

Training Strategies Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		24-27 September 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- Outcomes for learners are not yet good.
- Not enough of the teaching, learning and assessment are good or better and functional skills are not sufficiently integrated into the apprenticeship programmes.
- Insufficient use is made of information and learning technology.
- The information gained from initial and diagnostic assessments is not used effectively to plan learning.
- Employers are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learning.
- Long-term learning targets are not detailed enough and not all learners receive sufficient motivation or challenge to meet their individual needs and interests.
- Assessors do not routinely correct apprentices' spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Quality assurance arrangements do not bring about improvements quickly enough. Self-assessment does not provide a sufficiently detailed analysis of performance and all areas for improvement.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Training Strategies Ltd (TSL) has a clear strategy to improve outcomes and the quality of provision. Subcontracted apprenticeship programmes are showing improvement.
- Early years and playwork apprentices develop good levels of skills and knowledge.
- Partnerships are well established and are used increasingly effectively to meet local and national demand for courses and apprenticeships.
- Apprentices receive clear verbal feedback and written short-term action points to make sure they know what to do to improve their work and to prepare for the assessors' next visit.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors, including the rigour and frequency of observations of teaching, learning and assessment, to ensure they deliver high standards of provision.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure all apprentices benefit from high quality provision. Fully integrate functional skills within all aspects of apprenticeships and ensure all learners improve their skills and knowledge at an early stage.
- Improve outcomes by continuing to monitor apprentices' progress rigorously to ensure they achieve their qualification within the planned time. Where apprentices are identified as being at risk of falling behind, or where their progress slows, ensure swift action is taken to support them.
- Make sure the results of initial assessment are used fully to plan individual learning programmes (ILPs) for every learner. Ensure written learning targets are sufficiently detailed. Record relevant training provided by employers in the ILP.
- Increase the involvement of employers in planning high quality learning experiences for apprentices and ensure they are given every opportunity to attend and contribute to progress reviews. Provide employers with a written record of apprentices' progress and targets for learning.
- Develop a good variety of interesting and challenging activities that stretch and engage all apprentices. Encourage apprentices to take more responsibility for their learning and ensure they have ready access to their portfolios. Increase the use of information and learning technology in teaching, learning and assessment by encouraging more staff and learners to become confident in its use.
- Improve the standard of written feedback on apprentices' work so that errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are identified and corrected. Ensure all apprentices fully understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve the effectiveness of the self-assessment process by producing a more detailed report which contains an accurate analysis of performance, identifies all areas for improvement and informs challenging targets to drive improvement.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TSL began subcontracting apprenticeships midway through 2012 and the vast majority of these learners are expected to achieve their qualification later this year. At the time of the inspection TSL has no published success rates and none of the learners have yet completed their apprenticeship or reached their intended completion date. The provider's own tracking and monitoring data show the majority of current apprentices are on target to achieve their qualification as expected. ▪ In 2011/12 TSL had high success rates for foundation learners. They also had a small number of apprenticeships in security and cleaning with success rates around national averages. There is no difference in the achievement or rate of progress for different groups of apprentices. ▪ The large majority of current learners on all apprenticeships make satisfactory or better progress towards their learning goals. However, many apprentices experienced significant delays to the start of their learning programme; they were discouraged and lost enthusiasm as a result of 	

several changes of assessor. TSL and its subcontractors have since improved delivery and the vast majority of apprentices are expected to achieve their qualification within the time planned.

- Many learners, particularly those in early years and playwork are developing good practical skills and knowledge which they use effectively in their work settings. The majority of health and social care apprentices and those in management and customer service develop an appropriate range of work skills. They understand clearly the impact of their work and develop good communication skills. All apprentices have an adequate understanding of their rights and responsibilities as apprentices.
- Customer service apprentices develop increased awareness of the high standards employers expect and some have made changes in their work to improve the quality of service they provide. Employers recognise and value the new skills and ideas apprentices bring into the workplace, such as better organisational skills, increased attention to detail and greater personal initiative. Management apprentices can better challenge underperformance in their teams.
- Apprentices develop appropriate skills in English and mathematics for their job roles and to meet the requirements of their qualifications; however, they are not sufficiently encouraged to improve these skills beyond the requirements of the qualification.
- A minority of learners have received appropriate advice and encouragement about possible progression routes, although for most it is too early in their learning programme to plan the next stage. A few apprentices have already gained promotion at work and others have been given increased responsibility in their roles as they show improved skills and ability.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement; this is reflected in the outcomes for learners, which also require improvement. Too many lessons and assessment activities are not yet good. In early years and playwork, teaching and assessment are good. TSL works closely with the subcontractors to ensure they improve but it is too soon to see the impact of this for apprentices in management, customer service and health and social care.
- The quality of teaching and assessment sessions varies too much. In the better learning activities assessors have high expectations of apprentices and use their good levels of experience and skills to provide effective individual help and support. Assessors plan carefully to ensure apprentices are thoroughly engaged in activities and discussions. Good use is made of a wide range of teaching and learning techniques to motivate and involve apprentices. Assessors and tutors make learning interesting and good attention is given to ensuring apprentices develop greater understanding of the importance of safeguarding, management processes, legislation and new ways of working. This enables apprentices to become more confident and to work more effectively in teams.
- In the less successful learning activities assessors fail to engage apprentices sufficiently and do not check regularly enough that learning is taking place. Assessors use a narrow range of methods to engage apprentices and fail to motivate them. In these activities apprentices are not sufficiently challenged and little attention is given to meeting individual needs and interests. The pace of these sessions is often too slow and apprentices do not make sufficient progress.
- Apprentices in health and social care, management and customer service experienced long delays at the start of their programmes because subcontractors were slow to establish consistency in assessment practice. Too many apprentices did not receive a visit for several months, which demotivated them. Although TSL was quick to recognise this, subcontractors were slow to react and make changes. Current arrangements are now satisfactory and many apprentices have caught up and are now making adequate progress.
- Assessment practice requires improvement overall. In early years and playwork there are instances of very effective assessment with prompt and helpful feedback. Assessors provide sufficient information to ensure apprentices know what progress they are making but feedback

on how to improve is not always clear enough. TSL has developed good formal arrangements for monitoring apprentices' progress and recording all aspects of achievement. Apprentices who fall behind are now identified quickly.

- Across all apprenticeships, initial assessment requires improvement because it is not used effectively enough to plan learning. Learning targets are not sufficiently detailed and do not take into account apprentices' wider needs and interests. Not all assessors correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in apprentices' written work, and support for improving their use of English and mathematics is not integrated well enough with wider assessment and learning opportunities. Progress has been made with the development of arrangements to deliver functional skills but these are not yet sufficiently embedded within the range of apprenticeships.
- Assessors in all areas are making increased use of information and learning technology to support apprentices but this remains under-developed, especially in health and social care. Electronic portfolios are available to apprentices in management and customer service but these are not fully utilised. Online teaching and assessment resources are not used sufficiently or promoted on most apprenticeship programmes. The vast majority of apprentices do not receive appropriate support to understand how to make effective use of information and learning technology.
- Assessors establish effective relationships with employers which help to ensure apprentices develop appropriate practical skills. However, employers are not always sufficiently involved in reviewing learning and are not always aware of the progress made by learners. Assessors do not provide employers with written records of review meetings.
- Apprentices receive sufficient information about their programme and have a good understanding of what they need to do to complete the whole qualification. Assessors provide useful information to help apprentices progress to their next steps in learning.
- Assessors on all courses ensure apprentices are treated fairly and that their individual needs and differences are recognised. Assessors generally have a good understanding of equality and diversity but they do not sufficiently promote these when they meet with learners. Apprentices generally have satisfactory awareness of issues such as the importance of respect and dignity for other people, promoting choice and independence within care settings and ensuring good, clear communication with colleagues and customers in workplaces.

Health, public services and care
Health and social care
Early years and playwork
Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. This is reflected in outcomes for learners, which also require improvement. Health and social care apprentices experienced long delays at the start of their programmes with no access to an assessor. However, the majority of apprentices are currently making the progress expected of them.
- Assessors for early years and playwork apprentices have good levels of vocational knowledge and experience which they use effectively to engage and motivate apprentices. They ensure apprentices understand the importance of linking children's play and activities to the Early Years Foundation Stage profiles for learning and development. However, assessors for care are generally less effective and do not always ensure apprentices understand how their learning links with their everyday duties in the workplace.
- All apprentices receive a clear action plan containing short-term targets which explain what they have to do before the next visit from the assessor. However, the vast majority of these targets relate only to completion of units of the qualification and do not address individual needs and interests. Assessors do not always use information from initial assessment to inform ILPs.

- Assessors have strong and supportive relationships with employers which generally benefit learners. However, employers are not sufficiently involved in planning or reviewing learning. Employers are not encouraged to attend progress reviews and do not receive written copies of the notes from these reviews. ILPs do not link sufficiently well with mandatory and other training provided for the apprentices by their employers.
- Apprentices receive thorough and frequent assessment which ensures they make progress towards completing their programmes, but not always at a pace matched to their individual needs. Assessors do not give sufficient attention to stretching and challenging learners who wish to progress more quickly or pursue a topic in greater depth. Assessors for early years and playwork keep learning portfolios at their office so apprentices do not have the opportunity to review their work independently.
- The majority of assessors provide apprentices with good verbal feedback which tells them how well they are doing and identifies clearly what they need to do to improve. Arrangements for formal tracking and monitoring of progress are effective and assessors know which learners are progressing well and who requires further support. Assessors provide adequate support to help apprentices decide on their next stage in training, such as nurse training or a higher-level qualification. Use of information and learning technology is limited and too few apprentices are encouraged to understand or experience how they could be used to support and expand their learning.
- Assessors are particularly flexible when arranging assessment schedules and respect the demands of busy workplaces. However, they do not always ensure apprentices are fully occupied during visits. For example, there are long periods of silence as assessors complete forms. The majority of assessors do not check apprentices' learning and understanding frequently enough to ensure they fully understand new information.
- Arrangements for improving apprentices' skills in English are not fully developed. For example, apprentices are not encouraged to explore and understand the use of specialist language. Assessors do not check spelling, punctuation and grammar frequently enough. Arrangements for developing apprentices' skills in mathematics and information and communication technology are not yet fully effective. Support and teaching for functional skills are not integrated into apprenticeships and are introduced too late in the programme, which limits opportunities for apprentices to develop their skills.
- Assessors work effectively to ensure all apprentices are valued and feel supported. Apprentices have an adequate understanding of equality and diversity and understand how this relates to them in their workplaces. However, not all assessors adequately reinforce or promote equality and diversity in meetings with apprentices.
- All staff give satisfactory attention to health and safety arrangements. Assessors ensure apprentices have a good awareness of the importance of observing current legislation and following guidance to ensure children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded.

Business, administration and law
Business management
Customer service
Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement which is reflected in the outcomes for apprentices, which also require improvement. Too many learners have made slow progress in achieving their apprenticeship frameworks. However, recent improvements to programme planning and assessment practices are having a significant impact. As a result apprentices are making at least satisfactory progress.

- Apprentices receive good and effective support during the workplace visits from the assessors, who successfully motivate them. They improve their understanding of their work roles and make better contributions to their workplaces. They have improved their service to customers and are able to carry out tasks more confidently, for example, taking responsibility for maintaining the petty cash system. Management apprentices are more confident to challenge underperformance in their teams.
- Assessors are appropriately qualified and have extensive vocational experience. They use good examples from their own experiences to illustrate theoretical knowledge and understanding. Assessors draw on their good subject knowledge and awareness of the qualification standards to make accurate assessments of performance.
- Assessment practice is thorough and fair. Apprentices benefit from a good and flexible range of assessment methods making use of a range of evidence sources. Assessment plans are generally good and provide apprentices with clear actions. Visits are not always planned effectively enough to make the best use of apprentices' time.
- Assessors demonstrate good questioning skills, adapting questions to stretch and challenge the apprentices. They encourage apprentices to work independently. However, assessors do not use interactive communication technology sufficiently or imaginatively enough in assessment to record effectively apprentices' progress or to enliven sessions. Although an electronic portfolio is available, assessors and apprentices do not make full use of the system.
- Initial assessment is routinely carried out for all apprentices to identify their literacy and numeracy levels. However, the results of the assessments are not always used quickly enough to identify specific areas for development and plan an individual programme. The ILPs do not identify and record sufficiently the workplace training or apprentices' personal development needs. They are not updated frequently enough.
- Apprentices receive good constructive oral feedback from the assessors that highlights how they can improve. However, assessors' feedback on their written work and evidence is not always sufficiently detailed. Apprentices review their progress regularly and engage well in discussing what they have achieved. The reviews focus too much on framework achievement and insufficiently on the learning, personal development or the workplace training that has taken place. The majority of employers are not sufficiently involved in reviewing apprentices' progress.
- The standard of apprentices' written work in most portfolios is good. Most assessors routinely correct errors of English grammar, spelling and punctuation in apprentices' written work. Apprentices effectively develop the functional skills required for the frameworks. However, assessors do not always take sufficient opportunity to improve apprentices' skills in English beyond the functional skills sessions. Assessors do not sufficiently plan to extend apprentices' skill levels in English and mathematics beyond what is required for them to complete their frameworks.
- Apprentices have a very clear understanding of equality and diversity and can explain the relevance to their workplaces. They have a good awareness of their rights and responsibilities at work and know who they would approach if they have any safeguarding issues.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Due to the enthusiasm and drive of company directors, all involved with TSL are clear about the strategic vision for the company. Following a continuous period of business growth, primarily working as a subcontractor for other main contract holders, TSL has altered its strategic direction and now contracts direct with the Skills Funding Agency for some of its provision. This has proven to be a significant challenge for leaders and staff at TSL yet they remain focused on the company's ambitions and priorities for the future.
- Non-executive board members provide good advice and guidance to directors to inform strategic and operational decisions. Due to the inexperience of the directors of TSL in delivering

apprenticeship programmes, they have wisely recruited the services and expertise of three non-executive directors at board level within the company. These individuals have a wealth of knowledge and experience within workplace learning which they use effectively to improve provision.

- Management information is used well by staff and reports accurately reflect the performance of subcontractors. The provider carefully manages subcontractors' performance relating to contract compliance, especially recruitment profiles and progression towards apprentices' success. Under-performance by subcontractors is swiftly identified and appropriately dealt with by managers.
- Quality improvement activity is insufficiently robust and visits to subcontractors are too infrequent to drive improvements successfully. Quarterly audit visits by the manager responsible for subcontractors have been effective in identifying some issues and have led to some improvements. For example, the review process for one subcontractor is now more robust and clearly includes the employer in the process. However, many issues have been missed during visits and areas for improvement in the quality of provision remain.
- Too few observations of subcontractors' staff have taken place and training and development actions have not yet resulted in improved performance by some assessors. TSL has an effective process for the observation of teaching and learning; graded observations broadly reflect the commentary and result in appropriate actions for improvement. Based on the providers' own grade profile, the standard of teaching and assessment has risen significantly in the last year, although this has yet to impact sufficiently on subcontracted provision.
- The self-assessment process lacks rigor and the resulting quality improvement plan does not contain sufficiently challenging targets to drive improvement. Currently, too little use is made of feedback and evaluations from learners, employers and subcontractors involved in the apprenticeship programme. Managers have recognised this and taken steps to improve the robustness of this year's self-assessment process, although the report is not due for completion until November 2013.
- Managers have been slow to establish and manage the apprenticeship learning programme. The planning for the introduction of functional skills delivery has been slow. Many learners experienced delayed starts to their programme, whilst others became demotivated, as a result of several changes of assessor; more recently TSL has done much to remedy these issues.
- The provider has very strong partnerships with employers, training provider networks, Jobcentre Plus on Merseyside, and links to other training provision offered by TSL. The provider has established a strong reputation locally and all stakeholders speak openly of the positive attitude of TSL towards developing effective networks and partnerships. The directors are keen to continue this approach to business and have already established links with key organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus, in the areas served by the current subcontractors. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this work.
- TSL has an appropriately detailed equality and diversity policy and action plan containing objectives and monitoring measures for the continuous promotion of equality. The provider effectively reviews aspects such as the provision for those with additional learning needs and the analysis of achievement by different groups of apprentices. No significant differences in outcomes exist between different groups. Although the apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity is satisfactory, a minority of assessors miss opportunities to develop this knowledge further in the course of workplace visits.
- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding apprentices. The safeguarding policy is extensive and it is updated regularly in order to reflect any changes in legislation. Staff receive comprehensive annual training on safeguarding matters. Appropriately trained staff carry out suitable health and safety audits ensuring apprentices are based in safe environments. The management of subcontractors' safeguarding arrangements is appropriate.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Training Strategies Ltd**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships
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
Health and social care	3
Early years and playwork	3
Business management	3
Customer service	3

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 219								
	Part-time: 42								
Principal/CEO	Mr Timothy Lynch								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.tsl.eu.com								
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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	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+			
	20	41	12	51	N/A	14			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decorus UK Train 2 B K S Training 								

Contextual information

The 2011 census records the city of Liverpool as having a population of 466,415, of whom 14% belong to a minority ethnic group compared with 19% nationally. Liverpool is the most deprived local authority area in England. Persistently high levels of deprivation, worklessness and multiple disadvantages characterise the city. The level of deprivation is particularly widespread in neighbourhoods in north Liverpool. Some 20% of people of working age are unemployed compared with a national average of 11.5%. 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. The proportion of adults without a qualification at foundation, intermediate or advanced level is considerably higher than for England as a whole.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Daniel Grant
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Three additional inspectors, assisted by the subcontract manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last two 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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