

Smart Training

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Early years and playwork
- Business management

Description of the provider

1. Smart Training is a privately owned company of Mardell Associates Ltd based in Kingston-upon-Thames. Established in 1993, it provides training to apprentices, advanced apprentices, adult apprentices and Train to Gain learners in the early years sector. Smart Training contracts with the South London, Central London, Berkshire, Leicestershire and West Yorkshire LSCs. It works with a range of nurseries and childcare settings providing programmes in childcare learning and development, and business management. Learners attend off-the-job training one Saturday each month in training rooms or in hotels and other public buildings. The company also provides commercial training which accounts for 6% of its business.
2. The company is led by the managing director, supported by two other directors. The senior management team consists of three senior managers, two regional managers and eight other managers. It employs a further 23 training managers and 47 tutor/assessors. Of the assessors 23 are internal verifiers. Four additional staff provide specialist learner support and mentoring.
3. At the time of inspection 1538 funded learners were enrolled on programmes. Of these, approximately one third have additional learning needs, with the highest level of additional support in London at 43% of learners. The proportion of learners with disabilities is 16% and a further 13% have learning difficulties. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is high in central London at 46% and low in Yorkshire at 3%. Groups of learners reflect the different local populations.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject areas

Early years and playwork	Good: Grade 2
Business management	Outstanding: Grade 1

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Leadership and management are outstanding. Achievement and standards are good. Overall teaching and learning, meeting the needs and interest of learners and guidance and support are good. Provision in business management is outstanding and in early years is good. Provision for equality of opportunity is good.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. Smart Training has demonstrated outstanding capacity to improve. The effectiveness of steps taken to improve is also outstanding. Smart Training has maintained most of the strengths identified at the previous inspection, when it was also judged outstanding, while doubling the number of learners in training. The company has carried out a wide range of improvements across the provision in the last two years. New apprenticeship frameworks in children's care learning and development, and business management have been very successfully introduced. Quality assurance procedures are implemented very well through regular, carefully designed meetings focused on learners and their progress. Very good additional support is provided for the high number of learners with additional learning needs. Overall success rates continue to improve for all learner groups.
6. The thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process are good, although Smart Training awarded a higher grade for early years provision and equal opportunities than that given by inspectors. The self-assessment report identified all of the strengths found during inspection, most of the satisfactory aspects and some additional areas for improvement. The self-assessment report is completed annually and staff are encouraged to contribute. Smart Training makes good use of employers' and learners' views to evaluate its services.

Key strengths

- High success rates
- Particularly well structured training programmes
- Outstanding arrangements to identify and support learners with additional needs
- Good response to employers and community needs
- Good staff training and development to realise company strategy
- Very good initiatives to improve success rates
- Particularly well developed performance management systems

Key areas for improvement

- Staff and learner knowledge of equality and diversity

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good. Achievement on Train to Gain level 2 childcare learning and development is very good at 83%. In 2006/07, business management framework success rates and childcare apprentice success rates were very high at 80% and 78%. Overall success rates on all apprenticeships programmes improved from 53% in 2005/06 to 67% in 2006/07. All programmes are significantly above the national averages for each sector subject area. Success rates appear to be high for the first six months of 2007/08, although the data is incomplete and the exact rates are unknown. No data is currently available for adult apprenticeships. Timely success rates, as identified in the self-assessment report, remain low particularly for advanced apprenticeships in childcare. Little variation exists in overall performance between different learner groups.
8. Development of learners' skills is very good in business management where many have progressed from childcare qualifications to level 3 and 4 in management. Attendance at study days and work is good. Key skills and technical certificate achievement is very good. Learners demonstrate good personal and social skills at work. Learners are good at maintaining the safety and security of children. Childcare learners' written work is satisfactory overall.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

9. Teaching and learning are good overall. Workbooks are exceptionally well designed to integrate all framework aspects. The workbooks provide very clear instructions of the type of activities that learners, with the support of their mentors, need to complete each month during the programme. Tutor/assessors and training managers meet monthly with internal verifiers to discuss each learner, and to agree the actions and support needed to meet individual circumstances so learners progress well and achieve. Smart Training provides a high standard of additional individual coaching to ensure learners make good progress. Off-the-job training on Saturdays is particularly well structured, providing effective co-ordination between the topics taught and the workplace activities carried out by learners. Overall standards of teaching are satisfactory or better. Some learning session plans are rather ambitious for the time available, leaving insufficient time to check learners' knowledge and understanding of new topics. The self-assessment report and observation process focus on teaching and not sufficiently on learning.
10. Arrangements to identify and monitor learners with language, literacy and numeracy needs are outstanding. Learning needs are clearly identified at initial assessment and appropriate support detailed in individual learning plans. A thorough progress monitoring system is in place. Well qualified specialist staff support learners and coach staff to ensure they can also support the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Good communications between all staff ensures learners with additional needs achieve as well as learners who have no identified additional learning needs.

11. Smart Training works well with a wide range of employers. Good involvement in learners' training is facilitated through regular meetings, the use of workplace mentors and the structure of the programme. Smart Training is working with a variety of community based groups to provide training at times and locations to meet specific needs. Learners have access to good advice and guidance and are able to progress to higher level qualifications.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

12. Leadership and management are outstanding. Smart Training directors give very strong and clear strategic direction to improve success rates among young people and adults employed in childcare. The company has successfully doubled the number of learners and staff in the last four years. Organisational restructuring and staff recruitment is supported well by clearly defined developmental milestones. Staff are closely mentored and effectively coached to increase their knowledge and skills.
13. Smart Training has implemented a good range of initiatives in the last two years to improve success rates and the quality of the provision. The company changed to one awarding body and introduced new frameworks for childcare learning and development and business management. The development of a series of very well structured workbooks ensures good co-ordination of training and a clear understanding by learners and employers of targets and progress. Specialist staff have been recruited to provide very good language, literacy and numeracy support to staff and learners. Mentors are increasingly used to support learners in the workplace.
14. Smart Training has particularly good performance management systems. Good use is made of data to set targets and analyse the performance of different groups of learners and staff. Communication across the organisations is very good. Regular meetings between tutor/assessors, internal verifiers and training managers focus particularly well on supporting learners' progress and quality assuring the procedures. Senior managers conduct monthly meetings to further review staff and learner performance. Meetings and annual company days are used well to share practice, update staff and collect useful feedback. The self-assessment report identified all of the strengths found by inspectors.
15. Equality of opportunity is good. Smart Training works successfully with learners from a wide variety of backgrounds including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. It closely monitors the performance of different groups of learners. Any variations are investigated and appropriate action taken. Staff use good strategies to meet the very diverse needs of individual learners. Staff and learners reflect local area profiles in terms of ethnicity and disability and industry norms for gender. Smart Training has updated its policies to a single equality scheme and action plan although this has not yet been implemented. Staff and learners have not received sufficient formal training and development to ensure they are aware of the recent changes in legislation. Checking of employers' equality and diversity policies and procedures is informal.

16. Smart Training meets current government requirements for safeguarding learners. All staff are CRB checked every four years and child protection policies are in place. One person in each region is trained in child protection policies and procedures. Learners are very clear on what they should do in the event of problems with other learners, employers, staff or children in their care.

What learners like:

- 'My tutor and training manager gave me such drive and incentive to get things done'
- 'Tutors don't think you are stupid'
- Reliability, commitment and care of staff
- Meeting up to discuss and learn at study days
- 'Reviews help me know where I am up to'
- 'The course has given me more knowledge and made me more aware of a manager's role'
- 'This course has given me the confidence to think about a university course'

What learners think could improve:

- 'I was disappointed not to be consulted when my training day location was moved'
- Support with workbook work and explanation of tasks
- 'The tutor doesn't know some of the subjects'
- Number of observations for some learners
- Teaching of mathematics
- Amount of written work

Sector subject areas

Early years and playwork

Good: Grade 2

Context

17. Currently 836 advanced apprentices, 348 apprentices, 132 adult apprentices and 78 Train to Gain learners are on early years programmes. Overall, 3% of learners are male and 27% are from minority ethnic groups. One third of all learners are identified as having additional learning needs. All apprentices are employed in a range of day nurseries and childcare settings. Regular training sessions are offered in various locations. Assessors visit learners in the workplace monthly and training managers review progress at least quarterly.

Strengths

- Good success rates
- Very good additional learning support
- Thorough monitoring of learners' progress
- Good involvement of employers in training and learning
- Good co-ordination and management of training

Areas for improvement

- None identified

Achievement and standards

18. Achievement and standards are good. In 2006/07 framework success rates were excellent for Train to Gain learners and apprentices at 83% and 78% respectively. This is a rise from 68% and 64% respectively in 2005/06. Success rates for advanced apprentices have also risen over the past three years but not to so high a level. In 2006/07 the overall success rates for advanced apprenticeships were 56% compared with a national average of 50%. One third of apprentices, advanced apprentices, and adults have identified additional learning needs. Timely success rates remain low.

19. Attendance at study days and work is good. All learners develop a satisfactory standard of workplace skills. They are particularly good at maintaining children's safety and security. Most written work is of a satisfactory standard but some advanced apprentice work does not meet the standard expected at level three.

Quality of provision

20. Teaching, training and learning are overall good. Learners receive good on-the-job training to develop their practical skills and understanding of key aspects of childcare. Managers, mentors and room leaders all contribute to this. All are fully aware of learners' individual needs. Learning session planning for off-the-job training is of a high standard. However, some learning session plans are rather ambitious for the time available, leaving insufficient time to consolidate and check learning. A range of teaching methods are used, some of which are particularly creative and maintain learners' interest well. In the better learning sessions consistent checking of learning takes place. In weaker sessions, some tutors do not have sufficient confidence or knowledge to teach some subjects at level three. Most training days are linked well to work with children and learners' personal experience. Workbooks are particularly well structured and form the basis for independent learning and the production of evidence between training days. Individual coaching is of a high standard, contributing well to learners' progress. Resources are satisfactory overall and include a good range of books for learners to use for study at home.
21. Assessment is satisfactory overall. Planning clearly informs learners of what will be assessed. Observation records are comprehensive and indicate learners' knowledge and performance. Oral and written feedback from assessment is not consistent with some not clearly detailing how learners can improve. Assessment includes judgements about the knowledge and application of the principles and values of childcare learning and development. However, this is often not made clear in the planning or feedback.
22. Monitoring of learners' progress is very thorough. Communication between training managers, internal verifiers and tutor/assessors is particularly good. A regular monthly meeting of this team ensures that all are fully informed about learners' progress and appropriate action taken. Detailed quarterly progress reviews take place with all learners. Those with additional needs or specific problems are reviewed monthly. The review process is very supportive, clearly informing and guiding learners on how to improve. Target-setting is not always sufficiently specific.
23. An exceptionally good support system for learners identifies additional learning needs. Learning needs are clearly identified at initial assessment. Recommendations for support are entered into the individual learning plan and implemented immediately. A team of qualified basic skills tutors deliver support on training days and in the workplace. Training managers are developed to support learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Individual coaching is of a high standard and effective in significantly improving learners' basic skills. Progress is closely monitored during progress reviews and learning and assessment targets set.
24. Involvement of employers in training and learning is good. Managers set a clear direction for high standards and are keen to support staff in becoming qualified. A mentor system is in place in every workplace. Learners are well supported by these mentors. When training managers identify development needs for learners in the workplace they produce employer action plans. This is particularly so when learners do not have all the skills needed to progress to the next level of training. Smart Training employs mentoring support staff to provide a mentoring service in those workplaces that are initially unable to appoint a mentor.

Leadership and management

25. Management of training is good. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is particularly well managed. The carefully designed workbook integrates the national vocational qualification (NVQ), technical certificate and key skills. The workbook fully supports the production of all the required evidence other than direct observations. All learners, especially those with additional learning needs, find this particularly helpful. Staff and employers fully understand the workbook. Each member of staff is clear about their role and responsibility in relation to enabling learners to meet training requirements.
26. Particularly effective meetings between training managers, internal verifiers and a senior manager are used well to discuss all aspects of the training programme, especially supporting the learner through the journey. Action plans with clear targets are produced.

Business management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

27. Some 144 learners were on business management programmes at the time of the inspection, of whom 25 are Train to Gain learners 98 are advanced apprentices and 21 are adult advanced apprentices. One learner is male and 18 have additional learning needs. All learners work in childcare settings.

Strengths

- Outstanding overall framework success rates
- Good initial assessment, induction and progress recording
- Good teaching and learning
- Very thorough assessment and internal verification
- Good engagement with employers
- Good arrangements to identify and monitor literacy and numeracy needs
- Very well managed programme

Areas for improvement

- None identified

Achievement and standards

28. Achievements and standards are outstanding. In 2006/07, the overall framework success rate for advanced apprentices was outstanding at 80%. This is a significant improvement from a success rate of 51% in 2004/05. Many learners make good progress and almost half achieve ahead of, or by, planned deadlines.

29. Learners develop good personal and social skills at work and demonstrate improving levels of competence in applying management skills. Many learners have progressed from lower level childcare qualifications and through positions of responsibility at work. Most learners are now in their first management position.

Quality of provision

30. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job aspects of training is very good. Learners attend well prepared off-the-job training days at a local location each month. A well designed matrix of learning sessions gives a clear view of the aims and potential progress for each learner. Learners are able to attend alternative locations and dates if a particular training day is missed. Smart Training has prepared excellent workbooks that contain clear instructions on the activities needed to achieve the qualification, together with extensive referencing to ensure that all aspects of the framework are properly covered. Workbooks also include clear advice and instructions on

actions that need to be discussed, checked and agreed with workplace mentors and managers.

31. Initial assessment and induction are very good. Staff have very thorough processes for monitoring learners from the start of their learning programme. Learners receive a very comprehensive and informative individual learning plan. Learners discuss and agree very clear and detailed targets with their tutor/assessors on a monthly basis at their training days, and have very regular contact and support from a training manager. Monthly discussions about learners' progress are led by an internal verifier with the relevant training manager and tutorial staff. Decisions taken on how best to progress are agreed with both learners and workplace managers and recorded. The monitoring system is currently being integrated with the computer-based management information system.
32. Smart Training provides very good assessment and internal verification of learners' work and progress. Internal verifiers lead the significant meetings that determine learner progress, training needs and standardised approaches. Internal verifiers provide very good and regular feedback to assessors on the quality of portfolios, linked to a well designed cumulative internal verification record for each learner. Assessors are able to provide useful feedback on the quality of work practice as well as supporting learners in the compilation of portfolio evidence.
33. Good links with employers ensure learners maintain good standards of work and continue to progress. Tutor/assessors maintain good contact with employers in following through on learner progress in the workplace. Quarterly review visits enable training managers to bring a clear focus to learner progress in discussions with managers. An essential part of the learning programme is the use of workplace mentors for all learners.
34. Very good arrangements are in place to identify and monitor learners' numeracy and literacy needs. Those learners identified at initial assessment as needing support have further diagnostic testing to provide a detailed profile of their particular needs. Training managers maintain information within the management information database and monitor the provision of the support and resources. Separate but parallel workbooks are available for learners with additional learning needs and include basic skills activities relevant to their work. Specialist tutors provide targeted support to individual learners. They also support staff in preparing learning sessions and materials or providing support for personal competence in basic skills.

Leadership and management

35. Management of the business management programme is very good. The design of the training process is well structured and pragmatic. Smart Training has prepared well in negotiating with the awarding body the use of clear, helpful and focused documentation. The course team is small, cohesive and highly committed with a strong focus on the learner. New tutors have been successfully integrated with the team, and supportive training has helped maintain good teaching standards. Staff meet regularly for planning, standardisation, learning session modification and the sharing of good practice. The staff training and support programme is comprehensive and links to very thorough performance management through evaluation of observations, internal verifier feedback, and achievements against planned targets. Good use is made of the management information system to monitor success rates and learners' progress. A very detailed set of quality

standards fully supports management activity and staff development. Male learners represent only a very small proportion of the overall learner population and Smart Training managers have targeted specific advertising to tackle this imbalance.

Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning **apprenticeship** programmes managed by the Smart Training 2004 to 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/c ollege NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate**	Provider/ college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	406	62%	48%	37%	34%
		timely	459	36%	31%	20%	22%
	05-06	overall	520	65%	53%	47%	44%
		timely	518	35%	34%	25%	27%
	06-07	overall	532	69%	64%	61%	58%
		timely	520	34%	43%	29%	37%
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	175	77%	51%	64%	39%
		timely	188	26%	29%	18%	22%
	05-06	overall	229	76%	58%	68%	52%
		timely	226	35%	38%	31%	34%
	06-07	overall	282	79%	65%	78%	61%
		timely	285	44%	47%	44%	44%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Success rates on work-based learning **Train to Gain** programmes managed by Smart Training 2007 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2007/08 (6 months)	overall	23	83
		timely	19	30

Note: 2007/08 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 3 months or greater of the LSC contract year

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

*** Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'