

# Skills Training UK Ltd (STUK)

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		4–7 March 2014
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
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:

- The rate at which learners gain their qualification has improved progressively over the past three years, notably on the business improvement techniques programme where learners' overall attainment is now significantly above national rates. Apprentices' skills development, the standard of their work and the impact of their learning on their employers' business are all good.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good overall. All learners enjoy their learning and are motivated well by enthusiastic and skilled trainer-assessors.
- Most learners pass their English and mathematics examinations first time. Resources for English and mathematics learning resources are well developed and increasingly used well.
- Leadership and management are strong and focused. Senior managers have developed an effective quality improvement process. The quality and impact of performance monitoring and management arrangements are very much improved.
- Self-assessment is very thorough and links closely to a comprehensive quality improvement process.

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

- Target setting is not routinely specific and written feedback does not provide learners with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their performance further.
- Some employers in the business administration programme are not fully involved in supporting apprentices' learning and progress.
- Business administration trainers have not all had access to sufficient formal professional development in teaching and learning.
- The observation of teaching and learning system lacks focus on the impact on learning.
- The actions on STUK's equality improvement plan are not sufficiently specific.

## Full report

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

- Improve target setting and action planning for all business administration learners to include elements of personal development and workplace training and which are sufficiently precise, prioritised and time bound to help learners achieve their qualifications in the time specified.
- Ensure that all employers are fully involved in planning learning and reviewing business administration learners' progress so that the learners' workplace learning and skills development are recognised and contribute effectively to the completion of their programme.
- Share existing best practice with, and provide further training for, business improvement techniques trainers on how to improve learners' focus and participation in theory sessions.
- Provide detailed written feedback to all learners which gives clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their performance further, particularly for those who find the work difficult.
- Provide all business administration trainers with appropriate access to formal opportunities for professional development in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Further develop the observation of teaching and learning system to focus strongly on the impact of teaching on learning and ensure the outcomes of observations are linked directly to trainers' continuing professional development.
- Identify the specific causes of differences in the attainment of different learner groups and clearly specify the actions that need to be put in place to eliminate such differences.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learners' success rates are improving progressively on all programmes and at all levels. Data on learners' attainment of their qualification in the academic year to date indicate that the trend of improvement in success rates is continuing. A high proportion of learners remain in employment following the completion of their apprenticeship programmes. In 2012/13, just under half of past apprentices contacted by STUK had subsequently gained promotion or new job roles.</li> <li>▪ Learners' achievement of qualifications varies by age group. The attainment of apprentices aged over 25, who comprise around two thirds of learners, is significantly better than 19- to 24-year-olds, particularly for advanced level programmes. For the most part these older learners are substantially exceeding national success rates. The attainment of learners in the 19 to 24 age group has also improved over time, but mostly to a level close to, rather than above, national rates.</li> <li>▪ The highest rates of improvement and of attainment are for learners on the largest single programme, business improvement techniques. These learners are currently making good progress towards completing their qualifications. They are highly motivated, demonstrate strong skills development and much improved employability. Their work is of a high standard. The impact of their learning on business efficiency and profitability is high and frequently financially quantifiable.</li> <li>▪ The large majority of business administration learners are currently making satisfactory progress and developing appropriate technical and employability skills which help improve their performance at work. This includes improved customer service skills to deal with product and service issues, managing teams better, applying new organisational skills and gaining in personal confidence.</li> <li>▪ In 2012/13 the rate at which learners achieved their qualification in the time specified was low, despite progressive improvement across both programmes. The range of data on learners' attainment in the current year indicate that there has been significant improvement in these</li> </ul>	

success rates on the business improvement techniques programme and satisfactory improvement on business administration programmes.

- During 2012/13, the very few learners aged 16 to 18 had very low success rates; most of these learners had previously been on STUK's access to apprenticeship programme. In the year to date, the achievement of this younger age group has improved dramatically and is now excellent.
- While men and women achieve at roughly equal rates overall, women on advanced level courses are less successful than men by around nine percentage points, and STUK is unclear why. There are differences between the success rates of different minority ethnic groups, although only a tiny minority are underperforming. English, Welsh and Scottish learners, the largest single grouping, perform less well than most other groups, and STUK is also not clear why this is so. Learners from a minority ethnic heritage comprise slightly under half of all learners.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and much improved since the last inspection; this is reflected in learners' improved, and currently further improving, outcomes. However, a few aspects of teaching and learning require improvement on the business administration programme.
- Learners are motivated well by enthusiastic trainer-assessors (trainers). Many learners are surprised and pleased by how much their training enhances their workplace skills, often well beyond their expectations. Business administration learners benefit from good individual coaching in the workplace. Practical work for business improvement techniques learners is particularly effective. On business administration programmes a few employers are not involved with linking apprentices' job roles and experience to their progress on, and achievement of, the qualification.
- Training and assessment staff have high expectations of their learners. They use their industry experience and subject knowledge well to develop learners' knowledge and enrich learning opportunities. Most are appropriately qualified. STUK's well-developed learning materials are used by learners to develop good independent learning skills between face-to-face sessions.
- Business improvement technique lessons are well planned and learners very much enjoy the practical, classroom-based approach used for their programme. Enthusiastic trainers offer a broad range of learning activities which motivate learners. They routinely check all learners' understanding through questioning, and challenge learners to increase their knowledge beyond the minimum required for the qualification. While most trainers adapt standard theory presentations effectively to fully engage learners, a few trainers do not and their learners lose focus and become disengaged from the session.
- Learners on business administration programmes meet regularly with their trainers who coach and develop their knowledge and understanding effectively to meet the requirements of the qualifications. Learners are excited by the opportunity to gain qualifications. Much learning is actively based around most learners' job roles. However, teaching methods often lack challenge and, although the pace of learning is adequate, it sometimes lacks depth.
- All learners benefit from good assessment practice. Trainers' visits are timed flexibly and, when necessary, they attend during unsociable hours to ensure learners' competence is assessed at the earliest opportunity. A broad range of assessment methods is used well and includes good use of digital technologies. Good verbal feedback helps learners appreciate how well they have done during an assessment, but written feedback is scant and does not help learners reflect on how they can improve.
- Initial assessment is thorough and helps learners to choose appropriate optional vocational units linked to their job role. Learners are fully aware of their English and mathematics test results and their areas for improvement. Overall, all trainers plan English and mathematics learning sessions appropriately and learning resources are well developed. Most learners pass their English and mathematics examinations first time. Learners with additional learning needs in

English, mathematics and those with language needs are well supported and benefit from support from specialist trainers. Some trainers integrate English and mathematics very well into vocational learning, but this is not done systematically across all provision.

- Trainers provide good personal and academic support to learners. Learners have a good understanding of their progress. Trainers and assessors meet learners regularly to set targets and actions for the next visit, and most learners respond to these productively. The quality and impact of target setting, however, are not consistently high.
- Equality and diversity are promoted appropriately during training and learners have a good understanding of these aspects. Learners have a clear understanding of how to raise concerns regarding discrimination, harassment and bullying, and with whom.

## Business administration

Requires improvement

### Apprenticeships

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment on business administration programmes requires improvement; this is reflected in the relatively low, but improving, outcomes for apprentices. Although a high proportion of learners in 2012/13 did not complete their apprenticeship by their planned end dates, the large majority of current apprentices are making at least satisfactory progress towards completing their qualification.
- STUK has made significant improvements in the quality of its data and its monitoring arrangements for business administration learners. These arrangements are starting to improve the progress of current apprentices. Interventions and targeted support are now provided quickly, although the actions identified by line managers for trainers to undertake with learners are too general and not sufficiently considered.
- Learners improve their understanding of their work roles well and make better contributions to their workplaces, including improved competence in carrying out appraisals and managing their time more effectively. Team leaders become much more aware of the policies and procedures that underpin their work routines and develop a more professional and structured approach to their work. A good number of learners gain promotion or increased responsibility as a result of their qualification.
- Trainers generally demonstrate effective coaching skills, adapting questions appropriately to test and confirm learners' knowledge and application of theory. Trainers draw on their good subject knowledge to make accurate assessments of apprentices' performance and use interactive communication technology well, such as audio and video recording, in assessment practice. However, not all trainers stretch and challenge apprentices sufficiently beyond the basic requirements of the framework to promote deeper levels of knowledge and understanding.
- Assessment is thorough and learners receive good verbal feedback about their performance to help them understand how they can progress. The standard of learners' written work in most portfolios is at least satisfactory. However, trainers do not routinely correct learners' errors in English grammar, spelling and punctuation in written work. Similarly, written feedback is not sufficiently detailed to help learners reflect on how they can improve further.
- Trainers give learners very good personal and professional support. Trainers' visits to learners in their workplaces are frequent and timed flexibly to match shift patterns and weekend working.
- Initial assessment is carried out routinely and is used well to identify specific areas for development in learners' functional skills. Learners all complete the functional skills elements required for the frameworks successfully, and a few subsequently achieve at a level higher than required. However, some trainers are not improving learners' functional skills using examples or exercises based directly on the context of a learner's vocational setting and specific job role.
- Most trainers discuss targets with learners purely in terms of broad actions and activities to be completed by the learner before the next assessment visit. However, the targets set are not all precise, specific or time bound and do not help each apprentice understand exactly what they

need to do, by when and how. Consequently, some learners do not progress towards completion of their qualification as quickly as they might.

- A few employers are not fully involved in planning learning and reviewing business administration learners' progress with trainers so that any workplace learning or skills development done in the workplace are recognised and contribute to the completion of their learners' qualification.
- Learners have an adequate overall understanding of equality and diversity as a consequence of their induction and the use of standard prompts and discussions with trainers during reviews. Learners have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work. They work safely and know whom to approach if they have any safeguarding or equality and diversity issues.

## Business improvement techniques

Good

### Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, reflecting the high proportion of learners who are now completing their apprenticeship overall and particularly within the time specified. Apprentices' attitudes to learning are positive and strong. Many employers stated that where apprentices had instigated improvements in the workplace, such as improving efficiency and reducing customer complaints, the impact was good and the benefits financially quantifiable.
- Learning programmes are very carefully planned and tailored in close collaboration with employers to meet their particular needs. A significant majority of apprentices work for large national employers and have opportunities to work with high-quality products and on important projects.
- Trainers have high levels of vocational skill and practical knowledge and use their experience and expertise well to enrich learning. Trainers set high standards and expect learners to meet them. Project work is planned well with employers and learners to reflect the context of learners' work and the needs of the workplace. Trainers' visits are arranged to fit with learners' schedules or shift patterns. Learners enjoy their learning and speak highly of STUK's training staff.
- Learners enjoy and respond particularly well to practical elements of their training. Training staff use a wide range of scenarios, tasks, games, quizzes and reasoning activities to develop learners' essential problem-solving skills, confidence and resilience.
- In one very effective session observed, small teams of learners were invited to highlight key difficulties limiting profitability and efficiency in their employer's manufacturing processes. The teams ultimately summarised their views succinctly on what was required and set out clear ideas for improvement, taking into account long-term impact and potential costs. In the course of this exercise, learners had quickly realised that their original priorities and concerns were based on an incomplete assessment of the real issues, and their perceptions and quality of the solutions proposed evolved to become more realistic and practical. Employers value this level and type of training. It provides learners with a greater awareness of how quality improvement processes are applied in practice and gives them an opportunity to impact directly on improving efficiencies in the company.
- Trainers use good quality teaching packs which develop learners' theoretical knowledge adequately, supported by high quality PowerPoint presentations. However, in a minority of sessions observed by inspectors, trainers simply read the slides aloud, learners increasingly struggled to concentrate and trainers eventually resorted to asking and answering their own questions.
- STUK's managers have developed effective self-learning materials. Learners use these materials well outside of learning sessions and in the process develop independent learning skills to answer knowledge-based questions set by trainers.

- Trainers use the outcomes of the initial assessment of each learner’s literacy and numeracy skills effectively to predict who will need further training in these areas and who might struggle on their chosen programme. Learners’ mathematics skills are developed well, for example through exercises in data retrieval, analysis and presentation. Written and spoken English skills are developed appropriately and learners recognise the importance of improving their communication skills when working with customers. STUK provides some effective assistance to learners whose first language is not English or who have difficulty comprehending technical vocabulary.
- Assessment is fair and reliable, and trainers mark learners work frequently. Trainers respond quickly to learners’ queries with constructive verbal responses, but provide too little written guidance for learners on how they might improve. Trainers check learners’ progress against previous targets and new targets are set for the period ahead which are mostly specific, measurable and time bound.
- Learners and employers receive thorough initial advice and guidance about their apprenticeship at the beginning of the programme and both groups have a sound understanding of the programme.
- Trainers provide good personal and professional support for learners. Employers and learners are clear about their learners’ progress on the programme, what they need to do to complete units fully and meet the planned completion date.
- Trainers promote equality and diversity appropriately during learners’ progress reviews and develop their understanding adequately using a set of standard prompt questions to generate discussion. Relevant equality and diversity topics are covered sufficiently during induction and a useful student handbook includes particularly helpful guidance about working in a diverse workplace.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Good

- Leadership and management of STUK are strong and focused. Senior managers have very clear and ambitious strategic objectives for the organisation and plan very effectively to achieve specific goals. STUK has grown the scale and range of its provision significantly over the past fifteen months and, for the most part, raised standards. The business improvement techniques programme, which is now by far the largest programme, has shown notable improvement in this period. While there has been some improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on the business administration programme, this has been comparatively modest.
- Senior managers have prioritised the development and application of an effective quality improvement process during the past year, and much improvement is evident in the range and impact of current performance monitoring and management arrangements. Senior and line managers now have access to, and analyse well, a very good range of reliable and detailed data to monitor all aspects of the programmes’ performance. Managers have a very clear idea of each learner’s progress and are well informed about any problems that might prevent or hinder a learner in the completion of their qualification. The actions specified to overcome any barriers to learning or otherwise support a learner’s progress are not specific enough.
- Trainers have the required experience and skills needed to carry out their roles, and learners value the depth of their expertise. Trainers’ individual performance is monitored closely and managers provide some useful feedback to promote individual improvement and develop professional practice. However, for trainers on business administration programmes, trainers’ access to formal professional development and training in teaching and learning has not been available to all those who would benefit from it. Although there has been some sharing of good teaching and learning practice and techniques within the team, it has been largely a ‘make-do’ approach.
- An observation of teaching and learning system has been introduced which is extensive, well planned and well organised. However, observation records focus too much on evaluating

aspects of teaching practice, classroom management and lesson planning, and too little on the impact of teaching on learning. The grades awarded by observers are often over generous in comparison to the balance of strengths and areas for improvement listed in observation records.

- Self-assessment is a very thorough, comprehensive and highly evaluative process, the outcomes of which are summarised clearly in a concise self-assessment report (SAR). Inspectors agreed with the vast majority of strengths and areas of improvement identified in the SAR, but graded one subject area lower. Areas for improvement in the SAR are covered in less depth than the more positive aspects. Self-assessment links closely to a well-structured, detailed and integrated quality improvement process. The views of learners and employers are used regularly and constructively to identify what is working well and what can be improved.
- Learning programmes are well planned and well managed. The range of business administration programmes offered is meeting the needs of learners individually and employers generally in small, medium and large private and public sector organisations. The business improvement techniques programme has been expanded significantly over the past year and now includes numerous large organisations who work very closely with STUK to create tailored apprenticeship programmes. STUK has developed an appropriate and comprehensive strategy for improving all learners' English and mathematics skills.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is intrinsic to STUK's operational and strategic planning. Trainers' active promotion of equality and diversity within lessons, assessment and reviews is adequate. The quality and frequency of staff training in equality and diversity are adequate.
- STUK's current mix of learners is highly diverse and reflects local and regional populations; slightly under half of learners are from a minority ethnic heritage. The range of government-funded programmes STUK offers, including apprenticeships, is broadly complementary and targeted at some of the most disadvantaged in the population, including those with significant barriers to employment or learning. The proportion of male to female apprentices is approximately equal. A significant proportion of learners on the business improvement techniques programme is female.
- Senior management has undertaken an extensive equality and diversity impact assessment which identifies many positive aspects in the company's approach and the outcomes for learners. However, it also identifies clear differences in attainment between certain groups. STUK's equality and diversity action plan does not include a thorough consideration of why such differences in attainment exist nor does it identify specific improvement actions.
- STUK's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet statutory requirements and risk is managed appropriately. STUK has developed close working partnerships with local authorities in respect of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Only one safeguarding issue has been reported by an apprentice in the past fifteen months, and records indicate this was managed appropriately.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Skills Training UK Ltd

<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b>  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Outcomes for learners	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-

<b>Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>Administration</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Engineering</b>	<b>2</b>

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider							
<b>Age range of learners</b>	19+							
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: 444							
	Part-time: 0							
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Martin Dunford							
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	17-21 September 2012							
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.skillstraininguk.com/">http://www.skillstraininguk.com/</a>							
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Part-time</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	2	132	-	38	-	-		
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>								
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Part-time</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>	None							

## Contextual information

Skills Training UK Ltd's (STUK) head office is based in Wembley, West London. This report focuses on STUK's apprenticeships in business improvement techniques and a range of business administration programmes. Learners are all employed and based in companies in and around the coastal and central areas of the south east of England, much of Greater London and the West Midlands. The large majority of apprentices are adults, and around two thirds are aged over 25. Approximately half of learners are female. Just over half of current apprentices are from a White British ethnic heritage and the remainder comprise a broad mix of people from a minority ethnic heritage.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Nicholas Crombie HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by STUK's Head of Continuous Improvement 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 relevant 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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