

INSPECTION REPORT

Straight A Training Limited

04 November 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Straight A Training Limited is based in Farnborough, Surrey, and provides training programmes to young people in catering and hospitality in London, Devon, Cheshire, Reading and Surrey. There are currently 32 learners working towards foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in hospitality or customer service.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The quality of work-based learning for young people in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel is satisfactory. The leadership and management of Straight A Training Limited are satisfactory. Quality assurance is unsatisfactory, and equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- outstanding communication with employers
- good business decision-making and planning
- thorough and accurate self-assessment process
- particularly good pastoral support
- very good learning opportunities

KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate quality assurance arrangements
- poor framework achievement
- poor target-setting for learners
- some ineffective additional learner support

STRAIGHT A TRAINING LIMITED

- inadequate equal opportunities reinforcement for learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of data to support quality assurance
- better arrangements for key skills training and assessment
- broader range of evidence in level 2 portfolios of evidence

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 14 days at Straight A Training (SAT) in November 2002. They inspected hospitality, leisure and tourism. Inspectors visited SAT's premises at Farnborough, and employers' premises in Torquay, Cheshire, central London, Reading and Bagshot, where on-the-job training is carried out. Interviews were carried out with 16 current learners and four recent leavers. Inspectors carried out eight interviews with managers and staff, one interview with a subcontracted assessor, and six interviews with employers. They looked at a range of documents, including 17 learners' portfolios of evidence, 23 training plans, minutes and records of meetings, policies and correspondence. Inspectors also looked at the self-assessment report, which was produced in February 2002, and updated in September 2002 for inspection. Inspectors did not observe or grade any learning sessions.

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. SAT currently provides training programmes for 32 young people funded by the London Central Learning and Skills Council (LSC). All learners are employed and all training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. All learners are working towards foundation modern apprenticeships or advanced modern apprenticeships in catering and hospitality. SAT has four staff who carry out all assessment in the workplace and visit learners fortnightly to carry out progress reviews and assessment. Subcontractors carry out some learners' progress reviews and assessments. SAT negotiates with employers to place most learners on training programmes. Few learners approach SAT directly about training.

Work-based learning for young people

3. SAT's work-based learning in hospitality is satisfactory but achievement rates on modern apprenticeship frameworks have been poor. In 1999-2000, 70 per cent of foundation modern apprentices achieved their framework, in 2000-01, 5 per cent achieved the framework, and no learners have so far achieved the framework in 2001-02, although 55 per cent of learners are still in learning. Eight per cent of advanced modern apprentices achieved their framework in 2000-01 and none achieved the framework in 1999-2000. None has so far achieved their qualification in 2001-02, although 80 per cent of learners are still in learning. SAT recognises that lack of framework achievement is a problem and has tried to resolve the problem. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices was 90 per cent in 1999-2000, 33 per cent in 2000-01 and 5 per cent in 2001-02, with 55 per cent of leavers still in learning. Seventeen per cent of advanced modern apprentices were retained in 2000-01 and 80 per cent of current learners are still in learning for 2001-02.

4. Work-based learning in hospitality is satisfactory. SAT makes supporting learners a priority and assessors and employers give learners good support in a caring environment. There is frequent personal contact and support from staff. Learners are motivated. Assessors and employers respond to learners' problems promptly. Learners have good learning opportunities. Work placements are good and employers provide opportunities for personal development, training and assessment. Staff are experienced and competent. Assessors and employers have broad experience in catering and hospitality. Most assessors have been managers. Learners make good progress towards achieving their national vocational qualification (NVQ). Fifty per cent of learners who achieve their NVQ do so within four to eight months, and 15 per cent achieve their qualification in eight to 10 months.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

5. SAT is a company limited by guarantee, which provides training for staff in the hospitality industry. Two partners are directors and one is also the company secretary. The directors share responsibility for policy making, the strategic direction of the company, and staffing. One director handles training and awarding body compliance and the other director is responsible for the financial management. The directors carry out monthly reviews of company performance. In addition to these, SAT also complies with local LSC audit requirements. SAT employs a full-time assessor, who has responsibility for assessing learners who register for modern apprenticeships. Since May 2002, SAT has also employed a subcontracted assessor, who oversees training of a few learners. SAT has policies for equal opportunities and quality assurance. SAT has been a registered NVQ assessment centre since 1999. SAT produced its second self-assessment report in March 2002, and updated it in September.

STRENGTHS

- outstanding communication with employers
- good business decision-making and planning
- good staff development and training
- effective use of systems to monitor learners' performance
- thorough and accurate self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate equal opportunities reinforcement for learners
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of data to support quality assurance
- better monitoring of employers' equal opportunities arrangements

6. Communication between SAT's managers and employers is outstanding. SAT's staff, including directors and assessors, visit learners, at least fortnightly, and often weekly, in the workplace. During workplace visits, supervisors and managers discussed training and learners' needs and performance. SAT's staff assessed learners' work and training and were welcomed even when employers were busy. Employers gave positive accounts of communication with SAT. Some employers asked SAT to make presentations to encourage employers' staff to enrol on training programmes. Employers frequently take advice from SAT on training and development. There is plenty of informal communication and questionnaires are also sent to employers.

7. SAT's directors make good use of business decision-making and planning processes to improve training opportunities for learners. SAT has worked closely with a few employers that provide SAT and its learners with secure, good training environments. During a down-turn in business, directors renegotiated their training contracts and focused on providing good training to known, secure employers. Directors worked on a two-year plan to develop close links with employers. Good financial planning has been effective in recruiting new staff to deal with increased business. Existing staff's skills have also been developed.

8. SAT's staff and directors are well qualified to assess and provide hospitality training. SAT tries to recruit good staff, and to encourage and support staff to develop their skills once in post. All staff have individual development plans, and all have, or are working towards, appropriate assessors' qualifications. In the year before inspection, staff achieved eight qualifications relevant to training. For example, to deal with learners' slow key skills completion rate, the directors are working towards a level 3 key skills assessors' award. SAT has done a careful needs analysis and there are plans to ensure that there are sufficient, good staff during SAT's planned national expansion.

9. SAT has developed effective systems to monitor learners' progress. Managers and assessors can access information on learners' progress, on particular units of their NVQs and additional qualifications. All staff use, and are familiar with, the system. Learners are confident that SAT's staff know what progress they are making on their framework. File copies of monitoring sheets are updated weekly and are used on a central monitoring board which displays the progress of all learners.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

10. SAT's equal opportunities policy describes its commitment to provide equality of opportunity for staff and learners. SAT also has a complaints and appeals procedure. These documents are clearly written in accessible language. Master copies are kept on file and reviewed when legislation changes. Copies of policies showed when they were updated and reviewed. The policies and statements comply adequately with legislation.

11. Learners are given a copy of the equal opportunities policy and complaints procedure at their induction. During inductions, learners read or talk about the equal opportunities policy, and are asked to sign a form to accept the terms of the policy and compliance with legal requirements. In discussions with inspectors, most learners remembered the complaints and anti-bullying statements and felt that they understood the processes, but were not certain of the content of the equal opportunities policy. Some learners were unsure whether they had received the policy.

12. During training, equality of opportunity is inadequately reinforced. Once a training programme is agreed with employers, SAT checks to ensure that the workplace complies with health and safety and equal opportunities legislation. Learners fill in an equal opportunities questionnaire to indicate that they have received the policies, and give details about their workplace policies. Insufficient use is made of this feedback and there is inadequate monitoring of employers' equal opportunities practices and policies. SAT does not challenge employers sufficiently to deal with potential equality and diversity matters.

13. SAT has recently begun to collect data on learners' ethnic origin, gender and age and to represent it on graphs. As yet, data are not linked to quality assurance or training. However, some data are useful for monitoring quality assurance, equality and achievement.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

14. SAT has a policies and procedures manual for quality assurance. The management team is responsible for quality assurance and it reviews all the documents yearly. Staff understand the need for continuous improvement. SAT has a service level agreement with its main subcontractor, which includes equal opportunities, health and safety and monitoring of quality assurance. However, the process to assess SAT's quality assurance is currently not fully established.

15. SAT produced its second self-assessment report in March 2002 and reviewed it in September 2002. It was written against the 'Common Inspection Framework'. The views of learners, staff and employers were sought and incorporated into a thorough and accurate report followed by a well-written development plan. The report and development plan correctly assessed and identified areas for improvement. The judgements made in the self-assessment report matched those of inspectors. There is a thorough process for reviewing the self-assessment report yearly.

16. Internal verification of assessment is satisfactory. SAT has four assessors and three internal verifiers who are responsible for all assessment and verification during training. Internal verification is based on clear and effective procedures. Staff are trained according to well-established procedures. The verification of assessors' work is thorough. There are appropriate levels of sampling of assessment decisions and frequent observations of assessors. Feedback to assessors on their performance is appropriately critical and constructive. Internal verifiers have discussed with the external verifier using more diverse evidence in level 2 learners' portfolios of evidence.

17. The quality assurance and procedures manuals do not set out the quality assurance requirements in sufficient detail or with sufficient clarity to improve learners' experience. The quality assurance manual provides guidance on the sequence of processes but gives no deadlines for these processes. Some actions and activities to support staff in their monitoring of quality assurance are inadequate. There is no guidance on the quality assurance standards, and as overall targets are not set clearly, quality assurance cannot be monitored effectively. There are no clear procedures for new staff or employers to follow to recruit and select learners. When training begins, learners have an initial assessment of their basic skills and language needs, but there is insufficient evidence of additional support to provide the appropriate training. SAT is currently discussing additional support for learners with employers.

18. Some target-setting and reviews are poor. Training needs and learning objectives are not clearly set out. Learners receive frequent feedback on their performance, and their overall progress is recorded and monitored, but not in sufficient detail to ensure that all learners are clear about what their framework requirements are. There is no formal evaluation of learners' experience of induction, by SAT or employers. Some learners cannot remember the information from their induction.

19. There is inadequate monitoring of subcontracted staff. Subcontracted staff have

communication and a quarterly review according to the contractual agreements, but there is no formal system to monitor and quality ensure subcontracted training provision. There is good provision of training for staff but no formal process for passing on information to other staff or for sharing good practice.

20. Data have only recently been collected as a basis for quality assurance processes. SAT has a system to improve its collection of information which includes analysing learner profiles to improve achievement and retention rates. Informal meetings and communication occur frequently, but there is no evaluation of information which impacts on learners. Learners provide feedback, during and at the end of training courses, by filling in questionnaires. However, the questionnaires are not designed to collect sufficiently detailed qualitative information. Responses are not systematically collated, analysed or used as a basis for improvements, although informal feedback does result in action.

21. SAT has no central record of complaints, though many problems are discussed and dealt with promptly in the workplace. Questionnaires given to employers emphasise their business needs rather than learners' experience, and information collected is inadequate for improvement. There is inadequate recording of information about learners who leave early. Some changes and improvements are carried out because of informal employers' feedback, such as the frequency of assessors' visits and a planned schedule for learners and employers, but there is insufficient monitoring of feedback from employers, which could contribute to quality assurance arrangements.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	32	3

22. SAT provides modern apprenticeships in catering and hospitality to young people in several areas of the country, including Torquay, Cheltenham, London, Derbyshire, Oxford, Cardiff, Surrey and Cheshire. Learners are recruited directly from employers. All learners are employed in a range of establishments, including public houses, hotels, restaurants, and wine bars. Learners can join training programmes at any time. There are currently 16 foundation modern apprentices working towards either bar service, food preparation and cooking, housekeeping, or food and drink service programmes. There are 16 advanced modern apprentices on hospitality supervision and advanced food preparation and cooking (kitchen and larder) programmes. Four learners are working towards technical certificates in intermediate food hygiene and intermediate health and safety. Training is provided on the job. Learners collect evidence towards an NVQ and key skills in the workplace. Progress reviews are carried out at 12-weekly intervals, although assessors have frequent contact with learners, often weekly and usually fortnightly. SAT's assessors carry out induction in the workplace and learners are given details of their training programme, including equal opportunities, health and safety, and the appeals procedure. There are three full-time staff who are all assessors and two of whom are also internal verifiers. SAT also subcontracts one freelance assessor. All assessment is carried out in the workplace. Learners have an initial assessment at the start of their training programme.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	8		10		24		2									
Retained*	0		0		4	17	0	0								
Successfully completed	0		0		2	8	0	0								
Still in learning	8		8		0	0	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		20		43		10									
Retained*	0		1		14	33	9	90								
Successfully completed	0		0		2	5	7	70								
Still in learning	4		11		1	2	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- particularly good pastoral support
- particularly good learning opportunities
- experienced and competent staff increase learners' understanding of industry standards
- good progress towards vocational qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- poor framework achievement
- poor target-setting for learners
- some ineffective additional support for learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better key skills training and assessment
- broader range of evidence for level 2 NVQs

23. There is a genuine concern for the welfare of learners and support is a priority. Assessors and employers give learners good support in a caring environment. Staff give learners their mobile telephone numbers and e-mail addresses at the beginning of training so that learners can contact staff at any time. Learners value this support and use it frequently. Staff discuss with learners which units they should do as part of their training programme. Frequent personal contact and support motivates learners. Assessors and employers quickly solve any problems that learners have. Staff encourage learners to be ambitious and give them practical support and guidance to help them progress. Staff have good links with learners, employers and supervisors.

24. Learning opportunities for modern apprentices are particularly good. Employers provide good workplaces for learners, with supportive environments for personal development and good opportunities for training and assessment. Some workplaces have qualified assessors. Workplaces include prestigious hotels and restaurants, some of which have national and international reputations. Workplaces are modern and well equipped. Learners are part of the workplace teams and are given challenging and demanding roles, which build their confidence and develop their skills. Learners are motivated and interested, especially in the practical part of their training. Learners make good use of the optional NVQ units. For example, many learners chose NVQ units in addition to the units they have to do to achieve their qualification.

25. Learners benefit from working with experienced and competent staff. Assessors and employers have broad experience of the hospitality and catering industry. Most assessors have held management positions. The assessors come from different occupational areas of the industry, with professional experience of first-class hotels and restaurants. Most staff have degrees or the equivalent, others have higher-level vocational qualifications. Staff keep their knowledge up to date by attending conferences and training courses, reading trade journals and magazines, and attending events organised by industry and training associations. All staff are either qualified assessors and internal verifiers or are working towards their qualifications.

26. Learners make good progress towards achieving their NVQs. Fifty per cent of all learners who achieve their NVQs, do so in four to eight months. Fifteen per cent achieve their qualifications in eight to 10 months. SAT continues to support learners who do not achieve the targets on their individual learning plans within the planned deadline, even if they are no longer funded. Assessors visit learners frequently, at least fortnightly, to carry out assessments or to mentor learners. Most visits are recorded on an action plan. Learners who are making slower progress, or those who want to achieve their qualifications more quickly, are visited by assessors more frequently.

27. Achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks has been poor. Statistics show a 70 per cent achievement rate for the foundation modern apprenticeship framework in 1999-2000, 5 per cent in 2000-01 and no achievement in 2001-02, with 55 per cent of learners still in learning. For the advanced modern apprenticeships, statistics show an 8 per cent framework achievement in 2000-01, and no achievement in 1999-2000 or 2001-02. For these years, 80 per cent of learners are still in learning. SAT has identified framework achievement as a weakness and has taken steps to resolve the problems. More thorough interview and selection processes have been established, and more attention is paid to stages of learners' achievement. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices is 17 per cent for the year 2000-01, and currently 80 per cent of learners are still in learning for the year 2001-02. The foundation modern apprenticeship retention rate was 90 per cent in 1999-2000, 33 per cent in 2000-01 and 5 per cent in 2001-02. Fifty-five per cent of learners still in learning from 2001-02.

28. The assessor carries out quarterly progress reviews with learners and their

employer. Progress reviews do not emphasise learners' achievements and progress sufficiently and deal more with learners' satisfaction and pastoral support. They are not sufficiently detailed and contain few definitive action points for learners to achieve. Neither the employers nor the learners receive copies of the progress reviews. Individual learning plans are not useful as they do not contain sufficient information. Targets on individual learning plans are not updated to take account of learners' progress and achievements. Some in-house training plans are not filled in properly and some do not clearly set out what training learners will receive. The targets on individual learning plans are not updated frequently. Training plans are not used as a basis for progress reviews or further action-planning. They are not individual and some do not contain the full framework requirements.

29. Some additional support for learners is ineffective. Learners have an initial assessment and those learners who need additional support are identified. Learners are not always given the results of their numeracy and literacy assessments. There is no continuous assessment. Staff do not give adequate additional learning support to learners. Staff are not qualified to help learners who need language support. Results of the initial assessment are not always used to produce an action plan for training. Learners' previous learning and achievements are not always accredited. SAT has identified its initial assessment problems and is introducing new processes to provide additional support for learners.

30. For some learners, training in key skills was introduced towards the end of their training programme. It was not carried out from the outset as part of vocational training. Some learners and employers have insufficient knowledge of key skills training. Learners are told about key skills training and assessment, but they were not emphasised sufficiently until just before inspection. Key skills training is not always an integral part of assessment. Learners do not collect sufficient evidence of their key skills attainment through their vocational work. Some learners only start their key skills training and assessment when they have almost finished their NVQ units. SAT recognises its key skills problems and has introduced a new process to make key skills training an integral part of training leading to the NVQ. Learners are now collecting key skills evidence earlier and staff explain the importance of key skills training and assessment to learners and employers at their induction.

31. The range of evidence in level 2 portfolios of evidence is not adequately broad. There are insufficient witness statements, photographs and work products in them.