

Start Training Limited

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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:

- Health, public services and care
- Business, administration and law

Description of the provider

1. Start Training Limited (Start) is a private company established in 1983. The company operates from a centre in Swinton offering apprenticeships and Train to Gain provision in administration, information and communication technology, customer services, management, dental nursing, literacy and numeracy. Most of the provision is on employer premises. The company has held Investors in People since 1997 and acquired the Matrix Standard in June 2006.
2. Start is the lead partner for a tripartite consortium providing Train to Gain programmes. Start is also the lead provider and broker for Salford's Learning Agreement Pilot consortium, providing training and assessment for 21 learners. Start is a Dental Nursing Led Apprenticeship partner with Salford College.
3. Start's main work-based contract is with Greater Manchester LSC. Currently 229 learners are following apprenticeship programmes, 173 of whom are advanced apprentices. An additional 60 learners are on Train to Gain national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 and level 3 programmes and six learners are following Learning Agreement Pilot programmes. Start also provides privately funded NVQ information technology training to 53 learners.
4. Swinton is located on the outskirts of Manchester. Around 9% of the population are from minority ethnic groups, varying from 19% in Manchester to 1% in Wigan. Unemployment, although low at 2%, remains high in some wards. The proportion of young people achieving five GCSEs at grades A*-C varies from 52% for Manchester to 60% for Salford, compared with 62% nationally.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

Health, public service and care	Good: Grade 2
Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The overall effectiveness of provision is good. The provider has grown considerably since the previous inspection and Start has extended its partnership working, introducing new programmes and piloting local and regional initiatives. Achievement and standards are good as is the quality of provision. Leadership and management are good and equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Good partnership arrangements benefit Start learners and also those of other providers. Communication throughout the provider is good. Well-qualified and experienced staff are sufficiently focused on improving their learners' experience.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. Start's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Improvements to provision benefit learners through Start's effective working with employers and particularly good skills for life strategy. All weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been satisfactorily resolved, however, some only partially. In health, public services and care a previous weakness is now a strength. Grades awarded at this inspection are broadly in line with self-assessment and are higher than the previous inspection. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory and improving. Start has very effective strategies to monitor staff performance and audit compliance. However, the outcomes of these activities are insufficiently evaluated to identify trends or themes that would benefit from quality improvement. Start has recently started to use teaching observations to plan themed staff development. However, key areas of provision where quality improvement strategies are under-developed remain. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It is sufficiently inclusive, involving staff and taking good account of learners' and employers' views through assessor contact and questionnaires. The judgements are broadly accurate and many of the strengths matched inspection findings, although some were overstated. Although the report evaluates achievement and standards, quality of provision and equality of opportunity across the whole provision, grades, key strengths and areas for improvement were not included.

Key strengths

- High and improving success rates
- Good occupational skill development
- Very good and supportive employers
- Good partnership working
- Good and effective performance monitoring
- Highly effective skills for life strategy

Key areas for improvement

- Low timely success rates on dental programmes
- Insufficient planning of occupational theory sessions to motivate learners

- Some under-developed quality improvement strategies

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good, as noted in the self-assessment report. Apprenticeship success rates have improved consistently over a three year period. During 2006/07, overall success rates for advanced apprenticeships were 12% higher than nationally and apprenticeships were at the national average. Success rates have continued to improve during 2007/08 with overall success rates at 76%. Overall and timely success rates improved by 10% on administration and management programmes over the three years, and remain high. Overall success rates in dental nursing have also significantly improved to 78%. However, timely success rates, although improved, remain low at 36%. Success rates of diverse groups of learners are comparable.
8. Train to Gain overall success rates have been consistently high for the last two years at 86% in 2006/07 and 92% during 2007/08. Timely rates, although still high, have declined from 85% in 2006/07 to 73% during 2007/08.
9. Learners develop good occupational skills, gain confidence and become self-reliant. Employers benefit from their ability to work independently in completing activities that benefit the organisation. Administration and management learners amend and improve documentation and practice. Dental nurses are very professional in preparing clients and dental procedures.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

10. The quality of provision is good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Teaching and learning are good. Learners benefit from good, meaningful and supportive training planned by employers in the workplace. Very committed employers take good account of targets set at review and plan meaningful tasks with their learners that develop skills and provide assessment opportunities. Learning plans are used effectively, reflect the job roles of learners and are modified to capture changing work roles and responsibilities. In management, assessors make particularly good use of workplace evidence for key skills assignments. Teaching at the training centre is well structured. However, occupational theory sessions provided by Start assessors in the workplace are insufficiently planned. Session plans take little account of learners' preferred methods of learning, with an over-reliance on workbook completion. Start completes annual teaching and learning observations of each assessor. Although grades are not over-inflated, the judgements made are overly concerned with teaching activities rather than learning. Assessment practices are good, particularly in dental nursing. Assessment visits are frequent and planned to match the working patterns of learners. Frequent progress reviews support learners and employers in planning activities. Although equality and health and safety are promoted at review, the questions asked are not linked to the content of qualifications.
11. Partnerships with employers are good, they provide good support to meet the occupational aspirations of learners. Assessors carefully plan optional units to match work roles. Frequent assessor visits and opportunities for learners to contact assessors by telephone,

text message or email provide good support. Employers have a good knowledge of the awards their learners are completing and use this effectively to support progress. Arrangements to identify and support learners' additional support needs are good. Specialist tutors visit the workplace where learners have difficulty attending the training centre. Many learners improve their literacy and numeracy skills, completing key skills qualifications one or two levels higher than indicated through initial assessment.

12. Learners receive good information, advice and guidance. Careful interviewing supports learners' in making suitable programme choices. Induction is thorough. Assessors provide good and helpful progress guidance. Progression to advanced apprenticeships and high level programmes is good.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

13. Leadership and management are good. Start has a clear understanding of local and regional priorities and strategically aligns itself with partners to effectively extend provision and benefit learners. Start takes a responsive, very professional and adaptable approach to partnership working which benefits its learners. Start works with Connexions in providing very appropriate qualifications to learners at risk of being, or not in education, employment or training. It participates in the development of 14-19 diplomas in administration. Staff take good advantage of memberships of provider networks in accessing funding and sharing good practice. Start carefully monitors employers it works with, ensuring learners experience particularly good training and pastoral support.
14. Performance management of staff is good and very effectively identifies areas for improvement. Frequent reviews evaluate performance against set criteria, making good use of management information systems. Meetings are particularly learner focused, and include timeliness of diagnostic testing, learner progress, and the number of learners out of funding or at risk of not completing on time. Managers and assessors agree very appropriate actions to improve performance and support learners.
15. Arrangements to identify and support learners' literacy and numeracy development are thorough and very effectively managed. Managers closely monitor the timeliness of diagnostic assessments and the provision of additional support. Challenging skills for life targets include extensive staff development. Current staffing includes two level 5 and one level 3 literacy and numeracy specialists. All assessors have or are working towards skills for life qualifications.
16. Start's staff development programme takes good account of new initiatives, forward business planning and the outcomes performance audits. However, areas for improvement identified during teaching and learning observations do not contribute to appraisals or personal development plans. New staff are well supported through the allocation of a mentor, comprehensive induction and ongoing reviews against a probationary audit. Start values its staff and provides good support. Staff are given time to attend external training, and when appropriate they are allocated remission from duties to complete course work.

17. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet government requirements. All staff are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. Named senior managers have good links with the Salford Safeguarding Board. Appropriate training is scheduled.
18. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Many learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity issues. Many learners receive good equality information as part of their occupational qualification and through set questions during review. Learners receive a good range of information about equality and diversity in booklets and information displayed around the centre. Learners' views are valued and Start takes appropriate action in response to the frequent learner questionnaires. The organisation has exceeded most of its equality and diversity targets, but most are insufficiently challenging.
19. All key learning activities are quality assured. An audit cycle, linked to a quality calendar, ensures consistent application of procedures. Staff understand key improvement processes and are observed for compliance. The quality team reviews and updates all key documentation annually. An extensive cycle of observations includes teaching, coaching, learner reviews, recruitment, information, advice and guidance. However, although many quality assurance processes are in place, in some key areas trends or recurring themes are insufficiently analysed. Few performance targets are set. Many of the extensive audits allocate a competence grade, but Start does not effectively collate or use these grades. A newly recruited quality team has identified many of the deficits within the process. It is developing strategies for improvement.
20. Start is the lead partner in a Train to Gain consortium. Although external and internal verifier reports are analysed, systematic monitoring of other aspects of quality assurance are insufficient. This was identified as an area for improvement during self-assessment. Start is developing a quality audit cycle, but it is too soon to measure its effectiveness.

What learners like:

- Flexible arrangements to visit in the workplace
- Very friendly and helpful staff
- Increased knowledge and improved confidence
- ‘My assessor always explains things so I understand’
- Flexible training and support
- ‘The way my assessor keeps me on target’
- Being treated as an individual/adult and with respect
- Time to reflect on what has been learnt and action-planning
- Access to revision sessions
- ‘You can train in the workplace’

What learners think could improve:

- ‘More help when things are difficult to learn’
- Less paperwork

Sector subject areas

Health, public service and care

Good: Grade 2

Context

21. Currently 164 learners are on work-based learning programmes in oral healthcare, of these 18 are on apprenticeship programmes and 146 are on advanced apprenticeship programmes. In addition, 38 learners are on Train to Gain programmes. All learners are employed in the National Health Service or local private practices. Most training takes place in the workplace. Assessors visit learners at least every month to complete training, assessments and progress reviews.

Strengths

- Improving success rates
- Good skills development
- Very good employer engagement
- Very effective and flexible assessment practice
- Good strategies to meet the needs of learners

Areas for improvement

- Low timely success rates
- Insufficient planning of occupational theory sessions to motivate learners

Achievement and standards

22. Achievement and standards are good overall. During 2006/07, the overall success rates for advanced apprentices were slightly above the national average at 65%. These have improved to 79% to date in 2007/08. Overall success rates for the small cohort of apprentices have significantly improved from a very low 11% during 2006/07 to a high 77% to date in 2007/08. Timely success rates on the apprenticeship programme remain low at 36%. Assessors provide good support beyond learners' end dates. The first cohort of Train to Gain learners have not yet reached the end date, but are progressing well. Pass rates in the independent assessment have dropped slightly and are currently just below the national average. Start's recently introduced daytime revision sessions to prepare learners for the independent assessment have been well received by learners. Learners display a good understanding of theory.

23. Skills' development by learners is good. All learners work competently and confidently in their workplaces. Learners' understanding of why they perform various tasks increases substantially as the course progresses and this in turn improves patient care. Learners are able to talk effectively and knowledgeably during professional discussions. Learners are able to work unaided in their surgeries to support the dentist; they prepare the surgeries for patient consultations and maintain good infection control.

Quality of provision

24. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Employers' involvement in their learners' training programme is very good. Assessors provide employers with detailed information on how they can support their learners. Knowledgeable employers provide learners with good help in understanding the background knowledge questions, and provide opportunities for the learners to relate the knowledge to practice in the workplace. The planning of individual training sessions provided by Start assessors is less effective and insufficiently motivates learners. Session plans consist of a list of topics, with little information about how each topic will be taught. Little information is collected on the learner's preferred style of learning and the type of activities that are effective for that learner. Workbooks although comprehensive, are the main resource for teaching and learning and assessors generally follow these methodically. Once the workbook has been completed learners answer worksheets, also in booklet form.
25. Learners spend the first six months completing key skills portfolios before progressing to the occupational award. Key skills assignments are particularly helpful in supporting learners develop the literacy and numeracy skills required at advanced apprenticeship level. Although key skills assignments are already contextualized, Start has recently developed improved assignments to provide some of the evidence requirement of the occupational NVQ units.
26. Assessment practice is very effective and flexible. Assessment planning is good. Targets are clearly set and monitored. Assessors are very accessible and responsive to the needs of their learners. They visit approximately every four weeks and are available to answer questions over the telephone. They plan and execute assessment using a range of methods including observation and professional discussion in a way that helps learners to fully understand the process and effectively progress through the programme.
27. Employers take an active part in learner reviews. Start thoroughly monitors learners' progress. Assessors monitor any slow progress through useful discussions with learners and their employers on strategies that will lead to improvements.
28. Start's good and flexible practices effectively meet the needs of its learners. The order of units on learners' individual learning plans takes good account of each learner's work practices and their access to activities that will generate evidence. Employers are fully involved in the agreed learning plans. All workplace supervisors are familiar with the NVQ requirements and provide particularly good advice and support to learners. Learners with identified additional needs receive very appropriate support with their key skills by Start's specialist literacy and numeracy tutors.
29. Information, advice and guidance are good. All learners undertake an effective induction, which includes an initial assessment. Learners remember induction well, even after considerable time. Many apprentices progress to the advanced apprenticeship after appropriate and detailed guidance. Many learners aim to progress beyond their current role to being hygienists, practice managers or dental therapists and are provided with effective advice as to how to do this.

Leadership and management

30. Leadership and management are good and effective. The dental team works together well to support the learning process. The team discusses all aspects of the provision during monthly best practice meetings. The team is coherent and supportive of each other. Regular performance monitoring identifies poor performance and managers and staff agree effective measures to resolve any issues. New assessors are inducted into the provider effectively. Support is available until the new assessor becomes familiar with the systems and procedures adopted by Start. Internal verification is satisfactory and clear, detailed feedback is provided for assessors. Staff are well-qualified for the positions they hold and attend update training on a regular basis. Equal opportunities is well promoted at induction and at learner progress reviews.

Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

31. Start provides apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes in administration, management and team leader awards. Currently 15 advanced apprentices, and 33 apprentices follow administration programmes. One apprentice is on the management framework. An additional 21 learners are on Train to Gain programmes.
32. All learners are employed in a range of small and large service industry workplaces. Start helps find employment for applicants not in full-time employment. Learners receive initial assessment and a skills scan to help determine their suitability for the programme and to identify any additional support needs. Training and assessment is carried out in the workplace.

Strengths

- High and improving success rates
- Good occupational skill development
- Particularly good use of workplace evidence for key skills
- Good employer support for learners
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Areas for improvement

- Insufficient planning of on-the-job training
- Questions asked at review are not linked to occupational standards

Achievement and standards

33. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates for apprentices are high and improving. Overall success rates for advanced apprentices have improved significantly from 48% during 2004/05, to 89% during 2006/07. Similarly, timely success rates for advanced apprentices have improved over the same period from 33% to 78%. Overall and timely success rates for apprentices have also improved from 55% to 75% and from 55% to 67% respectively. During 2006/07, pass rates for technical certificates were 100%. Progression from apprenticeship to advanced apprenticeship programmes is satisfactory at 47%. Current learners are making good progress. Standards of work in learners' portfolios are good, with a good range of evidence.
34. Learners develop good vocational skills. Many administration learners are taking on significantly increased responsibility, are confident in their job roles and are completing complex tasks within the workplace. For example, one learner now prepares monthly product reports while another regularly arranges travel and accommodation for staff. Learners on the management programme have developed the confidence to get involved in grievance and disciplinary procedures. Learners demonstrate improved confidence, motivation, good communication skills and teamwork. Employers confirm that many learners have benefited from substantially increased confidence and self-esteem, and many have gained promotion.

Quality of provision

35. The quality of the provision is good. Training arrangements are satisfactory overall. Off-the-job training is flexible and planned to suit learner and employer needs. Resources to support group teaching and learning and assessment are satisfactory. Most learners receive their training for NVQ and key skills in the workplace. However, the on-the-job training provided by Start staff is insufficiently planned to motivate learners. An over-reliance on the completion of work packs leaves insufficient time for consolidation and reflection.
36. The integration of key skills into the occupational area is very effective and makes particularly good use of workplace evidence. Start has developed a range of projects that learners can adapt to provide highly relevant evidence for key skills. One project included analysis of timesheets that the employer subsequently used to provide evidence for the Audit Commission. Another project supports learners to analyse, research and cost stationery suppliers and consumables.

37. Assessment is well planned and incorporates a good range of evidence. Assessment visits are frequent, matching the needs of learners and the business demands of employers. Learners have a good understanding of the assessment process, the evidence requirements and target completion dates.
38. Arrangements to identify and support learners' literacy and numeracy needs are good. Specialist tutors provide timely and good support to learners in the training centre or in the workplace. Induction is comprehensive and develops learners' understanding of the apprenticeship programme and its requirements. Equality and diversity, and health and safety booklets give learners a good understanding of these areas. However, some learners' recall of induction is vague.
39. Learners' needs are particularly well met from good and supportive employers and assessors. Good working relationships exist with employers who are particularly involved in the training and progress of their learners. Employers provide good opportunities for learners to develop skills. Workplace supervisors have a good understanding of the programmes. Learners attend in-house training that includes product training, bespoke computer system training and health and safety. Employers are fully involved in progress reviews, making good contributions about learners' training, skills development and attitudes to work and agreeing to appropriate action points.
40. Support for learners from assessors is very effective. Assessors are accessible and responsive. Learners are confident to contact them for additional guidance and extra visits if required. Assessors thoroughly monitor and report on learner progress. Appropriate interventions are taken if slow progress is identified. Promotion of equality of opportunity and health and safety at reviews is adequate. Although many of the learners are following programmes with units dedicated to these two topics, assessors ask generic questions with little relevance to the units the learners are following. The questions asked are not linked to occupational standards.
41. Information, advice and guidance are good. Initial interview carefully identifies the career aims of applicants and suitability for programmes in terms of job role. Programme information is clear and detailed.

Leadership and management

42. Leadership and management are good. Management strategies have improved the quality of provision and increased learner success rates. Well-qualified and experienced staff benefit from a broad range of development opportunities. Managers use information very effectively to monitor the progress of learners and the performance of staff. Team meetings are frequent with a strong focus on learner progress and achievement. Performance management to effect continuous improvement is strong. Staff are well supported by managers and teams work very effectively together. Internal verification is thorough; a clear and detailed strategy is very effectively implemented. New assessors are supported well and opportunities to share good practice with colleagues are good. Equality of opportunity is satisfactorily promoted through course material, induction and occupational units. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process and the report is broadly accurate.

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship** programmes managed by the provider, **2005 to 2007**.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	2004/05	overall	95	50	50	34	35
		timely	96	41	31	26	22
	2005/06	overall	53	60	54	38	44
		timely	50	48	34	34	27
	2006/07	overall	74	73	64	70	58
		timely	83	51	43	48	37
Apprenticeships	2004/05	overall	55	58	52	55	40
		timely	74	49	29	45	23
	2005/06	overall	74	66	59	64	53
		timely	45	64	38	62	34
	2006/07	overall	57	61	65	61	61
		timely	63	52	47	52	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

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

Outcomes on **Train to Gain** programmes managed by the provider **2006 to 2007**.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006/07	overall	127	86%
		timely	127	85%
	2007/08 (9 months)	overall	230	92%
		timely	284	73%

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'