

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

18–21 October 2016

Overall effectiveness		Inadequate	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate	16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- The number of learners achieving qualifications is low and their overall progress is slow.
- Learners do not develop their English and mathematics skills quickly enough.
- Practical sessions are not structured well enough and learners work without clear individual objectives to achieve.
- A lack of work placements restricts learners' opportunities to meet the study programme requirements.
- Staff set insufficiently focused learner targets and progress monitoring is poor, resulting in learners falling behind with their work.
- Insufficient information, advice and guidance given to learners on programmes leaves them unsure of further training and work opportunities.
- Leaders and managers have taken insufficient action to improve learner outcomes since the last inspection.
- Managers do not use data sufficiently well to monitor learner performance or to form judgements when assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.
- Governance is weak. Directors do not give sufficient and measurable challenge to senior staff.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners demonstrate mutual respect for each other and for staff. They attend well, behave well and are punctual at all times.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited (STS) is a private training provider formed in 1998. It currently employs 14 staff and delivers study programmes from its training and administrative centre in Mansfield. Learners undertake vocational programmes in hairdressing, administration, information and communication technology (ICT) and customer service. The training centre includes a hairdressing salon which is open to the general public. In addition to the study programme, STS delivers apprenticeships through a subcontracting arrangement with another learning provider.
- Currently 24 learners are following study programmes. Most learners live in the local area. The proportion of school leavers in Nottinghamshire who achieve five or more GCSEs at grade C or above is lower than the national average. Unemployment in Mansfield is higher than the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall achievement rates for learners and the time they take to complete their training programmes. Enhance arrangements for more frequent monitoring of the progress of learners and set more clearly defined and measurable targets for improvement.
- Ensure that learners are aware of the importance of completing all the aspects of their training programme in order to improve their chances of progression into either jobs or further training. Increase the number of work placement opportunities for learners to help them develop their work skills and behaviours. Measure the impact of recent changes in priorities for mathematics and English delivery.
- Improve the skills of all teachers in order to plan and deliver challenging workshops and lessons. Plan and structure lessons better to ensure learners work to clearly set objectives. Ensure learners have high expectations and are ambitious, and reflect this in lesson planning to enable learners to make better progress.
- Provide more detailed and individualised information, advice and careers guidance while learners are working through their study programme. This needs to be more clearly focused and tailored to meet individuals' needs near their programme completion.
- Apply specific and time-bound improvement objectives more rigorously in quality improvement plans. Align these with the key performance indicators for the study programme requirements and use measurable short-term and medium-term targets to improve standards and achievement.
- Identify and put in place arrangements for reviewing governance that provide challenge and support for senior management in order to sustain and improve the provision. Identify clearly strengths and weakness when evaluating the provision and use data to provide supporting evidence for judgements.

- Through better partnership working, seek out and specify existing and new employers' needs more clearly to inform the development of training programmes and relevant career pathways for the study programme learners. Be more aware of local business developments to be able to increase the work experience opportunities for learners.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders and managers have failed over a two-year period to arrest declining performance in the provision for study programme learners. The number of study programme learners who achieved qualifications during this period fell to well below national rates. The capacity for securing further improvement is limited and the pace of improvement is too slow. The organisation does not benefit from any strategic planning and it does not identify measurable objectives against which to form plans. Expectations with regard to what learners can do and achieve are not high enough.
- Actions taken by leaders and managers since the last inspection have not made sufficient impact to raise the quality of the provision or to make a difference to the declining trend in performance overall. The few improvements that leaders and managers have made have not provided sufficient impetus to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to a good standard overall. Staff turnover has impacted negatively on the pace of improvement. New staff appointments have led to signs of improving standards of English and mathematics teaching to benefit current learners. For example, learners are now showing increased motivation, making better progress and producing better standards of written English; however, it is too early to see the full impact on all learners' achievements.
- Managers do not use data sufficiently well in forming judgements when assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Where judgements refer to, for example, achievement and retention, they are not accurate when compared to management data reports. The current self-assessment report does not make it clear where the main strengths, weaknesses or areas for improvement exist within the provision.
- Managers have not made sufficient progress with areas previously judged to require improvement in leadership and management. For example, the previous inspection in 2014 judged that quality assurance arrangements overall needed improvement, and this remains a requirement in 2016. Quality improvement plans do not relate clearly enough to the self-assessment report. Quality improvement planning lacks measurable targets and does not provide an accurate picture by which to judge progress.
- The revised arrangements for quality assuring and improving the areas of teaching, learning and assessment are fit for purpose but have not had sufficient impact yet on improving standards. As a result not enough of the learners in 2015/16 made progress or achieved qualifications.
- The range of provision offered through the study programme does not meet the needs of learners. A high number of learners leave early without completing their study programme. Not enough research takes place to develop programmes in response to the requirements of employers already in the area and new employers moving into the area. Managers are aware of this and have very recently appointed a new staff member to improve employer liaison.

- Managers and staff promote equality and diversity effectively across all STS's activities; staff and learners respond well to this approach and treat each other with respect. For example, learners are able to state why mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs is important.
- Managers and staff promote British values effectively with learners and they meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. Staff have received training which enables them to help learners understand and apply British values. For example, they develop learners' understanding of the democratic process through electing learners' representatives to bring forward ideas and suggestions for improvement.

The governance of the provider

- Arrangements for governance are inadequate. STS is governed solely by its managing director with four members of staff having significant management responsibilities within the company. However, apart from regular management meetings, there are no specific activities that could be described as governance or senior staff performance management.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff promote the importance of safeguarding to learners well. Learners are safe, apply safe practices and know how to take responsibility for their own safety and that of others. Two designated safeguarding officers work effectively to apply the safeguarding arrangements, which are fit for purpose. All staff who work with learners are subject to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Staff training to support the application of safeguarding is effective. Learners and staff access and use good-quality information to further develop their knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe.
- Good examples identified by inspectors show clear lines of communication and monitoring when dealing with individual safeguarding issues. STS has particularly good partnership working with external agencies, including social services and supported housing officials. Health and safety are a high priority and good attention to safe working practices was observed during practical sessions in the hairdressing salon.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Over the past two years teaching, learning and assessment have not been of a sufficiently high standard, too few learners have achieved and not enough of them have progressed to employment or further training.
- Lessons and practical sessions are not always structured well enough and do not provide sufficiently demanding activities, particularly for the more advanced learners. In practical sessions learners work at their own pace and many do not complete enough work in the time they have to prepare them for a commercial environment. In lessons questioning is undirected and activities are not well suited to enable learners to achieve the session outcomes; they also fail to challenge more able learners. Too often teachers' expectations of learners are not high enough and they do not make the progress of which they are

capable during lessons.

- Staff do not identify learners falling behind with work quickly enough, as progress monitoring is poor. Targets are not sufficiently well focused to support learners to make good progress towards long-term learning goals.
- A lack of access to opportunities to work on customers in work placement or the training salon limits learners' ability to put their knowledge into practice. Not enough work placement opportunities are available to learners across all the subject areas. Learners are not gaining the skills and knowledge required to function within a real-work environment; however, external clients do attend the training salon.
- Staff produce learner profiles detailing specific individual needs but they do not always take account of these needs when planning and delivering lessons in vocational subjects. Learners now undertake effective online diagnostic assessment of their English and mathematics skills, which teachers use well. The learners make good use of results to complete learning activities and, with the support of teachers, to improve the areas identified by the assessments. However it is too soon to see the long-term impact of this on the progress of current learners.
- Learners receive useful feedback that helps them understand what they need to do to improve. For example, hairdressing teachers provide learners with comments on client consultation cards completed during salon assessments which clearly identify what they have done well and give guidance on what they need to do to improve. Teachers support the development of learners' technical skills well and as a result practical learners produce good finished hairstyles and use technical language well.
- English and mathematics teaching is now given a high priority. New staff have been employed with relevant experience and expertise. Learners are beginning to benefit from this and enjoy learning and developing their skills. They improve their written English and apply mathematics skills in, for example, practical hairdressing sessions by calculating volumes confidently.
- Teachers give the promotion of equality and diversity, British values and the 'Prevent' duty a high priority in lessons and progress reviews. Many learners develop an understanding of these concepts and are aware of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Learners are also aware of potential dangers around e-safety and the use of social media. New teachers have created a safe and supportive learning environment that earns the trust and confidence of current learners.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Require improvement

- Retention rates for learners are low and continuing to decline. Learners are not always aware of the final range of progression opportunities open to them and do not understand all the options available. Information, advice and guidance are not routinely revisited while learners are on programme. However staff give information, advice and guidance competently to learners when they start their study programme.
- The few learners who benefit from work experience placements do not receive enough formal planning and guidance to maximise their skills development. This restricts their opportunities to develop wider employability skills such as teamwork, punctuality at work

and using initiative and personal confidence. Progression rates for learners moving on to further education and training or employment have declined over the last year and are low. One third of leavers remain unemployed.

- Good individual support for learners provided by well-experienced staff enables learners to be confident, well motivated and enjoy their learning, particularly in practical lessons. Good financial and counselling support helps them remain on their programme. A range of awards encourage learning and progression and celebrate individual successes. Learner of the month and learner of the year awards have introduced a competitive edge to learning which current learners have embraced.
- A strong focus exists on the promotion of positive behaviour through focused one-to-one discussions with staff. Learners demonstrate mutual respect for each other and for staff while in class and in the training centre. They attend well, behave well, and are punctual at all times. Attendance is well monitored and since the start of the new term attendance rates are increasing each month.
- Staff are approachable and learners feel safe. Teachers monitor the health and safety of learners well both in the training centre and in the work experience placements. The health and well-being of learners are a key focus for everyone while they are on their training programme. Healthy eating is encouraged and specialist sexual health clinics provided by external health specialists take place periodically in the training centre.
- Staff have a good and empathetic understanding of individuals' barriers to learning gained via a thorough assessment process, and they develop suitable strategies to reduce them. Teachers support learners' specific needs well by utilising available specialist learning materials to support, for example, dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

Outcomes for learners

Inadequate

- The proportion of learners achieving their qualification within their planned time has not improved since the last inspection in 2014 and is inadequate. Overall achievement has remained low and achievements of learners within their planned time have declined and are also low.
- Learners' achievement of functional skills qualifications has slightly improved since the last inspection; however, achievements are still low compared to national rates for similar providers. Hairdressing achievement rates remain very low.
- Analysis of the performance of different groups of learners is regular and comprehensive. Currently no significant gaps in learners' performance are evident across the range of different groups.
- The number of learners who progress on to further education, training or employment is declining and is now low. However, hairdressing learners are gaining good practical skills. They use technical terminology and practise well.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54643
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	106
Principal/CEO	Sue Bradshaw
Telephone number	01623 634 483
Website	www.stsmansfield.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	3	-	20	-	1	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the study programme manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Tim Hanson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Derrick Spragg	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqui Deane	Ofsted Inspector

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