

# South West Regional Assessment Centre

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		10–14 June 2013
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider is good because:

- Most learners are successful on programmes that develop their employability, vocational and social skills well.
- A high proportion of learners make good progress and are successful in gaining employment or moving on to further training.
- Staff provide good teaching and learning that supports learners' aspirations to become confident, well-motivated employees well.
- Assessments are well planned and trainers provide learners with detailed written feedback that helps them improve the standard of their work.
- A wide range of work placements builds learners' confidence and capability.
- Senior managers at South West Regional Assessment Centre (SWRAC) respond well to local needs by developing and delivering programmes that are well respected by employers and agencies supporting the unemployed.

#### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Too many learners on a small number of programmes do not achieve their qualification.
- Learners' personal barriers to learning are not systematically identified, recorded and addressed.
- The company's strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further are not yet sufficiently effective.

## Full report

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

- Closely monitor learners' progress on qualification-based courses to ensure a consistently high proportion of them achieve their qualification.
- Identify the causes of achievement gaps between different groups of learners and implement actions that close these.
- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching, learning and assessment by:
  - ensuring that trainers provide sufficient pace and challenge in all learning sessions, sufficient extension activities for more capable learners and effective support for those who find the work too hard
  - setting, monitoring and reviewing targets that help each individual learner overcome their personal barriers to employment
  - focusing observations of teaching, learning and assessment on the impact of teaching on learners' progress and using the outcomes of observations to identify and build on good practice
  - ensuring additional advice and guidance are available throughout the programme.
- Collect information about learners' employment in the months following their programme and use this information to improve courses so that an even higher proportion of learners gain employment.
- Introduce quality improvement activities, and systems to evaluate the impact of such activities, that consistently improve the learners' experiences.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- Over the last three years most learners have been successful in achieving their qualification. Learners on workplace learning programmes, the largest part of the company's provision, have been particularly successful. In 2011/12, SWRAC radically, and successfully, altered its provision in order to provide training for the unemployed, prisoners and ex-offenders on programmes consisting of a range of discrete units through which learners develop the skills needed to gain employment. Learners following these programmes are making good progress and a high proportion of those that have completed a course in 2012/13 have achieved the units that make up their programme.
- Most learners complete a small discrete qualification alongside their employment skills programme; an increasing proportion of learners successfully achieve this. However, too few learners on an award in hospitality achieve this qualification.
- A small number of learners take qualifications in English and mathematics, but few pass. The small number of apprentices in 2011/12 did not achieve their apprenticeship, but a high proportion of apprentices in 2012/13 have already successfully completed.
- A higher proportion of females are successful in their qualifications than males and success rates for learners with learning difficulties are particularly low.
- Learners develop very positive attitudes to learning that help them to find work. They develop their self-confidence and respond well to activities to raise their self-esteem. Learners on employability programmes attend very good work experience placements that significantly enhance their employability skills.

- SWRAC provides very good additional opportunities for learners to progress into employment. All learners on hospitality courses are offered a job interview and take additional qualifications that are valued by employers. Ex-offenders are provided with work in the waste recycling industry alongside their course, and other unemployed learners are provided with help through an agency to gain work in the waste disposal industry.
- Learners make good progress into employment once they have completed their programme. This progression is particularly good for learners on hospitality courses. SWRAC's training courses for the unemployed in Dorset are well regarded by other agencies supporting the unemployed. As a result, the number of unemployed learners attending courses at SWRAC has increased considerably between 2010 and 2013. Of a recent cohort of learners referred to SWRAC by Jobcentre Plus for a course in employment skills for the hospitality industry, a high proportion has already secured employment.
- Managers have much good information from learners, employers and other agencies about learners' destinations following their programme, but have not systematically collected comprehensive data on learners' destinations. A recently recruited member of staff now collects this and has had some success in tracking the destinations of learners in 2012/13. However, it is early days and the destinations of too many are still unknown. Managers do not yet sufficiently use the information they obtain to ensure courses improve the chances of an even higher proportion of learners of gaining employment.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and have made a major contribution to the improvement in learners' achievements in classroom-based provision and progression to employment. Learners on hospitality courses benefit from useful pastoral support from committed staff. Learners are well motivated and enjoy their training, with many developing independent learning and employment skills.
- Trainers have high expectations for learners and motivate them well to work towards gaining a range of qualifications and skills, including vocational and personal employability skills, before attending a work experience placement and progressing into employment.
- Most classroom sessions are of a good standard, with much good training leading to good learning. In many sessions learners participate enthusiastically in a wide range of well-conceived, and often creative, activities. These capture their imagination and enable them to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of the industry. However, no examples of inspirational teaching were observed by inspectors.
- In the better sessions, trainers effectively use probing questions that check and further learners' understanding. Learners often work collaboratively and productively in small groups or pairs. For example, each group of learners on the hospitality course prepares and serves a meal for members of the public, who pay according to the service and quality of the meal. Diners are very complimentary about these events. Trainers make the most of discussions and group work to enliven and extend learning. Managers in the Bournemouth training centre recognise the importance of sharing and developing trainers' skills and hold a useful weekly meeting to share good practice and discuss different ways of working.
- In weaker sessions, trainers do not clearly tell learners what they should achieve; some learning activities are poorly structured and sessions lack pace and purpose. A small number of learners become disengaged and distracted. In a small minority of sessions, teaching fails to stretch and challenge the most able learners or effectively support those who are struggling.
- Learning resources are appropriate and meet the needs of learners. In the hospitality training, learners gain experience in using industrial and professional cooking and food preparation equipment. Computers and other technology-based resources are available and used effectively,

for example when learners carry out research or write menus and curricula vitae. However, not all classrooms have ready access to electronic resources.

- Initial assessment is partially effective. A relevant range of measures determines learners' starting points and suitability for their training with an appropriate initial and diagnostic assessment of their English and mathematics skills. However, gaps in personal social skills and individual obstacles to employment are not systematically identified and recorded at the start of learning to enable staff to help individuals overcome these barriers before the end of the training programme.
- Assessments are well planned and managed and feedback on learners' written work is timely, detailed and helps them make improvements to individual pieces of work. However, spelling and grammatical errors are not always identified by trainers. Assessment practice in work and vocational areas is good and clearly demonstrates learners have met the qualification requirements and learning goals. However, learners whose first language is not English do not receive the specialist support they need.
- Workplace learners in waste management benefit from frequent visits by assessors to conduct assessments of performance. Learners' progress is monitored carefully and learners know precisely what they need to do to improve.
- Strong partnerships with local employers provide hospitality learners with confidence-boosting, well-managed work experience placements. These are particularly good at enhancing learners' belief that they have something to offer in the workplace.
- Arrangements for providing learners with initial advice and guidance are good. Learners referred from Jobcentre Plus receive useful guidance on making appropriate choices about training when starting their programme and on subsequent decisions about progression into work or further learning. However, subsequent advice and guidance are not offered at the best time for some learners who have identified specific barriers to employment.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is effectively introduced at induction and often reinforced during taught sessions, but not in apprentices' progress reviews. Trainers improve learners' cultural awareness and understanding of diversity. Learners demonstrate good respect for each other and behave well.

## Hospitality and catering

### Learning programmes for 19+

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which is reflected in learners' high rate of progression to employment and success in achieving units of vocational qualifications. Learners additionally achieve a nationally recognised award in food safety, which learners and employers value, but too few achieve an award in hospitality. Many learners successfully gain employment before the completion of their learning programme.
- Learners who have been unemployed for many months develop good employability skills whilst on the six-week programme. During training, learners develop confidence and improve their self-esteem. They communicate well with each other. In practical events learners work well in teams. Whilst on work placements, learners demonstrate good work ethics, are punctual and demonstrate the necessary motivation to work within busy commercial catering environments.
- Staff provide good support to learners that helps them to achieve their qualifications and secure employment. For example, learners are provided with clothing to wear to job interviews when appropriate, and shower facilities and a washing machine are well used by learners at the

Bournemouth training centre to improve their personal presentation. When appropriate, staff refer learners to external agencies for help with housing and other personal problems.

- Trainers are well qualified and experienced. They use their knowledge well to improve learners’ chances of finding suitable employment in the hospitality industry.
- Learners engage particularly well with interesting theory sessions which develop their confidence to take part in discussions. However, trainers do not always set activities that sufficiently stretch and challenge more able learners.
- Staff work closely with local employers and Jobcentre Plus to identify employment opportunities for learners. Trainers prepare learners well for the job interviews they attend. Learners receive timely advice and guidance on career opportunities whilst on programme and good support when in employment.
- Staff identify learners’ academic support needs appropriately, but information about learners is not always used to ensure support is put in place. Learners complete an appropriate initial assessment of their English and mathematics skills and apprentices complete a further diagnostic assessment. The progress of the very small number of apprentices is insufficiently well recorded and reviews of learning activities in functional skills do not always provide the clear details needed for employers to actively support learners.
- Assessment meets the awarding organisations’ requirements; however, on a small number of occasions, learners’ written answers to questions are not always marked correctly. Verbal feedback in sessions is good, it motivates and encourages learners well. Written feedback on learners’ personal skills, such as using positive body language when serving customers, is good and helps learners to improve. However, feedback on some learners’ written work is very brief and does not always enable learners to identify how they can improve.
- Learners improve their English and mathematics skills well in training sessions. In vocational sessions learners are encouraged to use dictionaries and spell checkers. Learners’ vocabulary is developed well. In a health and safety session learners developed a good understanding of complex language used in legislation and linked this well to hospitality workplaces when discussing health and safety in commercial kitchens. However, learners whose first language is not English do not receive sufficient support to enable them to gain full benefit from the training.
- Learners develop a good understanding of diversity during classroom-based learning sessions, show high levels of respect for each other and value each other’s contributions and opinions. However, apprentices’ understanding and knowledge of equality and diversity are insufficiently well recorded at reviews.

<b>Employability</b>	Good
<b>Learning programmes for 19+</b>	

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and lead to high achievement of vocational qualifications. Learners make very good progress, often from very low starting points, and gain valuable experience in real work situations. They achieve a good range of qualifications valued by employers within their chosen vocational areas.
- Training is good and learners develop the valuable skills they need to be successful in gaining employment. Very good initiatives, in conjunction with potential employers, charitable organisations and Jobcentre Plus, provide realistic training. These ensure learners are effectively prepared to apply for jobs. A good range of work placements, for example in recycling, gives learners very good experience of the industry in which they aim to secure employment.

- Learners develop a broad range of relevant vocational and personal skills which match their future employability needs well. For example, learners working in recycling and waste management work well as a team while producing kindling; they operate machinery safely and enjoy the challenge of developing and packaging new products. All learners considerably improve their employment prospects by searching effectively for jobs, writing curricula vitae, and completing job applications.
- Skilled trainers plan programmes using a good range and variety of learning activities, including practical tasks, which stretch, challenge and motivate learners. Learners in mathematics sessions make small boxes and successfully apply their knowledge of three-dimensional shapes. Novice information technology (IT) learners gain considerable confidence and are quickly successful in logging onto the Jobcentre Plus site to find advertisements for jobs.
- Trainers working with IT learners and the small number of learners aged 16 to 18 plan good lessons that meet the needs of individual learners. Learning resources are clear and well produced and a video on the topic of job interviews engages learners particularly well.
- In some employability courses the planning and management of learning require improvement. In these, learning is too focused on the completion of tasks; more able learners are not set work that stretches them, and some learners who are finding the work difficult do not receive the additional coaching they require. Occasionally, new learners joining a class disrupt the group dynamics, causing some more fragile learners to lose confidence and feel less secure.
- Initial advice and information for prospective learners are good. Learners are well informed and know what to expect from their course. Initial assessment, while clearly identifying additional support needs and qualification targets, does not always identify personal barriers to employment that individual learners may need to overcome. The personal, social or employability skills that learners need to develop are not routinely recorded or systematically reviewed.
- Assessment practice in work and vocational areas is good and assessors are skilled at using questioning to evaluate learning. Trainers ensure that assessment clearly meets the requirements of qualifications and learners receive very good, evaluative feedback on their progress, helping them to gain the knowledge and understanding they need to succeed. However, written work is not always corrected to improve learners’ understanding of basic spelling and grammar.
- Trainers create a safe and welcoming learning environment valued by learners. Trainers give good one-to-one support to learners, both in the workplace and in lessons. Equality and diversity are well promoted at induction, but not always effectively reinforced in training.

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>
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- Leaders and senior managers demonstrate a strong commitment to providing suitable programmes and support that effectively encourage learners’ aspirations and achievement. SWRAC’s directors have successfully established a culture in which learners, including the large number that has very low prior achievement or a history of failure in previous education, are able to achieve.
- Directors and senior managers have instigated and managed major changes to the learning programmes, acquired additional centres and expanded the staff team well. Communication across the company is good. Staff have a clear understanding of the ambitious targets set for learners’ achievements. Managers carefully develop and implement strategies for planning and improving the provision, including making use of other activities embedded in the specialist industries carried out by the company.

- Trainers and assessors are appropriately qualified and most have extensive experience. Staff have access to a relevant range of training and receive good support to improve their performance. Senior managers and directors frequently monitor learners' feedback as part of the company's performance management processes.
- The company's strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further are not sufficiently effective. Lesson observations are insufficiently rigorous. Observers focus too much on teaching and do not sufficiently evaluate how well learners learn and progress. The quality and standard of progress reviews are not sufficiently monitored.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive, with involvement of staff, stakeholders and partners, and includes learners' views, which are largely very positive. However, the self-assessment report and improvement plan are not sufficiently rigorous or detailed to evaluate and analyse the provision fully. SWRAC's arrangements to improve quality have not evolved sufficiently with the significant changes to the programmes and greater number of learners. Much of the quality improvement carried out is informal. The impact of actions to improve quality is not sufficiently monitored.
- Managers have strengthened subcontracting arrangements and improved the monitoring of subcontractors. SWRAC has taken appropriate action to address the poor delivery of subcontracted apprenticeships in 2011/12, and success rates for apprenticeships in the current year have significantly improved.
- Managers analyse and evaluate apprentices' performance, progress and progression and are developing management information systems for the newer employability programmes well. The monitoring of learners' progression is well resourced and is improving.
- Managers plan, implement and manage the curriculum and learning programmes very effectively. These meet the needs and interests of learners, employers and the community particularly well.
- SWRAC has been highly responsive in developing learning programmes that meet government priorities, particularly those that develop learners' employability skills. The company has developed a successful specialist sector programme for hospitality and catering in response to an identified need in the local area.
- Senior managers are highly effective in forging partnerships with other organisations that benefit learners such as on-site access to careers advice and responding quickly to the very high number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus. Programmes are arranged to meet specific learners' needs; for example, for learners who want to progress onto a further education access course.
- The company has very good links with local employers who provide opportunities for learners on hospitality programmes to have guaranteed job interviews and many provide work placements. Employers benefit from the employability skills learners develop at SWRAC.
- Equality and diversity are actively promoted. The company has appropriate policies and procedures that are implemented effectively by learners, staff, employers and subcontractors. Learners' awareness of equality and diversity matters is raised effectively during their induction when learners develop a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. However, equality and diversity are not sufficiently reinforced and extended during learners' progress reviews. It is too early to identify if the recent achievement gaps, for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and male learners, are narrowing.
- SWRAC meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Learners feel safe and training takes place in secure environments. Policies and procedures for safeguarding arrangements are detailed and are well understood by staff who have participated in suitable training. Health and safety procedures are thorough, comprehensive and implemented effectively. Risk is assessed and managed appropriately. However, e-safety is not sufficiently promoted to all learners.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### South West Regional Assessment Centre

<p><b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b></p> <p>1: Outstanding                  2: Good                  3: Requires improvement                  4: Inadequate</p>	<b>Overall</b>	19+ Learning programmes
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Outcomes for learners	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

<b>Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>Hospitality and catering</b>	2
<b>Employability training</b>	2



## Provider details

South West Regional Assessment Centre	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: N/A
	Part-time: 1813
Principal/CEO	Mr A Gunner
Date of previous inspection	8 August 2008
Website address	www.swrac.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Part-time</b>	4	193	0	45	0	1	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	9	13	0	0	0	0		
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ START Transport Training</li> <li>■ BCHA</li> <li>■ Way Ahead Group</li> </ul>							

## Additional socio-economic information

SWRAC is an independent training provider which has been trading since 1996. In the last two years it has decreased its provision of employer-based training for the waste management industry and increased the training it provides for unemployed learners and learners seeking employment in the hospitality industry. SWRAC subcontracts provision to three subcontractors in the North West of England and Dorset. It also delivers training to clients of a number of employers and charitable organisations in the waste and recycling industries. Most learners are in Bournemouth and Dorset where unemployment is lower than the Great Britain average and a high proportion of employment is in distribution, hotels and restaurants.

## Information about this inspection

**Lead inspector**

Steven Tucker HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the managing director 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 over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires 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. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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