Most learners receive appropriate and timely information, advice and guidance on their next steps in training, education and employment.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff are well supported and share the vision of the company in striving to ensure all learners succeed. New initiatives and management strategies are clear and staff understand their roles and responsibilities.
- The majority of assessors promote equality and diversity well by encouraging learners to respect the dignity, and support the independence, of vulnerable people receiving care services.
- Quality improvement arrangements are firmly focused on improving success rates by identifying slow progress. However, few planned observations of assessors at work have not been carried out. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate.

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

- Better meet individual learners' needs by ensuring results from initial assessment are used more effectively to plan learning and assessment of all parts of apprenticeship frameworks, including links to employer provided training and support for literacy, language, numeracy and wider functional skills.
- Improve learning by encouraging assessors to increase their use of ICT to support a broader and more innovative range of learning and assessment methods.
- Ensure that formal progress reviews are carried out at the planned intervals, include employers and support the accurate setting and monitoring of learning objectives.

Business administration and law

Grade 3

Context

34. At the time of inspection 26 learners were working towards business administration and 66 on customer service qualifications. Of these, 34 were on intermediate apprenticeships and 15 on advanced apprenticeship programmes. Forty three learners are working towards qualifications at levels 2 and 3. All training and assessment is delivered in the workplace. Steadfast subcontracts delivery for a small number of customer service apprentices to one other provider.

Key findings

- Success rates on NVQ at level 2 programmes have improved steadily since the previous inspection and are now high, particularly for business management programmes. The proportion of learners completing during the planned duration of their training has also improved slowly, and is now satisfactory. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes in the first year of their delivery in 2010/11 were high and well above national averages.
- Learners make good progress. Learners work confidently and with appropriate diligence while at work. They have a clear understanding of where they are on the programme and how much more work is required. Records of progress are appropriate and contribute to the improved monitoring of learners' progress. However, formal progress reviews for a small number of learners are not completed at the required intervals and rarely involve the employer.
- The development of learners' occupational skills is good and enhances their economic and social well-being. Employers provide learners with good in-house training and valuable industry qualifications. This is not fully explored during formal progress reviews. Many learners progress to higher levels and gain more responsible workplace positions. The planning and development of functional skills are adequate and enhance learners' employability.
- Learners feel safe and follow safe working practices such as the appropriate use of personal protective equipment. Many learners have undertaken additional health and safety training that relates specifically to their industry. Learners are very clear about the risks and hazards in their workplaces and with any equipment or materials they use.
- Training is satisfactory. In the better training sessions learners take an active role in the learning process. For example, they use their initiative to link the subject content to work tasks. Individual coaching in the workplace is very effective. The individual needs and abilities of learners are given appropriate consideration. However, more able learners are insufficiently stretched and challenged.
- Assessment is satisfactory. The blend of assessment by direct observation, job records and other methods is appropriate and meets awarding body

requirements. However, some assessment practice is too rigid and fails to identify opportunities for additional learning. Assessment practice in subcontractor provision is poor.

- Employer engagement is good. The provider works well with employers to identify and support the recruitment of apprentices. In better employers managers take an active role in learners' progress and development. They have a good understanding of the learning programme and expectations. Many opportunities are provided for learners to enhance their skills.
- Support for learners is effective and appropriate to their individual needs. In particular, learners value the pastoral advice and guidance provided by their assessors. Initial advice and guidance is insufficient with a very small number of learners inappropriately placed on low programme levels. Initial assessment is adequate. However, the results are not used often enough to plan individualised support for learning by relating work tasks to theory.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Operational management is effective at supporting learners make to progress. Monitoring of subcontractors is insufficient to ensure continuity of delivery and quality improvement. Managers have introduced a range of new processes and procedures. However, not all staff are involved in these developments and it is too early to judge their effectiveness.
- Procedures to safeguard learners are effective. All staff have received criminal record bureau clearance and undertaken appropriate training. They have a satisfactory understanding of relevant company policies and procedures.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff promote equality of opportunity in a positive manner and celebrate learner achievements. Learners have an adequate understanding of equal opportunities. However, some learning activities and progress reviews are not used well enough to challenge or develop learners' understanding sufficiently.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and reasonably self-critical. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate, although rather descriptive. Quality assurance activities have not been completed as planned. Too few observations of teaching, learning and assessment have been carried out. The process for the identification and sharing of best practices is underdeveloped.

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

- Overcome the variation in the quality of teaching and assessment through the reinstatement of consistently applied observations of teaching and learning to identify and share examples of best practice.
- Ensure all learners have a timely 12 weekly formal progress reviews which covers all aspects of their programme and actively involves the employer in the setting and monitoring of learning targets.
- Develop the use of the results from initial assessment to inform the detailed advice and guidance linked to employer provided training and support for

literacy, language, numeracy and wider functional skills that ensures all learners are on the correct programme.

Information about the inspection

35. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's operations director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, 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.
36. 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 two of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Steadfast 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	0	0
Part-time learners	677	677
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
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?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<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?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
<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?	2	
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?	4	
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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