

Mainstream Training Ltd.

Inspection date

11 December 2008

Inspection number

330084

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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' quality monitoring or annual assessment 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:

- Transportation operations and maintenance
- Warehousing and distribution

Description of the provider

1. Mainstream Training Ltd (MS) is a private training company, based in Sittingbourne in Kent, which operates as both as a training provider and staff recruitment company. The staff recruitment company is registered and operates as a separate company, Mainstream Staff Supplies Ltd. MS established itself in 1997 to meet training and skills needs in the construction and logistics industries. It has been delivering Train to Gain provision under a contract with Kent and Medway LSC since 2006 as a regional response provider and previously as a provider under the Employer Training Pilot. During 2007/08, the company was successful in gaining contracts to deliver Train to Gain provision for 2008/09 in the South East. The LSC has also awarded small contracts to MS for delivery in both the east and south west of England, although these are currently in the early stages of operation. At the time of inspection, there were 403 learners on programmes. The company is run by the managing director, supported by two national training directors, two national operation managers, two regional managers, and a quality assurance manager.
2. MS delivers most of the Train to Gain provision on employers' premises, but also has facilities for training staff at their headquarters in Sittingbourne. The site has specialist areas for forklift and other driver training, together with two classrooms and a **learndirect** centre. In addition to Train to Gain, MS also delivers provision through **learndirect** and has separate direct contracts providing customised training courses for the Ministry of Defence and the Prison Service. There have been no previous inspections of provision at Mainstream Training.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
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 area

Transportation operations and maintenance	Good: Grade 2
Warehousing and distribution	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards are good, as is the quality of the provision. Leadership and management are good, and the arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Train to Gain provision in transportation operations and maintenance and in warehousing and distribution is good.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

4. MS demonstrates good capacity to improve. The provider has not been inspected previously, and has only been providing Train to Gain programmes since 2006. During this time, MS has been very effective in achieving and maintaining good overall and timely success rates, despite rapid and substantial growth. Relationships with employers are good. Managers and staff share a strong commitment to raising standards and serving employers' and learners' needs. Many formal measures to assure and improve quality are relatively new and are appropriate and staff and managers have a good understanding of these. Effective performance monitoring targets are in place to secure positive outcomes for learners.
5. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The current self-assessment report is the first formal self-assessment document the company has produced. The self-assessment process is consultative and wide-ranging, and makes appropriate use of learners' and employers' comments. The report identifies many of the key strengths and most of the areas for improvement found by inspectors. However, the report is generally descriptive rather than analytical.

Key strengths

- Particularly good achievements
- Very good arrangements to meet employer and sector needs
- Very flexible support for learners
- Good provision of additional training and qualifications

Key areas for improvement

- Under-developed arrangements to observe the quality of training and learning
- Ineffective promotion of equality and diversity

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

6. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high in transportation operations and maintenance and in warehousing and distribution. Overall success rates have averaged 98% during the last three years. Timely success rates have averaged 82% in the same period. Learners value their training and can identify increases to employability and promotion prospects.
7. Assessors and learners work effectively to identify work-based skills and meet national vocational qualification (NVQ) standards. Portfolios are well organised with wide-ranging evidence. Assessors make use of good vocational knowledge to plan learning and assessments.
8. Further learning through additional qualifications is good. Most learners complete additional learning or training programmes at no additional cost to themselves or their employers.
9. Many learners also benefit from wider skills development while on programme. They demonstrate greater confidence and a more positive approach to the programme and their job roles.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

10. The quality of provision is good overall. Practical training is good. Instructors are well qualified with considerable relevant experience. Training is well structured. Tutors make good use of open questioning, and learners show good knowledge and understanding. Training and coaching are highly valued by learners.
11. Assessors visit learners frequently. Assessment is thorough and well structured. Feedback to learners is clear and action points are recorded for future visits.
12. Programmes meet the needs of learners and employers well, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Good attention is given to health and safety. Training is comprehensive and reflects current working practices.
13. Support for learners is particularly flexible and effective. Employers are highly supportive of training and provide good opportunities for assessment. Assessors support learners particularly well and structure their work around learners' shift and work patterns. Provision for skills for life is good, as identified in the self-assessment report.
14. Some internal verification processes are incomplete, particularly the formative sampling of portfolio evidence. The provider has identified this area for improvement through self-assessment.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

15. Leadership and management are good. The arrangements to meet sector and individual employer needs are very good. MS carries out thorough training needs analyses for each employer and learner before training. The provider has specialist assessors to meet employers' needs, and they base themselves frequently on employers' premises. MS has responded rapidly to employers' needs, employing suitable assessors and developing expertise in new training areas. Learners can study for a wide range of additional qualifications without any cost to themselves or employers, and thereby enriching their employability and vocational skills. MS provides good advice to employers on sources of funding and possible training routes for staff. A number of very clear and effective company websites provide learners and employers with current information on training, qualifications and funding.
16. Management is open and supportive, and internal communications are good. Managers are highly accessible and the senior management at MS share information widely with staff. Staff have a good understanding of the provider's aims and strategies. Staff work well to promote a positive, productive culture, and are very committed to improving services to employers and learners. Progression and career development are encouraged within the company. Several tutors and assessors have been promoted to management roles. MS has a policy of recruiting and offering opportunities to those people who may find it difficult to obtain employment elsewhere.
17. Strategic planning and business development are effective. During a period of considerable and rapid growth, MS has maintained a clear focus on learners' success. Success rates are high and have remained so during this period of growth. Expansion plans and contract bids have been shaped to maintain quality. Business and strategic plans are clear, and reflect government and regional economic priorities.
18. Arrangements to meet learners' literacy and numeracy needs are comprehensive and effective. In addition to developing funded learners' literacy and numeracy skills, MS provides training and certification for many other employers' workforces. MS carries out initial assessment of all learners' skills needs, and uses the outcomes appropriately to determine the provision of support. MS makes good use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support literacy and numeracy training. Skills for life staff provide numeracy and literacy training in the workplace. A number of portable training suites are located at major employers' premises, providing an appropriate environment for support. Initiatives to provide English support for speakers of other languages are currently under development in response to a growing number of recent requests from employers.
19. Staff have clear job descriptions and are set appropriate performance targets. Appraisals occur yearly and are valued by staff. Clear links exist between appraisal and staff development activity, though much staff development is requested and approved informally between appraisals. The company does not monitor the benefits derived from development and training sufficiently.
20. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. Policies and procedures relating to equality, grievance, complaints, anti-bullying, appeals, freedom of information and most other areas of statutory duty are clear and frequently updated. Learners receive a version of the equalities policy written in accessible language during induction. MS analyses trends in

performance for different learner groups, and reviews data relating to enrolment and outcomes by race, gender, age and ethnicity. However, the promotion of equality and diversity during reviews and at induction is insufficient. Learners and their assessors have a basic understanding of equality of opportunity and their rights and responsibilities under law, but they have an under-developed understanding of equality and diversity issues related to their sector subject areas. There has been no formal staff or management training in equality and diversity beyond that delivered during induction during the past two years.

21. Quality assurance measures are satisfactory overall. Staff share the provider's commitment to improving learner outcomes, and receive good support and guidance about new operating procedures. Management meetings have an appropriate focus on improving training and meeting employer needs. An appropriate range of performance targets are set and monitored. However, many formal quality procedures are newly established and are, as yet, under-developed. Reporting of outcomes by employer and by sector subject area is thorough, but managers do not formally review or analyse the progress made across individual NVQ elements. MS has not yet established processes to observe the quality of training sessions. The provider has identified this as an area for improvement.
22. Arrangements to gather and respond to learner feedback are satisfactory. MS reacts to requests for changes to training from learners. Measures to gather employer feedback are insufficiently formal. MS has very good communications and relationships with employers, but there is no systematic recording or analysis of feedback about training.
23. MS produced its first self-assessment report during 2007/08. Self-assessment involves learners and staff, but employers are not formally involved in the process. Inspectors agreed with self-assessment grades for sector subject areas but not with the overall grades for the provision. The self-assessment report is too descriptive. The report cites areas of strength that are no more than examples of satisfactory practice. However, many of the areas for improvement identified by inspectors are present in the report. The self-assessment report is linked to an appropriate development and improvement plan.

What learners like:

- Very supportive assessors
- 'It's useful to get a qualification while working'
- 'It's good to get time set aside to cover the work'
- 'Getting a qualification will improve my prospects'
- Safety training

What learners think could improve:

- Provision of more lift truck training away from the workplace

Sector subject areas

Transportation operations and maintenance

Good: Grade 2

Context

24. Some 353 learners are on the Train to Gain programme working towards NVQs at level 2 in driving goods vehicles, carrying and delivering goods, passenger carrying vehicle and plant operations. Programmes run for 10 to 14 weeks. Learners work in a variety of businesses, ranging from small local employers to large international organisations. Training for plant operations takes place at the employer's premises, and for driving goods vehicles at the provider's premises. All assessment is carried out at the learner's workplace by training company assessors with relevant occupational experience.

Strengths

- Particularly good achievement
- Good development of additional qualifications and learning
- Good practical driver training
- Highly flexible learner support
- Particularly effective management of the programme area

Areas for improvement

- Incomplete internal verification processes

Achievement and standards

25. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are particularly good. The overall success rate on goods vehicle programmes was 89% in 2007/08. In 2008/09 to date, the success rate is 100%. The success rates for plant operations NVQs were 99% and 100%, respectively, for the same two years. In 2007/08, timely success rates in each of the two programme areas were 68% and 64%, respectively.
26. Further learning through additional qualifications is good. Most learners carry out additional learning or training programmes to supplement their NVQ. Examples of further qualifications gained are dangerous goods qualifications for goods vehicle drivers, goods vehicle articulated vehicle driving qualifications, and reach truck operator and pedestrian pallet truck operator qualifications.
27. Drivers have received further training in nationally recognised SAFED (safe and fuel-efficient driving) techniques, which enhances their safe and more cost-effective driving skills. Many truck operators gain further qualifications such as lorry loader or excavator certificates. Many learners also benefit from wider skills development while on programme. They demonstrate greater confidence and a more positive approach to the programme and their job roles. Some company managers have also developed a more positive perception of programme aims, and have reviewed priorities of work activities since learners have been working towards NVQs.

Quality of provision

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28. The quality of provision is good. Practical training in driving skills is good. Instructors are well qualified with substantial operational experience. The structure of training sessions is good with effective use of open questioning. Learners' responses show good levels of knowledge and understanding. Tutors demonstrate good instruction skills, and their style of training and coaching is highly valued by learners. Instructors promote confidence in their learners using particularly effective motivational styles. Vehicles used for driver training are of a good standard, and are well maintained. Further relevant training and practice is given to learners by employers and mentors at work.
29. Training in plant operations is satisfactory. Tutors use effective instruction techniques, including frequent use of oral questions, problem solving, and links to real operating situations, as well as many good-practice hints and tips. Training sessions are participative, and involve all learners in discussions on operating techniques and problem solving.
30. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessors brief learners clearly before assessments and use good practical assessment techniques so that they can see and hear all the detail of learners' activities. Frequent use is made of oral questioning, and learners confidently demonstrate their background knowledge. Assessors provide clear, constructive feedback at the end of the assessment process.
31. The extent to which programmes meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Learners can access a wide range of training programmes that match well to the needs of the sector. The degree of flexibility and level of service and reliability provided by staff at MS are highly valued by employers, as is the assessors' technical expertise and motivational skills. Employers view MS as being very successful in assessing and meeting overall company training requirements through an effective training needs analysis process.
32. Support for learners is highly flexible. All learners feel particularly well supported by their assessors. Assessors are successful in meeting the demands of learners' very diverse work and shift patterns. Information, help and advice given to learners are consistently available from initial sign-up sessions throughout the programme until final achievement. Assessors not only visit learners at particularly unsociable hours, but they also frequently spend full shifts in sometimes arduous real working conditions with drivers on goods vehicle NVQs, to capture a broad range of evidence of skills as they occur during the driver's working period. Specialist tutors provide good support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs. Mobile skills for life training workshops take place at larger employer premises, where all employees can access free drop-in training for literacy and numeracy.

Leadership and management

33. Leadership and management are good. MS focuses clearly on meeting the total training needs of employers in the specialist logistics sector. Managers have high expectations of their staff, and set appropriately challenging targets. Good recruitment and selection processes ensure that all programme staff are well qualified, and have substantive operational experience in the sector. Staff adopt a highly professional approach, and their industry experience is recognised and respected by employers and learners. Resources and equipment for teaching and learning are satisfactory. Assessors develop good, and sometimes outstanding, working relationships with both employers and learners. Induction of learners is satisfactory. Learners receive adequate information about equality of opportunity at induction. There are questions on equality during reviews, but some learners and assessors have insufficient understanding of equality and diversity.

34. Some internal verification processes are incomplete. Very little formative internal verifier sampling of portfolio evidence is undertaken. The internal verification strategy on which staff base their sampling is unclear in some areas. The standardisation of assessment decisions is insufficient at assessor standardisation meetings, with too much emphasis on standardisation of documents and their use. This is insufficient to meet the training needs of assessors new to the programme. No formal system currently exists for the observation of training or other NVQ activities to bring about quality improvements.
35. The self-assessment report is overly descriptive, with some aspects reflecting no more than normal practice. It does identify most of the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. Consultation with staff and learners during the self-assessment process is appropriate.

Warehousing and distribution

Good: Grade 2

Context

36. MS has 50 learners on warehousing and distribution programmes. There are 19 learners on warehousing and storage courses and 31 learners on warehousing programmes. Learners work towards NVQs at level 2. All learners are employed. An operations support team at MS manages the learning and assessment programmes and assessors visit employer's premises. All learners have an initial assessment by interview and a test of their literacy, numeracy and language skills. Induction takes place in the workplace and at other suitable venues.
37. Learners are employed in large transport and warehouse companies and a mixture of general engineering and manufacturing businesses. Employers receive a range of support services, including quality improvement and management development. Assessors visit the learners in the workplace to provide training and assessment and to review progress. Four internal verifiers monitor the quality of assessment.

Strengths

- Very high success rates
- Good identification of work-based skills by assessors
- Very effective relationships with employers
- Good additional qualifications
- Good guidance and support for learners

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity

Achievement and standards

38. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates are very good. Since 2005/06, overall success rates have varied between 95% and 100 %. Timely success rates are good, with the exception of 2006/07 when they fell to 49%. The provider identified reasons for the drop in rates during 2006/07, and took swift corrective action. In 2007/08, timely success improved significantly to 84%.
39. Achievement of additional qualifications is good. Learners have the opportunity to gain a range of additional qualifications and training according to their personal training plans, for example, lift truck licences, manual pallet truck training and low- level power truck training plus many others valued by the employers. Plans exist to introduce first aid and manual handling qualifications in response to employer demand. Most additional qualifications are provided free to the learner and employer.
40. Identification of work-based skills by assessors is good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Assessors identify learners' existing skills and match them very closely with NVQ criteria. Learners are able to build upon their skills with additional levels of information supplied by their assessors. By working with highly skilled assessors, learners are provided with very good opportunities to broaden their skills during the programme.

They attain new levels of confidence, which improve performance. New skills are transferable and significantly increase learners' employability and potential for promotion. Learners gain a much broader understanding of their work and are successfully encouraged to pursue additional qualifications to enhance their skills and employability.

Quality of provision

41. The quality of provision is good. The quality of training is good. Assessors visit learners frequently and give them good technical support. Assessment is thorough and well structured, feedback is given to learners verbally and action points are recorded for future visits. Equality and diversity and grievance and appeals procedures issues are documented. Electronic portfolios are satisfactory and are structured logically to assist progress. Learners find them easy to work with and understand.
42. Initial assessment and provision for skills for life are good, as identified through self-assessment. MS recently introduced more effective screening of literacy and numeracy needs and has improved the provision of support given to learners. It has installed portable classrooms in some of the large employers' premises to offer literacy and numeracy support for all employees. Staff have specific skills for life qualifications.
43. MS uses up-to-date equipment and provides good facilities at their own premises for training and assessment. Learners are able to carry out suitable tasks which meet the NVQ criteria while on programme and through assessment.
44. Programmes meet the needs of learners and employers well, as identified in the self-assessment report. Relationships with employers are very effective.. Attention to health and safety issues is very good. Training is comprehensive and relevant to current working practices. Employers have a strong commitment to training. They are supportive of the need to train their staff and are happy to provide training and assessment opportunities for the qualifications. Effective communications exist between employers and assessors. Assessors manage the employer relationships very successfully. For example, assessors work around production timetables to provide time for assessment and portfolio building.
45. Guidance and support for learners are good. There is good careers and sector-specific training information on websites, with a dedicated question and answer support service, and website links to give learners and employers access to current information on available courses, training, and funding. There is a dedicated website to allow employers and learners to gain knowledge and understanding of what is involved in the training process. Learners are released from work, sometimes for several days, to attend training. Flexible work schedules accommodate the gathering of portfolio evidence. MS staff visit learners frequently, often at unsociable hours, and are very patient and supportive. Action plans are clear and time-related. Learners' views and opinions are valued and improvements made in response to their comments.

Leadership and management

46. Leadership and management are good. Internal communications are good. There are good programme review meetings where all aspects of the programme are discussed and improvement opportunities identified. There are specific and clear objectives for programmes, which are effectively monitored and evaluated. Assessors have a good understanding of their responsibilities. Any problems are dealt with promptly and effectively. Action plans are agreed and monitored frequently. However, some quality

assurance systems are under-developed. There is no formal lesson observation system currently in place, but MS is currently planning to introduce a scheme to observe training.

47. Internal verification is satisfactory. An appropriate plan is produced to ensure that all aspects of the assessment process are monitored.
48. Assessors and staff have a good understanding of the self-assessment process and report. They are fully involved in the company's quality improvement strategies. The self-assessment report is insufficiently analytical or self-critical. Judgements are generally accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the occupational area, but the text in the report is too descriptive and insufficiently evaluative.
49. Promotion, monitoring and reinforcement of equality and diversity is insufficient. All learners receive specific information on equality of opportunity and health and safety during induction. Learners discuss equality of opportunity during reviews, but the recording of some discussions is insufficient. Some learners have insufficient knowledge of equality and diversity. There has been no recent formal staff training in equality and diversity. There is no systematic reinforcement of equality of opportunity during learners' training, and there are few handouts or written materials to help to improve learners' understanding.

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes** managed by the provider 2006 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	114	97%
		timely	72	69%
	2007/08	overall	285	97%
		timely	239	84%
	2008/09 (6 months)	overall	87	100%
		timely	80	93%

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three 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

** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college/provider before inspection