

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		25–27 June 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Although the proportion of learners who progress into full-time education or training, an apprenticeship or employment has improved in the past year, it is still too low.
- Classroom-based teaching and learning does not include a sufficiently wide range of activities and learning resources to make it interesting and challenging for all learners.
- Learners have insufficient access to work experience to enable them to develop essential employability skills.
- Learners are not supported sufficiently to improve their English and mathematics and too few achieve qualifications in these essential skills.
- Managers do not use summary data on learner progression or achievement sufficiently well to enable effective monitoring and improvement of performance.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The Foundation Learning provision is highly responsive to local community and individual needs enabling learners to overcome some significant barriers to learning.
- Learners receive very effective personal support that helps them to improve their self-confidence and to develop their personal and social skills well.
- Learners' practical vocational skills are developed well through good one-to-one coaching and well-planned learning opportunities that give them hands-on practical experience in realistic working environments.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve significantly the proportion of Foundation Learners who progress into full-time education or training, apprenticeships or employment.
- Improve the range of activities and learning resources in classroom based lessons to engage and challenge all learners so that they all make good or better progress.
- Provide opportunities for all learners who are ready to undertake work experience so they can improve their employability skills.
- Improve the ability of staff to teach and assess English and mathematics across all programmes so that learners develop these essential skills more effectively and pass their qualifications.
- Develop and improve the use of accurate and detailed management information about learners' individual needs, targets and progress to enable effective monitoring of performance and to identify necessary improvements to the provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Learners enjoy their learning and make good progress in improving their confidence and attitudes to learning. Staff are sensitive to the needs of learners, some of who have significant barriers to learning, enabling them to participate with confidence and improve their self-esteem. However, the proportion of learners who progress to full-time education or training, apprenticeships or employment when they leave Foundation Learning, although improved in the last year, is still too low and requires improvement.
- Most learners develop good vocational skills. For example, a well-planned learning activity to move a polytunnel required horticulture learners to work effectively and collaboratively as a team, improving their employability skills in a practical lesson. Learners in the hairdressing salon gain customer service skills through interaction with clients. However, learners' employability skills in all vocational areas are not developed sufficiently due to a lack of appropriate work placements. Some learners have no work experience.
- Learners are encouraged and supported to make good progress in improving their personal and social skills and the proportion who achieve qualifications that recognise these is high. However, fewer learners successfully achieve vocational qualifications and this is too low on a few courses. For example, in 2011/12 only half of the learners taking a vocational qualification in hairdressing successfully achieved it.
- The progress learners make in improving their English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Learners arrive at Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited (STS) with low prior attainment of these skills. In 2011/12 almost a half of learners who participated in Foundation Learning did not achieve a qualification to demonstrate they made any improvement in these essential skills. Of the learners who left the programme in 2012/13, more passed qualifications in maths than in English where very few achieve a qualification.
- Managers monitor the participation of different groups of learners on courses well. They have introduced a number of strategies that have increased under-represented groups' participation in learning. Inspectors identified no significant differences in the performance of different groups of learners. However, managers and tutors do not have access to sufficient management information to recognise and analyse data quickly if differences in the achievement and progression rates of specific groups of learners occur.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement which reflects outcomes for learners which also require improvement. Although learners make good progress developing their personal and social skills, confidence and practical vocational skills, they do not make sufficient progress developing their English skills and too few progress to full-time education or training, apprenticeships or employment.
- Staff are skilled and experienced at providing very effective pastoral support, that meets learners' individual needs well, and enables them to overcome barriers to learning. Learners benefit from a strong focus on the development of their personal and social skills and they greatly increase in self-confidence. They learn to work well in teams, improve their attendance and behaviour and become more motivated to learn and to achieve their learning goals.
- Learners benefit from some highly motivating practical lessons that develop their vocational skills successfully. Those on horticulture programmes enjoy working at a large allotment where they propagate plants, plant them out, prune and mow, use a good range of tools and gain very useful hands-on experience of the industry. In hairdressing, learners receive good individual coaching and have good opportunities to develop their skills through working with clients in a professional hairdressing salon.
- In the best lessons, both practical and classroom based, learners work productively, focus and make good progress. Learners in mathematics lessons work hard to solve the problems set. Although the work is not always sufficiently well related to their vocational learning, learners make good progress in improving their understanding and skills. These positive learning experiences however, do not always result in success for learners in external qualifications.
- Initial and diagnostic assessments identify clear starting points for learners in all elements of their programmes. However this information is not always sufficiently well recorded and tutors do not always use this knowledge adequately when planning lessons, in order to meet learners' varying individual needs. Some learners do not receive the support they need to enable them to use the internet effectively for independent research.
- In less successful classroom-based lessons, teaching and learning do not include a sufficiently wide range of activities and learning resources, which makes the learning dull and repetitive. Too often learners all work at the same pace and level. More able learners do not always receive sufficient challenge and this slows their progress. Some tutors and learners drink hot and cold drinks during both theory and practical lessons and near to computers, which does not model best practice for learners in their preparation for work.
- Staff and learners use plans that identify learners' individual targets and tasks for the day well, and learners record their own brief evaluations. Reviews of learners' progress are regular and generally well recorded, although it is unclear to learners how these reviews link with the parallel use of individual learning plans, that only identify and record learners' overall learning objectives. Learners' longer term individual targets are often too broad to provide them with sufficient detail on their planned progress.
- The standards of learners' work in some portfolios require improvement. Work is not always completed sufficiently well and a few learners do not make sufficient progress in completing assessed work towards their external qualifications. Tutors do not pay enough attention to marking and correcting learners' work, in order to enable them to be clear about how they can make improvements.
- The development of learners' English skills and particularly their writing skills is insufficient and learners' achievement of qualifications in English is low. Learners' writing is not corrected for punctuation and grammatical errors and they continue making the same mistakes. Although learners benefit from lessons that enable them to focus specifically on their English skills, they do not develop these skills sufficiently through their vocational learning.

- Although learners' practical skills are developed well in realistic working environments in the training centre and at the allotment, their access to work placements is limited. Too few learners have opportunities to gain direct experience in a work place. This impedes the development of their employability skills.
- The quality of initial information, advice and guidance is good, although not always well recorded. A few learners receive additional individual learning support in theory lessons, but staff in this role are not always sufficiently clear how to best utilise their time to enable the learners they should be supporting to make better progress.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff assist learners to develop a good understanding of issues caused by stereotyping and challenge appropriately learners preconceived ideas and behaviours. Learners generally behave well at the training centre and allotment and treat each other with respect. Many learners arrive with complex needs and staff have a good range of skills and support systems which help them to meet learners' individual pastoral needs very effectively.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers are sensitive to the individual needs of learners and the wider local community and communicate this well to staff. They have developed a suitable range of provision and learner support arrangements that enable learners to develop personal and social skills and to improve their confidence significantly. However, leaders and managers do not set sufficiently challenging targets to improve the achievement of learners' qualifications or their progression into further training or employment.
- Managers regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning in workshop and classroom sessions. Although providing an adequate overview of the standard of assessment and some aspects of teaching, judgements focus on tutor activity and procedure rather than the impact this has on learning and the progress it helps learners to make. No judgements are made or feedback provided to tutors about what they need to do to improve the development of learners' English and mathematics skills.
- Managers gather and respond to learners' views well through a variety of approaches, such as a learners' forum. All foundation learners have an allocated personal tutor who knows them well and regularly seeks their views. The managing director is a board member of a local network of learning providers and uses information from this to plan and provide inclusive programmes that respond well to the challenges faced by young people in the local area. However, links with local networks, employers and partnerships have not resulted in increasing sufficiently the number of work experience opportunities for learners.
- Staff who teach on the Foundation Learning programmes, some of who are new to the role, are monitored regularly and receive adequate support to deliver the vocational, and personal and social aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. However, difficulty in recruiting staff with the appropriate levels of English and mathematics skills and slow progress in improving the English and mathematics skills and qualifications of existing staff results in insufficient support for learners to improve these skills. Tutors' written work and feedback in learners' portfolios and reviews often contain spelling, grammar and punctuation errors.
- Managers' understanding of the quality of provision and how to take it forward requires improvement. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process and the current self-assessment report, although brief, does identify accurately the key challenges affecting the provision. However, actions clarifying how these will be addressed are not clear and managers set insufficient targets to measure progress. Some of the areas for improvement identified in the April 2010 inspection, such as low rates of progression and insufficient work placements to provide relevant work experience, have not yet been addressed.

- Managers' use of data requires improvement. They do not have or use sufficient data on learner progression or achievement of Foundation Learning programme aims to monitor performance effectively and improve provision. Destinations of learners who successfully progress are not always recorded and although the true picture of the proportion of learners who progress could be higher than that formally reported, managers do not know what the actual figure is. Other progress, often significant, that learners are making, such as overcoming barriers to learning or in improving personal and social skills often remains unrecognised.
- Leaders and managers ensure that equality and diversity are promoted well in displays in classrooms and communal areas and that equality and diversity issues are well promoted in lessons. For example in one lesson, learners were engaged well in small group discussions exploring gender stereotyping, sexuality and homophobic bullying. In addition to developing their conversation and negotiation skills, learners' preconceptions and views were explored sensitively and where necessary, challenged appropriately.
- STS meets its statutory requirements to safeguard learners. Incidents of bad behaviour are dealt with swiftly. Learners recognise and appreciate this and feel safe in the training centre. All training staff have received appropriate safeguarding training, and are registered with the Criminal Records Bureau. An appropriate central record is maintained. Policies and procedures ensure compliance with current legislation.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Foundation Learning
Overall effectiveness	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 the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation learning	3

Provider details

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 69
	Part-time: 0
Principal/CEO	Sue Bradshaw
Date of previous inspection	April 2010
Website address	www.stsmansfield.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	20	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Additional socio-economic information

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited delivers apprenticeships through subcontract arrangements with other learning providers. The Foundation Learning programme is delivered at its central premises in Mansfield. Almost all Foundation Learners live in the local area. The proportion of school leavers who achieve five or more good GCSEs in Nottinghamshire as a whole is slightly above the national average, but for schools in Mansfield it is below both the local and national averages. Unemployment in Mansfield is almost two percentage points higher than the national average. Similarly, the proportion of adults with no qualifications is two percentage points higher than the national average. Average earnings in Mansfield are around one fifth lower than the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Malcolm Fraser HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, 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, 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 the Foundation Learning provision at the provider for which it has a direct funding contract but did not include the apprenticeship provision that is delivered through subcontract arrangements with other providers.

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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