

Rocket Training Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		25–28 June 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- Success rates are not yet consistently high.
- Not enough of the teaching, learning and assessment are good or better and insufficient use is made of information and learning technology.
- The results of initial and diagnostic assessments are not used effectively to plan individual learning and long-, short- and medium-term targets are too vague and lacking in challenge.
- Progress reviews are variable and learners' progress is not always fully and accurately recorded.
- Not all learners receive regular and detailed oral and written feedback about the quality of their work.
- Arrangements for checking the quality of provision are incomplete.
- The self-assessment report does not fully reflect and grade all aspects of provision.

This provider has the following strengths:

- There is a clear strategy for improving learners' success rates and the quality of provision.
- Success rates have improved considerably in the current year.
- Thorough recruitment process and induction programme are in place for learners.
- Increased work-experience opportunities are having a positive impact on foundation learners.
- Learners' good skills development, including independent- and team-working skills, has improved confidence and increased versatility in employment.
- Support in English and mathematics for apprentices in administration and customer service is particularly effective.
- A high standard of support for young people from areas of high deprivation enables them to overcome significant and multiple barriers to learning.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates further by monitoring learners' progress rigorously in line with the strategy so that they all remain on target to complete their programme and obtain their qualifications by their planned end dates. Where learners' progress slows ensure prompt action is taken to prevent further slippage and to regain momentum.
- Improve the standards of teaching, learning and assessment so that all learners experience provision of the highest quality, and make full use of information and learning technology to enrich and enliven learning.
- Utilise fully the results of initial and diagnostic assessments to plan individual learning programmes for every learner. Make sure that long-, medium- and short-term targets are challenging and that they successfully drive learners' progress.
- Improve the quality of learners' progress reviews so that all learners experience regular, high-quality reviews. Ensure that progress is comprehensively reviewed and accurately recorded.
- Provide all learners with regular, detailed and specific oral and written feedback on the quality of all their work so they are clear about the progress they are making. Ensure that all spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are identified and corrected so that the quality of their written work continuously improves.
- Develop and extend quality assurance arrangements to ensure that thorough checks are made on all aspects of the learners' journeys at Rocket Training Ltd (RTL) and at the subcontractors. Identify and share good aspects of provision and highlight required improvements. Implement strategies for bringing about improvements and closely monitor their effectiveness.
- Further develop the self-assessment report to ensure it reflects and grades all aspects of provision and that it makes a significant contribution to raising the quality of the provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For the past three years RTL's overall success rates for apprentices have fluctuated. For intermediate apprentices, overall success rates and success rates for those who completed within the planned time have been consistently low and below the national averages. For the past two years overall success rates for advanced apprentices have been in line with the national averages. In 2010/11 those completing within the planned time were 13 percentage points above the national average but in 2011/12 these completions declined to just below the national average. ▪ The success rates of apprentices were adversely affected by redundancies and trades union intervention in a major retail organisation. Apprentices' motivation was reduced and their progress was seriously hindered in three vocational areas. ▪ RTL began subcontracting provision midway through 2012 and many of the subcontracted learners are scheduled to achieve later in this year. As a result of management intervention and more rigorous monitoring in the current year, 66% of all apprentices are on target to complete by their planned end date. Several vocational areas are showing projected high success rates. For example, 98% of retail learners, 82% of childcare learners and 75% of horticultural learners are on target to complete their apprenticeships by the planned end dates. Seventy-four per cent of foundation learners are expected to achieve a positive outcome before the end of the current academic year if they remain on the course and attend regularly. ▪ Since 2010, success rates for learners on classroom-based courses, including learners on courses in engineering and manufacturing technology, retail and commercial enterprise, preparation for life and work, and business, administration and law have been low. In 2010/11 and 2011/12 the numbers of learners on Foundation Learning programmes who were either 	

retained or who progressed into training, education or employment were also low. However, as a result of more rigorous monitoring in the current year, the percentage has risen considerably and is good at 74%. Learners enjoy their training and those who attend regularly are successful in achieving positive outcomes.

- Increased opportunities for work experience in 2012/13 have resulted in more foundation learners successfully completing a period of work experience and deriving considerable benefit from it.
- Foundation learners' personal and social skills are improving and they are developing good independent- and team-working skills, and gaining in confidence. They are acquiring good, basic occupational skills such as those needed in motor-vehicle maintenance and administration. Attendance is being monitored more closely and is improving. Apprentices also develop good team-working skills and feeling valued at work has a strong motivational influence on them. Employers appreciate apprentices' versatility and the improved contributions they make, for example, in sales teams and in administrative duties.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement and this is reflected in outcomes for learners, which also require improvement.
- In the better lessons, learners benefit from tutors' high expectations. For example, foundation learners are effectively motivated particularly in vocational areas, such as motor-vehicle engineering, where they have individual learning objectives and suitably challenging tasks. Good emphasis is placed on practical approaches to learning, where learners are encouraged to discover information for themselves, such as three learners on a Foundation Learning summer programme who researched selected equality and diversity topics.
- In the weaker lessons, learners are not effectively challenged and tasks are not closely matched to their abilities and learning needs. Learners lose concentration because the work is either too easy or too difficult for them and their progress is erratic. Tutors' questioning skills are insufficiently developed and they do not make the best use of questions for stimulating learners, maintaining their concentration and checking their learning.
- Insufficient use is made of information and learning technology, where available, to enrich and enliven learning. Often smartboards are used as screens for data-projected images rather than as interest-arousing, interactive learning aids. Foundation learners have insufficient access to computers in their classrooms to provide an alternative to handwriting, to inject some variety into their learning and to enable them to practise their information and communication technology skills. Very good use is made of the increased work-experience provision for giving learners opportunities for developing and practising their occupational skills.
- Individual learning plans lack detail and short- and medium-term targets are too vague and lacking in challenge. They do not drive learners' progress sufficiently and help them to achieve more quickly.
- Assessment practices are variable and require improvement. In Foundation Learning, assessment methods lack rigour and in business, administration and law, assessors do not question apprentices sufficiently to check their levels of knowledge and understanding.
- Written and oral feedback given to administration and customer-service apprentices is not always specific and detailed enough and foundation learners do not receive regular feedback about their progress and what they can do to improve. The identification and correction of errors, such as spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, in learners' written work lacks consistency. In administration and customer service, English errors are accurately identified and corrected, whereas in Foundation Learning such errors are not routinely corrected.
- Progress reviews are regular. However, the recording of achievements varies and does not always identify the learning that has occurred or the progress that learners are making.
- The recruitment process is thorough. Additional learning and pastoral support is provided when needed and this makes a good contribution to learners' progress. The induction programme

provides learners with a good range of information when they begin their programme, including information on safeguarding policies and practices, equality and diversity, and health and safety.

- Initial assessment of English and mathematical skills is systematic. However, in Foundation Learning programmes and in administration and customer service the results are not used effectively to plan individual learning and to identify accurate long-, short- and medium-term targets.
- Learners are satisfactorily working towards functional skills qualifications at the required level. However, in Foundation Learning, functional skills are not sufficiently embedded into personal and social-development learning and vocational learning. A minority of apprentices are making good progress and are working at a higher level than that required by their apprenticeship framework.
- In administration, equality and diversity are adequately covered at each assessment visit through the use of 'hot topics' and in Foundation Learning, equality and diversity are promoted adequately although learners' recall of equality and diversity is variable.

Preparation for life and work Foundation Learning

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. This is reflected in outcomes for learners, which also require improvement.
- In the better lessons, learners are aware of tutors' high expectations and they are motivated and eager to learn. Challenging individual learning activities encourage learners to develop a good understanding of their subject. Tutors make good use of their own vocational experiences to stimulate learners and to enable them to understand the relevance of the topics being taught. In the weaker lessons, learning activities are not closely matched to learners' individual learning needs and most work on the same tasks. Activities are uninspiring, lacking in challenge and fail to motivate and engage learners. Insufficient use is made of information and learning technology and computers are not available for learners in all classrooms.
- Learners have good opportunities for developing work-related skills through preparation for employment courses, and effectively planned work taster sessions and work experience. The provider has developed good contacts with employers. Most learners have successfully attended work placements and in their vocational lessons they effectively use the skills learned. To support learners while on placement employers make use of a good work-experience information pack. Progression to apprenticeships, employment with or without training, or further education for these learners is now good.
- Learners' additional support needs are quickly and accurately identified early in their programme. When needed, learners receive good additional learning and pastoral support and this is having a positive impact on their confidence and progress. For example, in one of the better lessons additional learning support effectively enabled learners to develop time-management skills, work as part of a team and produce a presentation linked to a business product.
- Initial assessment of learners' skills and abilities is good. However, information is not used effectively to identify appropriate long-, medium- and short-term targets. Recording of achievement varies and it fails to identify what has been learned. Although progress reviews are regular, records lack detail and the progress learners make is not clear. Assessment practices are variable and lack rigour. Checking for learning in some lessons requires improvement. Learners do not receive regular oral or written feedback to identify how well they are progressing and what they need to do to improve. In the better lessons, appropriate emphasis is placed on self-assessment and informal peer assessment.
- Identification of errors in English and mathematics is inconsistent. For example, spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are not routinely corrected. Functional skills are not sufficiently embedded into personal and social-development learning and vocational learning.

- Initial information and guidance are good and result in learners being placed on the most suitable course. Learners also receive appropriate advice and guidance from teaching staff to help them decide their next steps in training, education or employment. Good links have been established with a range of relevant organisations, for example Connexions, who refer learners to RTL.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity adequately. In the better lessons, profiles of individual learners are used effectively to inform lesson planning, resource selection, learning activities and assessment practices. Learners' recall of equality and diversity is variable and sufficient importance is not always given to extending their knowledge and understanding.

Business, administration and law

Administration

Customer service

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. This is reflected in outcomes for learners, which also require improvement.
- In coaching sessions, learners benefit from effective individual tuition that enables them to develop further in their job role. Learners receive good encouragement to work independently. Assessors make adequate use of learning resources to support learners' development.
- Employers ensure they provide good opportunities for work-related activities that support learners' skills development. The tuition given to learners by assessors is valued by employers because it enables their staff to gain qualifications and develop valuable work-related skills such as those needed when answering the telephone and dealing with challenging customers.
- Assessors use their good vocational skills and experience to provide effective support for learners. They have a good understanding of the organisations in which learners are employed and this is used to benefit learners when planning assessment activities. Assessors carry out frequent assessment visits and assessments are suitably planned and sufficiently flexible to meet learners' and employers' needs.
- Learners are assessed using a range of appropriate methods. However, assessors do not question them in sufficient depth to determine the level of knowledge and understanding they have gained. Although an electronic portfolio has recently been introduced, it is not yet fully utilised by learners and assessors.
- The results of initial assessment are not used effectively to plan individual learning. Short- and medium-term targets are too vague and they do not drive learners' progress sufficiently and help them to achieve more quickly. They do not always include learners' personal and work-related skills development and learning support needs.
- Progress reviews are ineffective. Although they take place regularly, too many reviews fail to capture learners' progress sufficiently. Opportunities to assess learners' personal, learning and thinking skills are not discussed or recorded on individual learning plans.
- Although assessors provide oral and written feedback to help learners develop their written work, the feedback is not always specific and detailed enough to help learners improve their performance. Learners are not always clear about the progress they are making and what they still have to do to achieve their qualification. Spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners' written work are accurately identified and corrected.
- Most learners work towards the completion of functional skills qualifications relevant to the level of their framework. In a minority of cases learners who make good progress work to a higher level. Learners who require additional functional skills support, such as assistance in structuring sentences and in paragraph writing, receive very good support from assessors. Learners are directed to learning resources that appropriately support the development of their functional skills.

- Learners receive good information and guidance at induction. However, during progress reviews they receive insufficient information, advice and guidance to enable them to make informed choices about further study and career progression.
- Most learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity, and safeguarding policies and practices. Their knowledge is successfully extended by the use of a workbook at induction and further reinforced by questions during assessments and reviews. Learners are clear about whom to approach if they need to discuss any safeguarding concerns.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- RTL, operating in areas of significant deprivation, high unemployment and with a high percentage of the working-age population without qualifications, has established a clear strategic plan, a strong corporate mission, company values and key objectives. The established key performance indicators are extensive and measurable but targets are low, particularly for the continuous improvement of outcomes for learners. For example, the progression rate of intermediate apprentices to advanced apprenticeships is set at 35% by August 2013, progression for foundation learners is set at 45% by August 2013 and the target for completion within the planned end date for apprenticeships is set at 70% by August 2014.
- Service-level agreements do not specify stringent targets for subcontractors to achieve high success rates and to ensure completions by the planned end dates. However, RTL shares the good practice it has identified and deals with underperformance through accurate and useful advice and guidance to its subcontractors.
- Since the comprehensive reorganisation of RTL in 2012, that included significant senior management changes, the appointment of an operations manager and the engagement of a range of subcontractors, it has developed a culture that focuses very clearly on learners' experiences. This is very effectively supported through strategies to network with a range of community groups, local authorities, employers and training providers. Good practice is shared and organisations work together to influence change and develop programmes to meet the needs of learners with significant barriers to learning and to fulfil employers' requirements in areas of high deprivation.
- Managers and staff are dedicated and committed to improving learners' skills and employability. RTL staff are enthusiastic and welcome the introduction of the recent changes to the management structure and the strategic direction of the organisation. Over the past two years too many learners have failed to achieve their planned outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. However, current learners are developing their confidence and their personal and social skills. They are now making satisfactory progress.
- Learners' success rates are improving significantly although a few remain below the national averages.
- Leaders and managers are raising standards with realistic strategies for the development and improvement of learning programmes through developing and improving the ethos within the company. Recruitment, attendance monitoring and the use of work placements for foundation learners have significantly improved. By collecting an extensive range of personal information about learners, learners' programmes can be more accurately developed to meet their needs.
- RTL's quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors have brought about improvements in their performance. Their level of performance in a range of activities is thoroughly checked and where issues are identified RTL's managers provide comprehensive and useful advice and guidance to support the subcontractor in improving the provision. This is proving to be successful and developments in the provision are now having a positive impact on learners' experiences. However, RTL recognises that the quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. For example, in contrast to RTL's own internal quality assurance system, no observations of teaching and learning at subcontractors have taken place in order to monitor performance and ensure that standards are being met.

- The self-assessment process is improving. The report is evaluative and recognises some of the areas identified by inspectors that require improvement. The operations manager has initiated staff meetings, opportunities for subcontractors to state their opinions, learner focus groups and the support of an external consultant. A position statement that clearly explains how the provision has developed since the reorganisation of the provider supports the self-assessment report. The quality improvement plan is broadly accurate and clearly identifies the key areas for improvement and specifies actions, responsibilities and milestones. However, further development is required to ensure the self-assessment report reflects and grades all aspects of the provision.
- RTL is very successful at recruiting learners from areas of high deprivation and in providing high-quality pastoral support. Support staff have a good knowledge of the learners, many of whom have complex needs and multiple barriers to learning. Learners and staff are protected from bullying and harassment. Although equality and diversity awareness training for staff is adequate, opportunities are not routinely taken to meet the needs of all learners at all levels in teaching sessions. Despite this, many learners' knowledge and awareness of equality and diversity are adequate or better.
- RTL's arrangements meet the statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Two designated members of staff oversee a single central register of checks on RTL staff who have contact with individual learners. For the subcontracted provision, a record of staff members and their Criminal Records Bureau/Disclosure and Barring Service status is kept on file. Learners feel safe and adopt safe working practices in work placements and employers' workshops. Support for learners is good with detailed and thorough records kept of the contact between learners and the social worker and any follow-through work that takes place. Learners receive a good induction programme which helps them gain knowledge and understanding of the provider's safeguarding policies and practices, health and safety and equality and diversity.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Rocket Training Ltd			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships	Foundation Learning
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation learning	3
Administration	3
Customer service	3

Provider details

Rocket Training Ltd	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 410
	Part-time: 236
Principal/CEO	Mr Vahid Lavasani
Date of previous inspection	February 2010
Website address	www.rockettraining.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+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	48	1	34	6	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+		
	88	110	6	65	N/A	5		
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 and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Decorus UK ■ Elite Learning Solutions ■ 5 Stars Recruitment ■ Local Learning 							

Additional socio-economic information

RTL was founded in Liverpool in 1981 as the Brothers of Charity Youth Training Workshop. In 1994 it became a limited company wholly owned by its director. High levels of deprivation persist in Liverpool which is ranked as the most deprived local authority area in England on the Indices of Deprivation 2010. In October 2012, Liverpool's long-term youth unemployment rate was 41% and there were six jobseekers for every unfilled job vacancy in the city compared to four nationally. According to the 2011 census, the working population is under-represented in managerial, professional and skilled-trades occupations. In 2011, 86% of the population were White British or Irish, with Black and minority ethnic groups accounting for 14% of the city's population.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Ken Fisher
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Five additional inspectors, assisted by the operations manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report, quality improvement plan and position statements, and the previous inspection and monitoring visit reports. 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 collect 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 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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