

# Training Synergy (Escalla) Ltd

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		9–12 June 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-3</b>
	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:

- a low proportion of apprentices on programmes other than information and communication technology (ICT) successfully complete their apprenticeship; and too many female apprentices, particularly in property services and pharmacy, leave their programmes early
- trainers and assessors do not routinely incorporate the development of English and mathematical skills into apprentices' activities outside of specific functional skills lessons
- managers pay insufficient attention to the professional development of trainers and assessors to help them to improve their practice
- trainers and assessors do not use a sufficient variety of training and assessment methods to enrich learning, support progress, and consistently meet apprentices' individual needs
- trainers and assessors set targets for apprentices which focus too narrowly on completing assessments and do not sufficiently identify opportunities for apprentices to further develop their skills; as a result, apprentices do not all make the progress of which they are capable
- when observing teaching and learning, managers do not focus sufficiently on learning and the progress that apprentices make in learning sessions
- managers are not yet using self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements well enough to ensure that all apprentices make good progress.

### This provider has the following strengths:

- a high proportion of information and communication technology advanced apprentices achieve well and complete their apprenticeship successfully
- managers maintain good partnerships with high-quality employers who provide apprentices with opportunities to develop skills beneficial to the economy
- managers carefully match employers' business needs and apprentices' interests, so that the majority of apprentices who complete their programmes progress into sustained employment
- ICT apprentices develop their personal, social and work-related skills well through participation in citizenship projects within local communities and schools.

## Full report

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

- Ensure that more apprentices, especially female apprentices, complete their programmes, so that all apprentices achieve well.
- Ensure that all apprentices improve their use of functional English and mathematics to enable them to participate fully in their training and make good progress in their careers.
- Provide training and development for assessors to improve the planning of assessments and the range of assessment strategies used; make better use of technology to gather evidence and improve the progress apprentices make.
- Improve the impact of feedback to apprentices following assessments by making sure that assessors provide clear written feedback for apprentices that clearly describes what they need to do to improve further.
- Ensure that apprentices' learning plans include specific targets for the development of their English, mathematics, and work-related skills, in addition to their vocational targets, to enable them to make better progress.
- As a matter of urgency ensure that a single self-assessment process is developed to replace the current dual system inherited from the two previous companies, and produce a single coherent set of quality improvement objectives.
- Improve the accuracy and usefulness of observations of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that observers focus on learning and the progress apprentices make in sessions.
- Ensure that managers use the outcomes of observations of teaching, learning and assessment to contribute to reviews of staff performance and provide well-focused professional development.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training Synergy and CLM merged their apprenticeship provision in May 2014 and are still in the process of rationalising the provision, trading under the new name of Escalla. Training is funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Training Synergy (Escalla) Ltd is a new organisation with no published data on apprentices' outcomes and no previous inspection history.</li> <li>▪ Currently, there are 104 apprentices on programmes for ICT for practitioners, property services and pharmacy technicians, and a small number of apprentices on a range of other programmes. The advanced apprenticeships for ICT practitioners is the largest programme, constituting about 40% of the provision; the majority of these apprentices are located around Crewe, with small numbers in London. Apprentices attend technical and functional skills training at their local Escalla centre for one week each month. All other apprentices are training at a variety of locations around the country and receive training and assessment in the workplace from visiting assessors.</li> <li>▪ Although no data on apprenticeship outcomes have yet been published a large proportion of ICT apprentices stay on their programmes and achieve very well. However, the majority of apprentices are studying other vocational subjects and the proportion of these apprentices who complete their apprenticeship successfully is lower and requires improvement.</li> <li>▪ Most apprentices make the progress expected of them in the development of relevant technical skills which support their job roles. Information technology (IT) support technicians work well in companies which are market leaders, and pharmacy technicians work to professional standards supporting retail pharmacists. However, apprentices do not make the expected progress in their work-related skills, in particular the development and use of English language. For example, at</li> </ul>	

one employer supervisors now read and correct all emails before they are sent due to concerns about the quality of written English produced by IT support technician apprentices.

- ICT apprentices, benefit from an innovative range of citizenship projects which develop their social, team-working and personal skills well. For example, one group of apprentices researched and developed a range of activities to raise awareness of cyber bullying for teachers to use at a local primary school during an activities day.
- Many apprentices work to high standards in the workplace, and add value to their employers' businesses. However, these standards are not reflected in apprentices' written assessed work. Assessors encourage routine written tasks that meet the assessment criteria effectively, but seldom encourage apprentices to develop their knowledge further, achieve their aspirations or work beyond a basic level. As a result, many apprentices do not reach their full potential.
- A large majority of apprentices are exempt from functional skills assessments owing to their prior achievements but assessors do not support or encourage them to develop their mathematical and English skills further. As a result, they do not benefit from gaining more advanced English and mathematical skills to support their future career choices, or to enable them to reach their potential in their employment.
- The large majority of ICT apprentices are male, while pharmacy and property services attract predominantly female apprentices. Retention rates are higher for male apprentices and, consequently, success rates are higher for ICT programmes; overall, however, female apprentices are proportionally more successful than their male counterparts. Female apprentices are also more successful at progressing into sustained employment. Managers have taken little action to understand and tackle these variations.
- The small number of apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve at a similar rate to the majority of apprentices, who are of White heritage. However, apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds are less successful at progressing to full-time sustained employment. Managers have planned few actions to identify the causes of this discrepancy.
- A large proportion of apprentices progress into employment, with most apprentices gaining permanent positions after their apprenticeship, often meeting local skill shortages; there are several examples of apprentices progressing directly to team leader roles and positions of responsibility on completing their apprenticeship. Many ICT apprentices attain additional qualifications, including CISCO and Microsoft technical qualifications. Small numbers proceed to further or higher education, however staff do not promote these opportunities sufficiently.

### **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement; this is reflected in the low success rates for the majority of apprenticeships, and the lack of progress all apprentices make in the further development of their English and mathematical skills. Apprentices acquire technical skills quickly, and make good contributions and progress in the workplace, but not all reach their full potential.
- Apprentices enjoy their courses and, due to good individual support provided by knowledgeable staff, most participate well in learning sessions. Too often, however, assessors fail to set sufficiently challenging tasks tailored to match the job roles and prior knowledge of all apprentices. Apprentices complete activities that meet the requirements of their vocational qualification, but these do not always link clearly to the specific skills individual apprentices need in their job roles. As a result, many do not develop their skills beyond a basic level and this impedes their progress at work. For example, in learning sessions, a trainer discussed the complexities of internet access and permissions for apprentices in an internet support company, but the apprentices' understanding was not then developed in the workplace, where such knowledge was a key requirement of the support role.
- The quality of assessment requires improvement. Assessors in different vocational subjects use different approaches which vary in effectiveness. Assessors in pharmacy make better use of the

e-portfolio to track apprentices' progress than their colleagues in IT programmes. Staffs' written feedback on apprentices' work is cursory, lacking detail and advice. Comments focus on meeting the basic standards required and do not support apprentices sufficiently to make improvements in their work, or challenge and inspire them to achieve a higher standard and further develop their work-related skills.

- Trainers' support for apprentices in lessons is good. As a result, apprentices feel confident to ask questions freely which helps them to understand key concepts. This creates a good learning environment, which apprentices greatly appreciate. The small class sizes and inclusive atmosphere also enhance the effectiveness of support in lessons.
- Assessors have a good understanding of apprentices' social and personal needs and carry out regular workplace reviews of their progress. However, they do not give sufficient attention to assessing and recording the level of skill that apprentices have developed by each review, to enable them to measure the progress apprentices make over time. As a result, assessors do not have sufficient information to plan each apprentice's next steps effectively.
- Most apprentices benefit from high quality work places and supportive employers. Apprentices work hard, developing their confidence and social skills and broadening their experience, which they use effectively when dealing with customers' problems.
- Apprentices receive good initial information, advice and guidance. Staff discuss apprentices' learning needs effectively with them and their employers, and ensure that apprentices work towards the most appropriate qualification and level. End-of-programme discussions, however, are often too informal to be of significant use in supporting apprentices to identify and plan their further career and progression.
- Assessors do not record specific areas of learning and development requiring improvement thoroughly enough in individual learning plans. Too many targets are vague and lack helpful detail to enable planning of the next steps in learning. Assessors' records of reviews do not show apprentices' progress towards improving their skills, attitudes, and knowledge sufficiently, or give details of their progress towards improving functional and employability skills.
- Assessors and trainers do not consistently use information about apprentices' prior attainment or the results of initial assessment to contribute to the planning of teaching, learning and assessment so that they meet individual needs.
- Teaching, learning and assessment of mathematics and English functional skills require improvement. Assessment at the start of apprentices' programmes does not include a detailed identification of gaps in their knowledge in these subjects. As a result, trainers and assessors do not have sufficient information to plan lessons which develop individual apprentice's knowledge and skills. Apprentices who produce work of a poor standard are not required or encouraged to improve or correct it.
- Trainers and assessors do not plan sufficiently well to help learners understand equality in the workplace, or raise their awareness of diversity so that they appreciate how people from other backgrounds might hold different values and beliefs. However, assessors have started to introduce discussions on radicalisation and British values, with further training for staff planned in the coming months.

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

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. Whilst leaders and managers are committed to the aims of the organisation, and work hard to match apprentices with good-quality employers, they have not taken enough sustained and effective action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, too many apprentices leave their programmes before achieving their qualification, or do not develop their English and mathematical skills beyond the basic requirements of the qualification.
- Managers and staff place a strong focus on the achievement of apprentices on IT courses, resulting in good achievement; on other courses, such as property services or pharmacy,

employers and Escalla use quality assurance methods effectively to ensure that those apprentices who have remained on their programmes make progress. However, significant deficiencies exist in the monitoring of aspects of apprentices' progress towards achievement, such as their attendance, progress reports, individual learning plans and target setting. As a consequence, these essential aspects of the apprentices' experience are not yet good, and not all apprentices are achieving their full potential.

- When observing sessions, managers focus too much on trainers' performance and not enough on evaluating the progress made by apprentices in sessions, and over time. As a result, the effectiveness of lesson observations as a tool to promote improvement is reduced. Managers make insufficient links between observation findings, reviews of individual staff performance, and the development of best practice in teaching, learning and assessment. As a consequence, they do not identify or achieve some specific and necessary improvements.
- Staff benefit from working in a harmonious team and forge good relationships with apprentices and their employers. Many staff attend regular essential legislation updates and achieve assessor awards. However, managers do not provide sufficient focused training to help trainers and assessors improve and update their practice, as a result, much teaching and learning require improvement.
- Self-assessment requires improvement. In their self-assessment reports, managers are broadly accurate in their identification of general areas for improvement, but do not focus sufficiently on the impact of provision on apprentices, or provide the detail needed to make specific improvements. Two different systems for gathering information about programmes, and evaluating and improving their effectiveness, inherited from the two previous companies, are currently in use. They have yet to be incorporated into a single system, but responsibilities for making improvements are often shared. As a result, some key objectives, such as the need to improve the promotion of equality and awareness of diversity in learning, are missed and the sharp focus required in quality improvement plans to bring about change is lacking.
- Apprentices, including those in property services, pharmacy and IT, complete a range of qualifications which meet national and local employers' needs well. Leaders have created enduring relationships with employers, who praise the support they receive highly; these partnerships result in close matching of employers' needs and apprentices' interests. Escalla is responsive to employers' feedback, for example changing a qualification module to meet the needs of a pharmacy business, modifying attendance patterns on IT programmes, and providing apprentices with a one-day customer service course.
- Staff take great care to place apprentices on courses and in employment settings that suit their needs and interests, and placements are of good quality. Apprentices appreciate the support they receive from both Escalla's and the on-the-job assessors and trainers.
- Managers have placed insufficient emphasis on ensuring trainers develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills. Although apprentices achieve the English and mathematics qualifications they need to complete their full apprenticeship qualification, there is no further skill development or opportunity to take further qualifications in English and mathematics beyond this minimum requirement.
- The promotion and development of apprentices' awareness of equality and diversity require improvement. Materials for induction provide a useful introduction to aspects of equality and diversity, but the development of apprentices' understanding through their training is insufficient. Managers' monitoring of different groups of apprentices' achievements is superficial and, where differences exist, they are not always identified and actions to address the differences are not planned.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff receive regular knowledge and awareness updates, and employers' health and safety arrangements are thoroughly assessed. Apprentices are well informed at induction about personal safety, for example child exploitation and e-safety.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)****Training Synergy (Escalla) Ltd**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  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
Overall effectiveness	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
Outcomes for learners	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-

<b>Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>ICT for practitioners</b>	<b>3</b>

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16-18								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	92								
Principal/CEO	Claire McLellan								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.escalla.me/apprenticeships								
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+	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	39	5	54	7	-		-		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	-		-		-				
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	-								
Part-time	-								
Number of community learners	-								
Number of employability learners	-								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None								

## Contextual information

Training Synergy (Escalla) Ltd was established in May 2014 by the merger of two independent learning providers, Training Synergy Ltd and CLM, with the aim of broadening and strengthening the apprenticeship schemes offered. The first SFA-funded apprentices were recruited in July 2014; few have yet reached their planned end dates. Escalla currently also has apprentices subcontracted from three further education colleges.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Barry Barrett-Mold

A lead inspector and two additional inspectors, assisted by the director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment reports 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 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:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012)

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