

# Skills Team Limited

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Inspection date

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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](http://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](http://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:

- Information and communication technology
- Business, administration and law

## Description of the provider

1. Skills Team Limited (STL) is a privately owned training company, which was formed in February 2006, specialising in the delivery of Train to Gain funded programmes. It operates from offices in Hammersmith. The provider has held a direct contract from the South East LSC since 2007, originally to complete the programmes for learners from a former lead partner which had ceased trading and then its own larger contract from June 2008. In addition the company is a subcontractor to four other Train to Gain consortia led by Fusion (College of North West London), Kingston College, Uxbridge College and Hammersmith and West London College.
2. The managing director is supported by two other directors and a senior management team of two. Three programme managers run programmes in information and communication technology (ICT) and business administration and law. STL employs 14 trainers, 22 assessors and six internal verifiers. Eight members of staff act as both trainers and assessors. Other staff liaise with employers, generate enrolments, or provide administrative support. At the time of the inspection there were 483 learners on Train to Gain programmes, of whom 188 were under the provider's own direct contract. One hundred and twenty two of those directly contracted were women and 46 were from minority ethnic groups.

## Summary of grades awarded

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

## Sector subject areas

Information and communication technology	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Business, administration and law	Satisfactory: Grade 3

## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievement and Standards, quality of provision and leadership and management are satisfactory as is the contributory grade for equality of opportunity. Provision in the subject sector areas, ICT and business, administration and law, is satisfactory.
4. The grades awarded in this inspection relate to directly contracted Train to Gain provision. The provider does not differentiate in its provision between directly contracted and subcontracted learners.

### Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. The provider has demonstrated a satisfactory capacity to improve. As a new provider, STL has no inspection history. It has however learned through its relationship with those colleges which subcontract to it. Some aspects of the provision have improved as a result of staff suggestions. This is the first year that the organisation has produced a self-assessment report. Its associated development plan addresses a number of areas for improvement but it is too early to judge their full impact. The self-assessment report was considered by inspectors to be too generous in its grades. The report correctly identified a number of the strengths and areas for improvement identified at inspection, but also identified as strengths some areas which are either normal practice or insufficient to be considered a key strength. STL has quality improvement plans at programme level, with appropriate actions and responsibilities. Progress against these plans is reviewed routinely at monthly management meetings.

## Key strengths

- Good development of occupational skills
- Very effective use of Information Learning Technology (ILT) to support teaching, learning and assessment
- Good assessment
- Good links with employers
- Good staff development

## Key areas for improvement

- Incomplete quality improvement arrangements

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. In the only complete year to date, 2007/08, the overall success rate was 76%. At the six month point in 2008/09 the overall success rate is 79%. The timely success rate in 2007/08 was 57%. Although the timely success rate for 2008/09 appears low at 18%, STL has had a large increase in the number of learners. Of these, 191 are still in learning and most learners are making satisfactory progress.
7. Learners in both subject sector areas develop existing and gain new occupational skills well. Employers and learners recognise that they work more effectively and some learners have been rewarded at work with promotion or increased responsibility. It is too early to identify overall performance trends in provision or to differentiate effectively the performance of particular groups of learners. The self-assessment report recognises the need to improve timely success rates, and STL has set suitable targets to do so. The report incorrectly claimed excellent overall success rates.

### Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Overall teaching and learning are satisfactory. STL uses ILT very effectively to support teaching, learning and assessment. Trainers, especially in ICT use ILT very effectively in workshops. Assessors in both programmes routinely use digital audio and video recording to capture a wide variety of evidence for assessment. Assessment is good. It is well planned and sufficiently frequent to enable learners to progress at a brisk pace. however, links between training and assessment are sometimes insufficient.
9. Programmes and activities satisfactorily meet the needs and interests of the learners. Links with employers are good. Nominated learning champions at each employer act effectively as the main point of contact with the provider. They facilitate booking of resources at the employers' premises and the attendance of learners at workshops and other arranged sessions. STL's programmes respond well to the needs of the employers, but do not always effectively meet the needs of individual learners.
10. Guidance and support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors and other staff provide satisfactory guidance and support to learners throughout the programmes. They also provide sign posting or referrals to other support services.

11. The self-assessment report identifies a number of areas for further improvement and clearly sets out how they are to be implemented.

## Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Satisfactory: Grade 3

12. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Staff development is good. STL has recruited sufficient staff to deal effectively with the increasing number of learners and to allow managers to become further involved in the development of the programmes. New staff receive good support from managers and mentors. The support for those working towards their assessor qualification is particularly good. Most staff are registered with the Institute for Learning and receive good support from STL with their continuous professional development. A number of assessors are now working towards an appropriate teaching qualification. The annual appraisal system satisfactorily produces action points for individual development. Appropriate generic training is also periodically provided. This has included dyslexia awareness. A training session from an external adviser on safeguarding has been arranged for April 2009.
13. Directors and managers set a clear direction, which they satisfactorily communicate to staff through regular meetings at company, management and team levels and between individual members of staff. Their vision to 'make a difference' is articulated through clear targets for increased recruitment, improved overall success rates and year-on-year improvements in timely success rates. STL uses a workshop style delivery for much of the training. This maximises the efficient use of staff, however, it also limits the effectiveness for some learners as it does not always allow for their individual needs. Resource management is good.
14. Links with other providers and services are satisfactory. STL has Matrix accreditation and maintains a network of other providers for learner referral. It does not provide Skills for Life training and has a satisfactory strategy of referral to a prioritised list of providers for learners with significant literacy, numeracy or language support needs. Individual staff members maintain effective networks with individuals within partner colleges and other providers. Links with employers are good.
15. STL has developed a robust learner management system and continues to develop new features for it. The system is extensively used by managers and staff to record information and monitor learners' progress. Managers also use it to monitor performance, inform management decisions and to generate the data required by the contract.
16. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. As a Train to Gain provider, STL deals exclusively with adult learners and has not



identified any vulnerable adults among them. However, it recognises the potential and has arranged appropriate training in safeguarding for all staff this training is also to be open to a partner college. STL's adviser is working with them to produce an appropriate safeguarding policy, and any other necessary actions, before legislation applies fully in October 2009.

17. Quality improvement arrangements are incomplete. Quality improvements to date have been largely informal. Improvements have been made to the management information system and in the increased number of appropriate staff. Although most of STL's procedures governing the learner journey are represented in flow charts, not all aspects are covered and there is no supporting detail for each aspect on the flow charts. Similarly, managers observe and grade teaching and learning sessions but do not always produce action points for staff development. Existing arrangements lack sufficient procedures to assure that other aspects of the provision, such as reviews or target-setting, are performed to the required standard. There is not a systematic review of each aspect to ensure that adopted procedures are fit for purpose. Self-assessment was completed for the first time just before the inspection and does not yet adequately drive forward continuous improvement.
18. The self-assessment report recognises the need to formalise some aspects of leadership and management and the need for continuous improvement and addresses these in the associated development plan.
19. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory and is covered adequately at induction. STL is committed to equality of opportunity and treats learners fairly. It has comprehensive policies, which satisfactorily respond to current equal opportunities and disability discrimination legislation. The provider employs staff from a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities, which reflects that of the learners. Staff draw on their own experiences to explain equality and diversity issues to learners. Managers regularly monitor training and other material to ensure that they are free from cultural bias. Although equality of opportunity is included and adequately covered, in some National Vocational Qualifications (NVO) units in the programmes it is insufficiently promoted during reviews. STL ensures equality of access to learners with disabilities such as hearing impairment by providing additional help and support either in the workshops or during individual sessions. The provider helps learners with poor literacy skills to complete their portfolios using alternatives to writing such as digital recording or laptop computers. Access and facilities at the provider's premises are adequate for staff or learners with impaired mobility.

## What learners like:

- 'Assessors take on board issues at work and use them in training'
- 'Feel as if I am learning something'
- Activities in the workshops
- 'Asked for our opinions in workshops'
- 'Not felt under pressure'
- Assessors always available
- 'I'm empowered by the training'
- 'The trainer is brilliant'
- 'Tutor is very interactive, asks lots of questions'

## What learners think could improve:

- More regular feedback
- 'More details on how far I am through the programme'
- Better communication and contact with the assessor
- Induction - 'The folder of stuff is a bit daunting on day one'
- 'I might not do this again its so time consuming'
- 'Make courses longer for new learners'
- Internet training – 'too much information in one session'
- More guidance on putting together a portfolio
- More consolidation exercises

## Sector subject areas

### Information and communication technology

Satisfactory: Grade 3

#### Context

20. STL offers programmes in ICT at levels 2 and 3. There are currently 51 learners on Train to Gain programmes. Forty-three are working towards Information Technology Qualification (ITQ) level 2, and 8 towards ITQ level 3. Learners are employed by a range of employers, including, hotels, stockbrokers and sports centres. All learners receive an induction in the workplace covering the content of the NVO, equal opportunities and health and safety. Learners attend workshops delivered in the workplace. All assessment takes place in the workplace.

#### Strengths

- Good development of vocational skills
- Very effective use of ILT to support teaching, learning and assessment
- Good response to employer needs
- Very good resource management

#### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of initial assessment to inform teaching, learning and assessment planning
- Insufficient planning for individualised learning

#### Achievement and standards

21. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Overall success rates are satisfactory. In 2007/08, as in 2006/07, overall success rates were at 75%. Timely success rates are improving and increased from 17% in 2006/07 to 35% in 2007/08. At the time of inspection timely success rates for the current year stood at 35%.

22. Learners develop vocational skills well. They demonstrate enhanced use of bespoke and commercial software packages. Both employers and learners recognise the improved efficiency in the workplace, increased confidence in the use of ICT and the professional work products. Colleagues also benefit as learners share their newly acquired knowledge.

## Quality of provision

23. Quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Resources are good. STL provides learners with a portfolio containing all key documentation and a USB stick with copies of centre prepared software manuals and the NVQ standards. STL also provides those learners, who require additional support to develop their IT skills to the required standard, with a copy of a computer based academic course and a free subscription to office software.
24. STL staff use ILT very effectively to support teaching, learning and assessment. Tutors use LCD projectors to demonstrate software functionality. ILT is used well to support group work activities. For example, learners take it in turn to complete an activity while providing an explanatory commentary. During professional discussions assessors routinely use digital voice recorders and cameras to support evidence collection.
25. STL does not sufficiently plan for individualised learning. Although schemes of work and lesson plans are standardised with well planned tutor and learner activity the identification of methods of assessment to check learning and attainment is limited. Learning outcomes are standardised, although tutors collect learners' own learning goals at the start of the workshop. Learners undergo initial assessment and identify personal learning goals in their individual learning plan, much of this information is recorded in the learner management system. However, tutors and assessors do not always use this information routinely.
26. STL makes insufficient use of initial assessment to inform teaching, learning and planning. It uses a national diagnostic test to initially assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills. The provider has a clear process for referral if additional support needs are identified. Learners complete a skills scan and learning styles analysis. The results are recorded on the learner management system but they are not used effectively to inform other teaching plans for workshops or assessment plans. End dates are standardised by group and not negotiated individually. Induction is satisfactory. Learners have a good recall of the range of topics covered such as health and safety.
27. STL appointed a new ITQ coordinator in 2008. Internal and external verification procedures have been developed to ensure the provider meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Experienced assessors provide good support to work-based learners. The marking of learners' work is usually of good quality, but occasionally feedback is too brief and does not help learners to improve.
28. The extent to which programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. The response to employer needs is good. The provider has developed good relationships with employers. Each employer nominates a learning champion as the main contact with the provider. The learning champions provide support for employees undertaking the qualification and in many cases are themselves learners. Employers host the workshops, and those in the same sector sometimes collaborate to share workshop facilities for their staff.

Employers take the lead for identifying the programme of learning and for identifying their learners, many of whom receive no course information or advice until the first workshop.

29. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. This comes partly from the employers' key contact managers and learning champions, helped by the effective relationships developed by the provider. Assessors and tutors also provide suitable information, advice and guidance throughout the programme.

### Leadership and management

30. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff have, or are working towards, an appropriate teaching or assessor qualification. Most staff are registered with the Institute for Learning.

31. Graded observations of teaching and learning for tutors are carried out using the provider's internal observation scheme. Although observation of assessment is carried out twice a year by the lead internal verifier against national assessor standards observations are not graded.

32. Resource management is very good. The provider supplies a bank of laptop computers, connected to a portable server, installed with a range of commercial software. Specialist support equipment is available if required. The resources enable the provider to simulate a working office environment which includes access to the internet and email.

33. The provider adequately covers health and safety in the teaching, and in particular correct posture and screen height adjustment. However, the layout of some rooms restricts tutors' ability to set-up the equipment, and in one instance cables were located in the centre of the table next to learners' drinks. Often only fixed leg chairs are available.

34. The self-assessment process is satisfactory, incorporating involvement from all staff and feedback from employers and learners. The self-assessment report lacked evaluative judgements and, other than the improving success rates, failed to identify specific strengths or areas for improvement for the area of learning.

## Business, administration and law

Satisfactory: Grade 3

### Context

35. STL offers programmes in team leading, business administration, customer service and management at levels 2 and 3. There are currently 137 learners on Train to Gain programmes. Twenty-four are working towards customer service level 2, 23 on team leading level 2, 27 on business administration level 2 and 63 on management level 3. Learners are employed by a range of employers. These include hotels, care homes, health insurance, housing associations and the National Health Service. Learners often receive an induction at their workplace. Training workshops and assessment usually take place in the workplace. There are 16 staff, of whom seven are working towards their assessor or verifier awards.

### Strengths

- Particularly good in overall in year success rates in customer service
- Good development of occupational skills
- Good assessment
- Good links with employers

### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient coordination of some aspects of the programme
- Insufficient quality monitoring

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

36. Overall in-year success rates for customer service are particularly good. In 2007/08, 73% of learners achieved their qualification. In the current year to date, 96% of leavers have achieved with 41% of these still in learning. Success rates for all other qualifications are satisfactory. On team leading, 80% of learners achieved in 2007/08. There was no business administration or management learners until the current year. No learners have achieved yet in business administration however 90% of learners are still in learning. In management, 69% of learners have achieved and 80% of these are still in learning. Timely success rates are low.

37. Development of occupational skills is good. Learners develop good occupational skills and a wide range of practical employment skills. They develop and improve their self-confidence, motivation, self-esteem and team working skills. Learners are empowered and have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Learners take on additional responsibilities as their confidence

and skill levels grow and are aware of their improved performance. Some learners have progressed into higher level positions. Employers value the contribution learners make towards their work. Learners follow programmes that support their jobs and increase their potential career aspirations.

## Quality of provision

Quality of provision is satisfactory.

38. Assessment is good. Assessment planning is particularly well detailed and clear. Learners and employers are always fully aware of when assessment is to take place and what is due to be assessed. Particularly good use is made of technology in assessments. Assessors use voice and video recordings effectively to ensure the capture of all available evidence. Good use is made of products of work. Assessment is briskly paced and most learners make good progress towards their qualification. STL are currently developing a web based electronic portfolio.
39. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although trainers use a narrow range of methods, adequate training is planned to meet programme requirements. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. STL provides a wide range of learning resources which include paper based workbooks and electronic based resources. However these are not always used effectively to support learning and the language used in the resources is too complex for some learners. Some learners do not use the available resources and attendance at some workshops is unsatisfactory.
40. Induction for learners is satisfactory. Health and Safety, details of the qualification and the programme are adequately covered. however there is too much focus on documentation completion.
41. The programmes and activities satisfactorily meet the needs and interests of learners. Links with employers are good. Working relationships with learners and employers are particularly good. STL works well with approximately 50 employers to meet both their needs and the individual needs of learners. Arrangements with employers effectively provide opportunities for learner development. Communication with employers is usually good. Learners value the programmes and the ability to gain a meaningful qualification. Some learners are not on the most appropriate qualification and the needs of the employers are sometimes taken into consideration above those of learners.
42. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Learners have frequent assessor visits; usually at four weekly intervals, or more often if required. Visits are flexibly timed to suit the learners' work schedules and their need to gather specific evidence for their NVQ. Learners can also contact their assessors by telephone as required. Assessors ensure that individual support is available where additional learning needs have been identified. Information advice and guidance is adequately delivered as part of the programme

## Leadership and management

43. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff training and development is appropriate. Staff receive particularly good training and support to gain their assessor qualifications. Communication across the company is satisfactory. Internal verification is satisfactory. Monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Equality and diversity are briefly discussed at induction but not regularly discussed after this as part of the overall programme. Learners and staff generally have an adequate awareness and understanding of equality and diversity but progress reviews are superficial and do not sufficiently explore equality of opportunity with learners although the self-assessment process is fully inclusive, the self-assessment report is too descriptive, lacks judgement and is insufficiently critical.
44. Coordination of some aspects of the programmes is insufficient. Target setting and action planning of the programme for some learners is insufficient. Learning resources and materials are generic and do not clearly signpost learners to the information or take into account learners' individual needs. Individual learning plans and progress reviews are superficial and are completed for compliance purposes. Learners do not receive a copy of these and are not aware of their relevance to the programme. Coordination of training and assessment is sometimes insufficient and communication between assessors and trainers is inconsistent. Staff are not always aware of work done by other staff with the same learner.
45. Quality monitoring is insufficient. Quality assurance arrangements do not adequately ensure that all key aspects of the learners' experiences are monitored. Observations of workshops are satisfactory. However, they are insufficiently evaluative and do not identify meaningful areas for improvement. Other key learning processes, for example progress reviews and target setting, have not been recently observed. Quality monitoring is generally carried out for compliance purposes only. Quality policies and procedures lack clarity and are not always followed by staff.



## Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes managed by Skills Team Limited 2006 to 2009

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	0	0%
		timely	0	0%
	2007/08	overall	39	76%
		timely	11	57%
	2008/09 (6 months)	overall	63	79%
		timely	50	18%

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