

Straight A Training Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 54640

Name of lead inspector: Jo Parkman HMI

Last day of inspection: 11 December 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Fenwick Harrison Building
16–20 Camp Road
Farnborough
GU14 6EW

Telephone number: 01252 669008

Information about the provider

Straight A Training Limited (SAT) was formed in 1999 by two partners, both of whom have extensive experience within the hospitality and catering industry. SAT initially provided national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in hospitality and catering but has since expanded its offer to include business administration, management, team leading and customer service. A small number of learners are working towards qualifications in skills for cleaners and domestics, but this area was not included in the inspection. The majority of learners are working and training in central London. SAT has no training facilities but has offices in Farnborough, Hampshire. Training is funded by Central London Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Government-funded training accounts for around 75% of SAT's annual income.

SAT offers apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes in a number of subjects within hospitality and catering, and business, administration and law. About 80% of SAT's current learners are adults on Train to Gain programmes. The vast majority of apprentices are also adults. All learners are employed within the hospitality and catering industry.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	167 learners
Apprenticeships	36 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	
Hospitality and catering	2
Business, administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness of SAT's provision is good. Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the company and have managed its expansion particularly well. SAT has developed strong partnerships with prestigious employers within the catering and hospitality industry, and works hard to meet their skills and training needs. It offers a wide range of training opportunities. This, together with very effective advice and guidance, helps to ensure that learners work towards the qualifications best suited to their individual career aspirations. Overall, SAT demonstrates good capacity to improve the quality of its training programmes, although it does not always make the best use of data to help it bring about improvements. The achievements of learners are good and the majority progress to further training or gain promotions when they have completed their training. The standards of teaching and learning are good. SAT's staff are highly skilled and ensure that learners experience good quality training and assessment. Assessors monitor learners' progress thoroughly. Learners are clear about what tasks they should complete before the next visit, and what will be assessed next. However, individual learning plans are not used well to plan how and when learners will achieve the various components of the qualification. Assessors are very well aware of the potential difficulties faced by learners for whom English is an additional language and provide good support to improve learners'

vocabulary and confidence with English. However, SAT has yet to implement an effective strategy to identify and support learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and learners feel very safe and well protected. SAT promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily and is working hard to ensure that all learners have an equal chance of success.

Main findings

- Success rates are high for learners on Train to Gain programmes at level 2. The proportion of learners who achieve their qualification within the planned time is above the national average. At level 3, overall success rates are 10 percentage points above the national average, although for a minority of learners progress is slow. On apprenticeships, success rates for adult learners are high and above the national average.
- Learners develop very good skills, including employability and personal skills. Progression to further education and training is good and many learners achieve promotions as a result of their new skills and confidence. Learners who speak English as an additional language improve their confidence in speaking, listening and writing. On apprenticeships, pass rates for key skills are high.
- Learners use safe working practices and SAT has good arrangements for monitoring health and safety. Staff respond effectively to learners' concerns and learners feel very safe and well-protected.
- Training and assessment are good. Staff have a diverse range of backgrounds and use their experience well to support their learners. Arrangements for assessment are particularly flexible and assessors are skilled at meeting the individual needs of learners. They visit learners weekly and provide constructive and helpful feedback for the majority of learners.
- Initial assessment of learners' work skills is very good. However, the initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language is not well-developed. Learners only receive a basic literacy assessment, which does not identify gaps in their knowledge or indicate what level of key skill they might be capable of achieving. All learners receive the same initial assessment and for those with poor language skills it is not appropriate as it does not identify their English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) needs.
- Many assessors speak English as an additional language and they have a good understanding of the potential barriers faced by learners who have ESOL needs. They provide very good informal support. However, SAT has yet to develop and implement strategies to formally meet the literacy, numeracy and language needs of learners.
- Assessors monitor learners' progress thoroughly. They set suitable targets so that learners are clear about what tasks they should complete before the next visit, and what will be assessed next. However, assessors make insufficient use of individual learning plans to plan how learners will achieve the various components of the qualification in a timely way over the duration of their programme.

- SAT's partnerships lead to outstanding benefits for learners. SAT has developed very strong partnerships with a wide range of prestigious employers. Learners benefit from particularly high quality workplaces and develop impressive curriculum vitae. Assessors are highly skilled at helping learners to choose combinations of NVQ units which reflect not only their current roles and responsibilities but also suit their aspirations.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Assessors provide good information and advice, and ensure that learners are well aware of other opportunities open to them once they have achieved their qualification. They help learners to plan their careers and encourage them to be ambitious.
- Strategic and operational management are good. The two directors have managed the development and expansion of the company particularly well. SAT has high expectations for its learner and its employers. The provision has been developed well in direct response to employers' requests and to meet the skills needs of the industry.
- Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place for the very few learners who are aged 16 or 17, and SAT uses suitable risk assessments to identify vulnerable adults. All assessors are appropriately vetted and suitable policies and procedures are in place. Staff have received basic training but SAT is aware of the need for further formal training to develop their knowledge further.
- The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Managers analyse data about participation and success carefully and draw meaningful conclusions. The data show that learners with poorer language skills and apprentices aged 16 to 18 have a poorer chance of achieving, and SAT is working to ensure that these learners achieve as well as other learners. SAT has worked hard with employers to ensure that all employees have an opportunity to achieve qualifications and access training.
- SAT's self-assessment is accurate and effective as a quality improvement tool. Leaders, managers and staff have a particularly good understanding of the company's strengths and what needs to be done to improve further. Quality improvement planning is effective and teams have very good arrangements to share good practice. However, managers make insufficient use of data to monitor performance.

What does Straight A Training need to do to improve further?

- Research and implement more appropriate tools for the initial assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. Ensure that learners with ESOL needs receive an appropriate assessment.
- Implement an effective strategy to develop learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills. In particular, introduce arrangements to provide support for learners with ESOL needs to ensure that lack of language skills does not hinder their progress.

- Make better use of individual learning plans to ensure that assessors plan how and when learners will achieve the component parts of their qualification over the duration of their programmes.
- Make better use of data to monitor and evaluate performance. In particular, use data more effectively to monitor the progress of different groups of learners and to evaluate the success of actions for improvement.
- Continue to develop staffs' understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding to enable them to use this knowledge confidently in their work with learners.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- being able to apply for better jobs and promotion as a result of training
- the challenge of achieving an NVQ at level 3
- being able to improve their language skills
- the helpful, motivating, enthusiastic and trustworthy assessors.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the setting of written homework alongside shift work.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the way assessors are always punctual and visit frequently
- the fast progress made by their staff and the way they are developing their skills and confidence
- the way the training is tailored to meet their needs
- SAT being very approachable, trustworthy and easy to do business with
- the fact that staff really enjoy their training
- having a good choice of training programmes.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the extent of detailed feedback about what learners are working on and how they are progressing.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

SAT has good capacity to improve, and has made good progress in improving the quality of its provision since the previous inspection. Leaders and staff have a clear vision for the company and have managed its expansion well so that the quality of the provision has also improved as the number of learners has increased. Success rates have risen substantially over the last three years and most are now above national averages. Managers and staff work very hard to identify any areas for improvement and are committed to making changes where necessary to bring about improvements. The self-assessment report is a particularly accurate appraisal of the quality of SAT's provision. Self-assessment leads to a coherent and comprehensive plan for quality improvement. SAT has strong relationships with employers and responds to their needs particularly well. SAT's response to learners' concerns is good and there is an appropriate regard for their welfare. Staff are highly skilled and experienced, and most are working towards additional qualifications which contribute to the quality of their work.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

Achievements for learners are good. For learners on Train to Gain programmes at level 2 success rates are high. The proportion achieving the qualification within the planned time is above the national average. At level 3, overall success rates are 10 percentage points above the national average, although for a minority of learners progress is slow. On apprenticeships success rates for adult learners are high and above the national average. Too few apprentices are aged 16 to 18 to allow meaningful judgements to be made about their achievements.

Learners develop very good skills, including employability and personal skills. Progression to further education and training is good and most learners achieve promotions as a result of their new skills and confidence. Learners who speak English as an additional language satisfactorily improve their confidence in speaking, listening and writing. On apprenticeships pass rates for key skills are high and learners achieve their key skills early in their programme.

Learners use safe working practices and SAT has good arrangements for monitoring health and safety. Staff respond effectively to learners' concerns and learners feel very safe and well protected. They have a good awareness of how to seek support or help and develop good working relationships with their assessors which foster trust and openness.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

Training and assessment are good. Staff have a diverse range of backgrounds and use their experience well to support their learners. Arrangements for assessment are particularly flexible and assessors are skilled at meeting the individual needs of learners. They visit learners weekly and provide constructive and helpful feedback,

although for a small minority of learners working towards qualifications at level 3 in business management, there is not enough written feedback.

Initial assessment of learners' work skills is very good. Assessors complete comprehensive scans of learners' existing work skills at the start of their programmes. However, the initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language is not well developed. Learners only receive a basic literacy assessment which identifies whether they are able to work at foundation level. It does not identify gaps in their knowledge or indicate what level of key skill they might be capable of achieving. All learners receive the same initial assessment, and for those with poor language skills it is not appropriate as it does not identify their ESOL needs.

Many assessors speak English as an additional language and they have a good understanding of the potential barriers faced by learners who have ESOL needs. They have good empathy with the learners and understand well the difficulties they may have with technical language. They provide very good informal support and help learners to develop their vocabulary appropriately. However, they are not trained to provide support for language or literacy. SAT has yet to implement effective strategies to formally meet the literacy, numeracy and language needs of learners.

Assessors monitor learners' progress thoroughly. They set suitable targets so that learners are clear about what tasks they should complete before the next visit, and what will be assessed next. However, assessors make insufficient use of individual learning plans to plan how learners will achieve the various components of the qualification in a timely way over the duration of their programme. Most learners are unclear about their overall progress or when they will complete their programmes.

SAT's partnerships lead to outstanding benefits for learners. SAT has developed very strong partnerships with a wide range of prestigious employers. Most employers are very well involved in the learners' training and have embedded it as part of their own staff development and appraisal programme. Learners benefit from particularly high quality workplaces and develop impressive curriculum vitae. Assessors are particularly skilled at helping learners to choose combinations of NVQ units which reflect not only their current roles and responsibilities but also suit their aspirations.

Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Assessors provide good information and advice and ensure that learners are well aware of other opportunities open to them once they have achieved their qualification. They help learners to plan their careers and encourage them to be ambitious. SAT is working towards achieving Matrix accreditation. Staff provide good help and support for learners' welfare and there are good arrangements for directing learners to external specialist agencies as appropriate.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

Strategic and operational management are good. The two directors have managed the development and expansion of the company particularly well. SAT has high expectations for its learner and its employers. The provision has been developed in direct response to employers' requests and to meet the skills needs of the industry.

SAT has an open and consultative style much appreciated by employers and lines of communication are particularly effective.

Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place for the very few learners who are aged 16 or 17, and SAT has suitable risk assessments to identify vulnerable adults. All assessors are appropriately vetted, suitable policies and procedures are in place and staff have received basic training. However, staff have not had enough training to confidently distinguish between health and safety, general welfare and safeguarding issues. Learners receive good information and training on health and safety and have a good awareness of how to access help and support. However, assessors do not routinely monitor the hours worked by apprentices.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. SAT has suitable policies and procedures which cover all current legislation. Staff receive regular updates about changes in law and practice during their regular team meetings. Learners receive an appropriate induction and their knowledge and understanding are developed effectively during their training. However, in business management and customer service programmes assessors do not pay enough attention to embedding diversity into their training and to checking learners' knowledge during assessments. In a minority of cases learners have only a basic knowledge of, for example, legislation relating to disability and how it impacts on their work.

Managers collect and analyse data about participation and success carefully and draw meaningful conclusions. SAT has worked hard with employers to ensure that all employees have an opportunity to achieve qualifications and access training, even where they may not be eligible for government funding. SAT has identified that learners aged below 18 are more likely to leave their apprenticeship without achieving and that poor language skills are a barrier to success for a minority of learners. Managers are working effectively to an equalities action plan to develop strategies to ensure that learners with poorer language skills, and younger learners, achieve as well as other learners.

SAT's self-assessment is accurate and effective as a quality improvement tool. Leaders, managers and staff have a particularly good understanding of the company's strengths and what needs to be done to improve further. Quality improvement planning is effective and teams have very good arrangements to share good practice. However, managers make insufficient use of data to monitor performance. Managers do not monitor success and timely success rates rigorously enough and do not monitor the progress of groups of learners on different qualifications and with different assessors effectively. SAT does not have a system to identify if learners are making slow progress based on targets in their individual learning plan.

SAT provides good value for money. Outcomes for learners are good. SAT manages its resources very effectively and financial management and planning are good. Staff are very well supported and leaders place a strong emphasis on developing staff, including supporting them to achieve additional qualifications such as degrees.

Subject areas

Hospitality and catering

Grade 2

Context

Currently 128 learners are on hospitality and catering programmes. Of these 94 are on Train to Gain programmes and the remaining 34 are apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships. The majority of learners are working towards NVQs in professional cookery at levels 2 and 3, and NVQs in hospitality supervision and leadership at level 3. All learners are employed, mostly in prestigious London restaurants and hotels. All training and assessment is carried out in the workplace.

Key findings

- Overall success rates are high. The success rate for apprenticeships has improved from 28% in 2005/06 to 70% in 2008/09. The success rates for Train to Gain are also above the national average. For the first nine months of 2008/09 most learners who achieved NVQs on Train to Gain programmes took longer than planned. However, current learners are making very good progress and more recent data show a substantial improvement in timely achievement.
- Learners develop good work, personal and social skills during their programme. They improve their communication skills, confidence and employability. Progression to higher or other training is good and learners are frequently offered promotion at the end of their programmes.
- Assessment is good and assessors make the best possible use of a wide range of evidence from the workplace. They record evidence well and give learners clear feedback. Assessors are very motivated and enthusiastic, plan assessments well and make good use of short-term target setting.
- The arrangements for the initial assessment of learners' literacy and language needs are inappropriate. All learners receive a basic literacy assessment but this does not identify gaps in their knowledge or indicate what level of key skill would be appropriate for them. Learners with language needs are not given a specialist ESOL assessment. Although learners receive good informal help, the strategy to provide formal literacy or language support has not yet been fully implemented.
- Planning of learning is insufficient. Assessors do not plan with learners how or when they will complete the components of their qualifications within the duration of their programmes. The majority of learners are unaware of when they will achieve their qualifications or whether they are on target to achieve in a timely way.
- The involvement of employers in the training programmes is very good. Employers are strongly committed to training and fully support their learners

and SAT's staff. The range and quality of workplaces is very good and provides excellent opportunities for learners to train and develop.

- Learners receive good advice and guidance and fully understand what is expected of them. Assessors enable learners to select programmes and choices of NVQ units which best suit their career aspirations and meet the needs of their employers.
- Resources are good and staff are well qualified. SAT provides assessors with a good range of learning resources, including appropriate assignment and project briefs, digital cameras and laptops.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. Learners work in safe and secure workplaces. Assessors embed health and safety at work, and employees' rights and responsibilities, in the learners' programmes so that they clearly understand their relevance.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners discuss equal opportunities with their assessors on a regular basis and have a satisfactory awareness of equality and diversity. However, staff and learners have only a basic understanding of safeguarding and the broader aspects of equality and diversity.

What does Straight A Training need to do to improve further?

- Improve arrangements to support literacy, numeracy and language needs. Assess literacy needs to at least intermediate level and use more appropriate tools to assess the needs of ESOL learners. Develop a range of resources and approaches that help assessors to provide more effective support, prioritising ESOL.
- Develop an individual learning plan that effectively aids the planning and monitoring of each learner's progress. Use the plan when reviewing progress with the learners and employers.
- Further develop the understanding of staff and learners in safeguarding and equality of opportunity.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

Currently 205 learners are on business, administration and law programmes. Of these, 161 are on Train to Gain programmes and the remaining 44 are on apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships. The majority of learners are working towards NVQs in customer service at level 2, NVQs in management at level 3 and in team leading at level 2. All learners are employed, mostly in prestigious London restaurants and hotels. All training and assessment is carried out in the workplace.

Key findings

- Achievements for learners are good, especially on Train to Gain at level 2, where the timely success rate is 12 percentage points above the national average. The overall success rates for Train to Gain learners and learners on apprenticeships are also above national averages.
- Learners develop good occupational and employability skills, including communication and research skills. Learners with ESOL needs make good progress in developing their confidence in the use of English. Progression to further education and training is good and the majority of learners achieve promotion as a result of their training.
- Learners feel very safe and well protected. High levels of trust enable learners to talk to SAT staff about any problems. Employers provide good training in health and safety and this is further developed by SAT, as assessors have a sharp focus on safe working practices during assessment.
- Assessors use their extensive knowledge of the sector well to coach learners and identify relevant projects and assessment opportunities. Assessors have basic teaching qualifications and have a good grasp of the importance of finding the right learning approach for each learner.
- Learners benefit from an excellent range of learning opportunities. The majority work in prestigious venues, or for leading companies, who provide good in-house training. Assessors support and extend the training provided by the employers through assignments and challenging work-based projects, often involving research that leads to improved working practices.
- Assessment practices are sound, with very good use of workplace assessment opportunities and effective use of questioning and discussion. However, observation records are excessively descriptive and for a small minority of learners written feedback lacks detail.

- The arrangements for the initial assessment of learners' literacy and language needs are inappropriate. All learners receive a basic literacy assessment but this does not identify gaps in their knowledge or indicate what level of key skills would be appropriate for them. Learners with language needs are not given a specialist ESOL assessment. Although learners receive good informal help, the strategy to provide formal literacy or language support has not yet been fully implemented.
- Assessors do not make good use of individual learning plans to plan learning over the duration of the programme. A number of documents are used to monitor learners' progress, but these focus on the achievement of NVO units, rather than on planning learning.
- Programmes are strongly focused on the needs of learners. SAT staff are very successful at involving learners in selecting qualifications and optional units that meet their needs and aspirations. Learners respond very well and show a high level of commitment and enthusiasm.
- SAT collaborates exceptionally well with employers to develop effective training programmes. High levels of trust exist between SAT and employers and enable SAT's staff to promote the benefits of learning and negotiate programmes that meet both the needs of learners and the needs of the business.
- Support for learners is very effective. Learners receive good guidance at the start of programmes and benefit from frequent visits from their assessors. Progression to further training is good and assessors ensure that learners receive good guidance on other training opportunities at the end of their programmes.
- SAT gives staff good support and encouragement to pursue their particular interests and aspirations during continuing professional development activities. SAT takes full advantage of the professional development opportunities offered through various national improvement programmes.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. SAT ensures that learners know and understand their employers' equal opportunities policies. Learners' inductions, progress reviews and questionnaires include a focus on equality and diversity issues. Some assignments include questions about equality and diversity. However, SAT does not develop learners' knowledge of relevant legislation sufficiently for those in customer service or supervisory roles.

What does Straight A Training need to do to improve further?

- Develop an individual learning plan that effectively aids the planning and monitoring of each learner's progress. Use the plan when reviewing progress with the learners and employers. Ensure that records of observations are not overly descriptive. Provide sufficient detail in the written feedback for all learners.

- Improve arrangements to support literacy, numeracy and language needs. Assess literacy needs to at least intermediate level and use more appropriate tools to assess the needs of ESOL learners. Develop a range of resources and approaches that helps assessors to provide more effective support, prioritising ESOL.
- Further develop staffs' and learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues. Provide more training on how anti-discrimination legislation impacts on their job role for learners who work in customer service or management roles.

Information about the inspection

1. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by one of SAT's directors, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of SAT's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local LSC, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
2. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of SAT. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in two of the subject areas SAT offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Straight A Training

Learning types: 14–16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16–18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall				Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	79				79
Part-time learners	282				282
Overall effectiveness	2				2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2				2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	NA				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	NA				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	NA				
Quality of provision	2				2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	2				2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	NA				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2009