

Straight A Training Limited

Independent Learning Provider

Inspection dates

25–28 October 2016

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Managers focus strongly on improvement and have strengthened the provision significantly since the previous inspection.
- Learners' achievement of their apprenticeships is good. The mix of additional training qualifications they achieve in the workplace enhances their employment and promotion prospects significantly.
- Learners become highly skilled chefs, customer service and business administration staff. Progression into employment is good, with the vast majority gaining promotions, increased responsibility and pay rises.
- Learners' attitudes to learning and work are good. For the majority, gains in knowledge and skills are very strong as a result of high-quality learning experiences.
- The majority of training staff, workplace supervisors and mentors are industry experts. They understand the needs of learners and businesses well and ensure that their teaching reflects current industry standards.
- Learners develop valuable English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills that prepare them well for their next steps in learning and their future careers.
- Assessment and coaching in the workplace are strong and detailed feedback helps learners to develop their hospitality and business skills quickly.
- Learners pay good attention to safe working practices. They feel safe and are well supported and looked after.
- A small minority of learners are not making the progress expected of them because managers do not set improvement targets for staff that focus sufficiently on improving their impact on learners' progress.
- Assessors do not consistently promote the effective development of study skills such as note-taking.
- A small minority of employers are insufficiently involved in planning learners' on- and off-the-job training, which slows their learners' progress.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Straight A Training Limited is a private training company which has been in operation since 1999. The provider works with a number of large hospitality and media organisations to deliver apprenticeships across a wide range of locations in England and Wales. It provides qualifications in hospitality and catering, as well as business administration, customer service and management. The two directors are supported by an operations manager, with nine full-time trainers, as well as other management support and administrative staff.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should set their assessors clear performance targets and appraise their performance with reference to the impact of their work with learners.
- Managers should monitor individual learners more closely and implement intervention plans quickly when their progress slows.
- Managers should ensure that teachers improve learners' understanding of good study practices such as accurate note-taking and recording verbal feedback to ensure that they have a record of key learning and feedback points for future reference.
- Managers should ensure that all employers or workplace supervisors are contributing to setting up and monitoring training and assessment plans to support their learners to achieve their full potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have worked hard since the previous inspection to improve the quality of provision and effectiveness of safeguarding. As a result, the majority of learners now achieve their qualifications and progress to full-time employment within the planned timescales. For example, managers and staff monitor learners' progress on a monthly basis and hold assessors keenly to account for learners' progress and achievement.
- Leaders have a very clear strategy and vision for the future direction of the company. These are shared with staff and linked to opportunities for staff development to support business and growth needs, such as delivering non-accredited courses in health and nutrition. Leaders are ambitious for the company and prioritise high achievement rates for their learners.
- Senior managers are developing the curriculum well. They have set a clear focus on broadening the provision around its core strength of hospitality and catering, business management and associated subjects, such as administration and team leading. Leaders and managers engage well with local and regional employer groups and are active members of the chamber of commerce. Leaders use the business intelligence they gather to inform the programme offer, which is closely aligned to business needs and local and national priorities. Leaders are developing very good links with some renowned hotel chains and media groups. As a result of these partnerships, learners have very good career prospects.
- The arrangements to assess and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection. However, the observations of teaching and learning focus too much on the actions of the tutor and not sufficiently on learning and learners' progress. Target-setting arising from staff appraisals is not yet fully developed and sufficiently focused on the impact of teaching on learners' progress.
- Managers have developed highly effective partnership working with a number of local schools. This supports the development and delivery of vocational programmes for Year 10 and 11 pupils very well, providing them with alternative vocational pathways and career progression opportunities. Staff work with one school which specialises in supporting young people with autism particularly well, giving pupils the opportunity to take their first steps into working in hospitality and gaining an apprenticeship.
- Leaders' and managers' checks on employers' arrangements to support apprentices are comprehensive. Leaders and managers make sure employers can provide sufficient training and assessment opportunities for learners when designing programmes. Employers have a clear understanding of the expectations of the programme and the support arrangements needed to enable learners to develop knowledge and skills and complete their programme

successfully.

- Leaders' and managers' arrangements to improve English and mathematics provision are having a positive impact. A recently recruited English and mathematics tutor is developing resources and supporting all staff to improve their own skills and confidence. This enables them to better integrate English and mathematics skills in all aspects of teaching and assessment. Learners' achievements of qualifications in English and mathematics have increased significantly since the last inspection.
- Employers value highly the gains in employability and social skills that their learners make and the impact of these on their businesses. Assessors make sure learners work towards English, mathematics and ICT qualifications at a higher level than that required by their apprenticeship. Assessors provide constructive and supportive feedback to learners, promoting the skills required to improve the presentation and accuracy of their written work. Learners for whom English is an additional language develop good speaking and listening skills that enable them to communicate with customers clearly.
- Managers have introduced a comprehensive induction programme which prepares learners well for their qualifications. This ensures that assessors and learners have a detailed understanding of the programmes, from recruitment to completion and employment. Assessors take responsibility for maintaining their professional competency and currency within the sector and keep up to date with industry practices.
- Leaders and senior managers promote equality, diversity and British values well. Regular training provides staff with the confidence and knowledge to support learners, who themselves demonstrate a good understanding of topics such as discrimination, harassment and health and well-being. High-quality learning resources help to underpin and support their learning.

The governance of the provider

- The company directors participate fully in senior leadership team roles, responsibilities and meetings. Between them, they have an excellent understanding of the organisation, including the strengths and areas for improvement, and are providing strong leadership in driving business growth and further improving the learners' experience.

Directors are currently reviewing governance arrangements to ensure that the business continues to grow in line with the company's strategic plan. Directors work closely with their accountants and bankers to support and challenge significant developments and to ensure that procedures are in place to maintain business continuity for the benefit of learners.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have implemented effective safeguarding arrangements. The manager responsible for overseeing the statutory duty for

safeguarding keeps detailed records and monitors these thoroughly. Learners are particularly well supported throughout any personal difficulties and referrals and communications with specialist agencies are managed well. Managers carry out comprehensive recruitment checks on staff and maintain detailed and up-to-date records.

- Leaders record the management and resolution of safeguarding incidents involving learners well. Referrals to external support agencies following safeguarding issues have resulted in very positive support for learners in areas such as mental health and self-harming.
- Leaders and managers have responded well to their obligations under the 'Prevent' duty and training for all staff has been effective in raising awareness of the issues. Most learners have a clear understanding of the risks of and keeping themselves safe from radicalisation.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. They know how to keep themselves safe at work and in their personal and social lives as a result of promotions such as e-safety and the wider application of safeguarding which they understand well. For example, when lone working or when working shifts.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Learners make very good progress and develop the skills, knowledge and qualifications to do their jobs well. Well-qualified and experienced assessors and workplace trainers use their experience well to enrich learning. Most learners benefit from working in high-quality workplaces with good employer support. As a result, the vast majority make good progress.
- Assessors and employers have high expectations of learners and motivate them to be successful in their learning. Assessors reinforce learning well with regular reference to good industrial practice and high standards. They use a good range of assessment activities and feedback approaches to manage learning and track progress.
- Assessors' planning in a minority of sessions requires improvement. As a result, assessors do not consistently stimulate learners' interest during training sessions in order to develop good study habits. Learners do not have a complete record of the key learning and development points for future reference. As a result, a small minority of learners are not making the progress of which they are capable.
- Assessors provide good support to meet individual learners' needs. Assessors make good use of electronic learning resources and assignments to support knowledge development. Learners use a wide range of evidence in their portfolios to demonstrate competence. Assessors make good use of written feedback to ensure that learners know how to improve. However, assessors do not make sure their verbal feedback is recorded by learners for further reference when they are trying to improve the quality of their work.

- Assessors use technology well to support programme delivery and learners find the electronic portfolio particularly helpful. They value the ease with which they can upload evidence for assessment and receive feedback from assessors between visits. Assessors use technology effectively during visits to develop learning points. For example, in a session on manual handling, a short but highly relevant video clip was used to show correct techniques which effectively prompted further discussion.
- Learners' career aspirations and interests are closely matched to the skills and attributes that individual employers require for their business. Media learners, working closely with their line manager, choose from a range of options ranging from legal casework to digital media to support their career development and meet their employers' business needs.
- Assessors place a strong emphasis on learners developing good skills for employment and safe working practices. Assessors prepare learners well for the hospitality and business sectors. In hospitality, assessors frequently put on their chef's whites and give demonstrations of fish and meat filleting to refine workplace skills further. Assessors focus well on developing learners' personal skills such as respect, resilience and self-confidence.
- Assessors support the vast majority of learners to set very effective personalised learning targets, as well as short- and long-term goals. Progress reviews are frequent and learners soon take responsibility for their learning and make good progress. However, a minority of employers are not involved in reviewing their learners' progress. Assessors' approaches are superficial and fail to record the on- and off-the-job skills development of learners. Targets set at these learners' reviews focus only on qualification completion, rather than personal development targets for learners. This slows the learners' progress.
- Learners with additional support needs receive effective support from staff to ensure that they make good progress and achieve their qualifications. Staff are adept at supporting learners with physical or mental health difficulties.
- The teaching of English, mathematics and ICT is good, as staff provide intensive support to learners. Managers and staff assess learners' starting points accurately and expect them to develop their skills at a higher level, rather than the minimum standards required for the apprenticeship. Assessors support learners for whom English is an additional language well. Helpful guidance on correct pronunciation of new technical vocabulary ensures that these learners have good speaking and listening skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners are committed to the aims of the apprenticeship programme and undertake assessment with energy and enthusiasm. Learners take pride in their work. They are prepared well for work and demonstrate a mature attitude to their studies and work. Employers give their learners more responsibility as soon

as they are ready.

- Learning programmes engage learners particularly well and enable them to develop skills, resilience and attitudes to work that prepare them well for employment and a productive life in modern Britain. Learners develop quickly the knowledge and skills they need for work. Their practical and written work is of a high standard. However, assessors do not develop learners' study skills sufficiently to make sure they take detailed notes of key points arising from learning or assessment sessions. As a result, learners soon forget what they need to do to improve their knowledge and skills further.
- A majority of learners act as good role models for their organisation and mirror well the organisational and professional values that employers rightly expect. They take pride in their appearance, adhere to company dress codes and act with respect and courtesy to visitors and peers.
- Learners with personal, social and health needs benefit greatly from the high-quality support they receive from the staff and external specialists. As a result, learners accessing this support successfully complete their programmes and gain good jobs in the business and hospitality sectors.
- Assessors help learners to develop their skills in English, mathematics and ICT very well. All learners are self-confident and articulate. Assessors develop learners' vocational language well and provide help with accurate pronunciation for learners for whom English is an additional language. In business, learners complete additional training in the use of specialist data-handling software as media researchers. Learners use ICT well for research on the internet, to access online learning materials and to prepare work for assessments.
- Learners receive good careers information to help them select the programme that best suits their abilities and career paths. Learners receive good guidance about their further options. Learners often spend time in different departments, gaining additional experience of their employers' work which gives a clear line of sight to future careers. As a result, the numbers securing sustained jobs, promotions and pay rises are high.
- Assessors and employers prioritise and strongly promote health and safety. Learners feel safe and demonstrate high levels of safe working practices, particularly in busy kitchens. They are fully aware of how to report any concerns they may have about possible safety risks to themselves or others.
- Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding. They are confident in the arrangements for reporting and investigation and know that incidents will be dealt with thoroughly. Managers and staff make sure learners develop a good understanding of online safety and radicalisation during their induction and throughout the programme. Learners' knowledge of how to protect themselves from radicalisation is also good.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners enjoy their studies and the vast majority make very good progress. Both intermediate and advanced apprentices achieve well, with most completing within the planned timescales in the current year. Learners achieve well on their main qualification and this has improved markedly since the previous inspection.
- Learners develop good work-related skills as well as broader skills, such as team working, which support them in becoming valuable team members in busy media centres, hotels and kitchens early in their course. Learners make rapid progress in developing their business and hospitality skills, with many showing significant improvements from their starting point in a short space of time.
- Learners develop their skills to meet the exacting needs of employers and, in many cases, exceed the requirements of their qualifications. High numbers of learners attend additional training and achieve additional qualifications such as personal and product branding and food hygiene which relate well to their career aims. Staff prepare learners well for their next steps in their career or higher education.
- Leaders and managers have made sure they have robust, accurate data to manage learners' progress and performance throughout their apprenticeship. They particularly focus on underperforming groups. Managers are closing achievement gaps. For example, the number of males completing within the agreed time frame has improved and is now more in line with female learners. However, a significant minority of learners with one employer are not making the progress expected of them, given their starting points. A significant minority have left the programme early. Managers are aware of this situation and have ceased enrolling more learners with this employer.
- Managers and staff have worked hard since the previous inspection to ensure that they have detailed information about the destinations of learners. The vast majority of learners continue into sustained employment, with many gaining additional responsibilities, promotions and pay rises. Many become mentors for new learners.
- Learners develop good skills in English, mathematics and ICT. Assessors make sure learners are working towards their next level rather than the minimum standards set by the apprenticeship. Learners have made much better progress in achieving these qualifications since the last inspection. A high and increasing number of learners pass their tests at their first attempt.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54640
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	244
Principal/CEO	Ms Jayne Raftery
Telephone number	01276 469 020
Website	www.straighta.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+
	0	0	8	105	24	105	0	2
Number of learners by learnership level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	8	105	24	105	0	2		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	None							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							

At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:

Qube Learning and Development

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief executive officer, 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

Martin Bennett, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
Tracey Griffin	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Masterson	Ofsted Inspector

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