

Training Synergy (Escalla) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

9–12 May 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Apprentices make exceptional progress in improving their English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- Apprentices gain good technical and vocational skills through the wide variety of classroom and workplace activities, which includes team-working, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Apprentices make extremely good progress in their job roles. Employers often promote and give much additional responsibility to apprentices at work, sometimes at a very early stage in their apprenticeships.
- Apprentices become much more confident, are highly motivated, enjoy their learning and take great pride in their work. They display very good behaviour.
- Expert practitioners deliver high-quality off-the-job training that engages apprentices very effectively, including the use of adept questioning to increase understanding by relating workplace experiences to theoretical concepts.
- Staff work very well with workplace managers to plan on- and off-the-job training opportunities to deliver programmes that motivate apprentices and relate well to the needs of employers.
- Staff use assessment very effectively to identify where apprentices underperform; they provide clear and constructive feedback that enables apprentices to further improve their skills and knowledge.
- Apprentices undertake useful citizenship projects through which they make a positive contribution to society and are prepared well to work in diverse communities.
- Too few apprentices are being recruited in order to build a sustainable provision.
- Actions within the quality improvement plan focus too narrowly on weaknesses from the previous inspection, and do not take sufficient account of areas for improvement in other aspects of the provision.
- In the current year, there is a small increase in the number of apprentices who are leaving their programmes early without achieving.
- Not enough apprentices progress to further learning after their apprenticeship.

Full report

Information about the provider

- 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 apprentices funded by the Skills Funding Agency were recruited in July 2014. Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken the decision to focus solely on ICT and digital marketing, and have discontinued apprenticeships in other subject areas.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should ensure that the provision meets local skills needs by more effective recruitment of apprentices and employers, thereby building a more sustainable provision.
- Further improve retention by ensuring that all apprentices and employers have a clear understanding of the programme requirements, and receive appropriate information, advice and guidance throughout the apprenticeship, including for those at risk of leaving early.
- Further improve the quality of the provision by using a quality improvement plan that has a better focus on all aspects of the apprentices' experience, rather than just the weaknesses identified at inspection.
- Ensure that apprentices have improved progression opportunities, including the introduction of the planned higher lever ICT apprenticeship programme.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and senior managers provide effective leadership with a clear vision to provide high-quality apprenticeships in ICT and digital marketing job roles. They set high expectations for apprentices including for their standards of work and behaviour and for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as outcomes for apprentices, have improved since the last inspection.
- Leaders set a strong priority to ensure that apprentices further improve their English and mathematical skills. Even where apprentices are exempt from qualifications, staff require them to complete a thorough assessment to identify any weaker areas and then work towards improving these important employability skills. The online learning resources are of good quality and apprentices use these well to improve their skills.
- Performance management is good. Managers regularly review apprentices' progress with trainers at the effective monthly one-to-one meetings, setting clear actions to support apprentices' progress where required. Managers, in their observations of reviews and training activities, are effective in reviewing the quality of learning and assessment sessions and agreeing actions for further improvement, including additional staff development activities. Trainers and assessors are highly qualified and have substantial vocational knowledge and experience that they use well to support apprentices.
- Managers maintain good links with existing employers, who engage well in the apprenticeship programmes; for example, employers regularly attend progress reviews to plan learning. Managers also work well with local schools, and frequently attend careers fairs and employer forums to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities.
- Marketing activities are not sufficiently effective in developing the apprenticeship programme to meet local skills needs. Not enough apprentices and employers are being recruited in order to build a sustainable apprenticeship provision.
- Managers mostly evaluate the quality of the provision well and they make good use of feedback mechanisms to collect users' views and plan improvements. For example, apprentices are now given handouts to support learning in sessions, and employers receive a telephone call prior to assessment visits to better plan their availability to attend. The quality of computer equipment and the learning environment are also under review as a result of feedback.
- Leaders and managers have taken effective action to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, the quality improvement plan is too narrowly focused on addressing these weaknesses, rather than also identifying those aspects of the provision that could be further improved.
- The quality of information, advice and guidance for apprentices is not fully meeting their needs. Too few apprentices progress to further learning, and training for staff delivering information, advice and guidance, although planned, has not been implemented sufficiently.
- Managers promote equality and diversity well. Managers ensure that staff receive up-to-date training and that trainers embed useful topics into learning sessions. This results in apprentices increasing their understanding of aspects such as discrimination and the law,

as well as undertaking citizenship projects that develop their understanding of living and working in a diverse society.

The governance of the provider

- The executive board of Escalla maintains an effective overview of the performance of the apprenticeship programme as a result of regular reporting by the director for apprenticeships, who has a thorough understanding of the quality and financial performance of the provision.
- The director works closely with the senior management team to evaluate performance. Together, they have taken effective action to make improvements since the previous inspection.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers embed learning well into apprentices' off-the-job sessions on how to keep safe. This raises apprentices' awareness of the potential risks they face, such as from radicalisation and extremism, and child exploitation.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe at work, in their personal lives and online, and know what to do should they have any concerns. Senior managers act effectively as mentors, providing ongoing support and a point of contact for apprentices.
- Managers maintain appropriate policies and records and ensure that all staff receive appropriate training, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Trainers set apprentices clear and meaningful job-related targets that motivate them to develop new skills that often lead to additional responsibilities. Trainers work effectively with employers to plan on- and off-the-job training opportunities to deliver programmes that both motivate apprentices and respond very well to business needs. For example, one apprentice has gained the skills to update software remotely for veterinary practices across the country.
- Trainers pay very good attention to developing apprentices' English, mathematical and ICT skills during assessments and reviews, setting clear, individualised independent learning activities that apprentices complete well. All apprentices, irrespective of previous qualifications, improve their skills and become more effective in day-to-day work activities through their achievement of challenging targets. For example, apprentices on digital marketing programmes analyse data collated through specialist software to determine the success of marketing campaigns and the costs to the organisation.
- Trainers make good use of technology and a wide range of resources to support learning and assessment to meet the needs of apprentices, enabling most to make good progress. Apprentices benefit from virtual computer software to undertake independent learning activities and apply theoretical concepts to develop skills to use in the workplace. Assessors make very effective use of the good-quality blogs that apprentices produce to

assess their workplace performance and skills development.

- Expert practitioners deliver high-quality off-the-job training that engages apprentices and develops their understanding, including the use of adept questioning that relates apprentice's workplace experiences to theoretical concepts. Information technology apprentices undertake effective training that equips them well to understand business, and the added value of using technology. For example, an apprentice has written a user guide for local businesses that explains in simple terms the technical and business benefits of a web presence.
- In a small minority of cases, trainers do not take sufficient account of apprentices' prior knowledge and experience to plan learning to ensure that the most able develop to their potential. A small minority of apprentices who already have other higher level qualifications or experience find the qualification element of the framework too easy and do not receive sufficient challenge to further improve their knowledge.
- Staff use assessment effectively to identify gaps in apprentices' skills or knowledge, and use the outcomes of assessment to set challenging targets related to apprentices' work and professional development to help them improve. Apprentices benefit from detailed feedback that accurately confirms when their work meets the required standard, along with particularly useful guidance that helps them to further develop their skills and knowledge, which they apply well to challenging workplace activities.
- Trainers embed aspects of equality well into learning sessions, and are effectively promoting fundamental British values; they ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of the importance of key aspects of life in modern Britain. Apprentices undertake specific projects to support the local community. For example, they develop websites and user guides for children in a school for pupils who have special educational needs to highlight the dangers in the use of social media and how to report safety concerns.
- Initial information, advice and guidance do not always routinely support all apprentices to make informed choices about their future work or study options. Not all apprentices gain a sufficient understanding of the breadth and depth of the apprenticeship framework or are not matched with a suitable employer to meet their expectations. As a result, a small minority of apprentices leave early with no defined destination outcome.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Apprentices make exceptional progress in improving their English and mathematical skills. Apprentices use independent and online learning activities to develop their skills, which they then apply in the workplace very well. For example, apprentices in digital marketing improve their numerical skills in budgeting, financial planning and data analysis, which they then use to analyse data for determining the effectiveness of marketing campaigns based on the number of visits by potential customers.
- Apprentices have an excellent understanding and appreciation of the significance of adopting and developing professional standards in their learning programme. For example, all apprentices adopt a professional attitude and dress code when attending off-the-job learning sessions and engage well in all activities. Attendance at off-the-job training is excellent.

- Apprentices are highly motivated, enjoy their learning and take great pride in their work. They display very good behaviour, respect, a courteous attitude and professional approach to their peers, staff and employers. They work very effectively with colleagues and are aware of customer and client expectations, taking great pride in their work.
- Apprentices gain excellent technical and vocational skills through the wide variety of classroom and workplace activities, which include team-working, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Apprentices make extremely good progress in their job roles. Employers often promote and give very significant responsibility to apprentices at work, sometimes at a very early stage in their apprenticeships. These include lead roles in managing social media accounts and responsibility for email marketing campaigns, including launching funeral plan campaigns. In one case, an apprentice was entrusted with the authority to change computer network and registry settings.
- Apprentices have a detailed and thorough understanding of how to stay safe from harm and at work and demonstrate safe working practices. Apprentices talk confidently about how to stay safe when using social media and how to avoid risks posed by using the internet, including those of radicalisation. Trainers routinely check safe practices in the workplace and check that the apprentices feel safe and know how to report concerns. Where appropriate, they take immediate action to safeguard the apprentices.
- Citizenship days are highly effective in preparing apprentices to work in diverse communities, to gain a good understanding of tolerance and respect, and to make a positive contribution to society. Apprentices are curious about different cultures, and in one activity researched effectively the difference in marketing campaigns in two countries where issues around faith and beliefs were different.
- Apprentices participate in a comprehensive range of activities that raise their awareness to make informed choices about living a healthy lifestyle. External speakers attend training sessions to deliver information on drug and alcohol awareness, hate crime, safe driving and eating disorders; apprentices debate these and other issues passionately. Apprentices talk confidently about induction and the first week of their programme. They gain a thorough understanding of the wider aspects of the world of work, for example from a range of additional days during off-the-job training to support living and working with diverse communities.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Apprentices make good progress to permanent employment, with the large majority remaining with the same employer. Most apprentices are young and new to the workplace and perform extremely well in their job roles. However, too few progress to further and higher learning programmes.
- Apprentices work to a high standard, both in their job roles and coursework. They also become much more confident, demonstrating high levels of motivation to succeed in their apprenticeships and careers.
- Apprentices develop their mathematical and English skills very well beyond the requirements of their qualifications and apply the skills in their job roles very effectively. Most pass their functional skills qualifications at the first attempt.

- In 2015/16, the large majority of apprentices successfully achieved their qualifications, and most gain a distinction in their technical certificates.
- Apprentices currently on programme are making good progress in their qualifications. However, there is a small increase in the number who leave their jobs early without achieving.
- Nearly all information technology apprentices achieve a useful additional technology qualification that further improves their skills.
- Managers collect and use data well to monitor performance, including in relation to the age, gender and ethnicity of apprentices. Participation rates of women are improving well. However, digital marketing apprentices who are women are achieving less well than their male counterparts, due to leaving their jobs early. A similar gap in achievement, albeit in different subject areas, existed at the previous inspection, and managers have not yet been able to ensure that women apprentices achieve at the same rate as the men do.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59163
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	86
Principal	Claire McLellan (Director of Apprenticeships)
Telephone number	020 75569383
Website	www.escalla.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	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	26	9	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		35			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	N/A							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of apprenticeships, 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

Gary Adkins, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Tucker	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Stittle	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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