

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 54643

Name of lead inspector: Derrick Spragg HMI

Last day of inspection: 16 April 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 2nd Floor
8 Regent Street
Mansfield
NG18 1SS

Telephone number: 01623 634483

Information about the provider

1. Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Ltd (STS) is a private training provider founded in 1998. It became a limited company in 2002 and currently employs 30 staff. The head office and hairdressing training salon are in Mansfield town centre. It has two other sites in the Mansfield area. STS holds contracts with the Skills Funding Agency and the Young Peoples' Funding Agency. Government funding account for 95% of STS's income.
2. STS provides advanced apprenticeships and apprenticeships in horticulture, hairdressing, retail, warehousing and distribution, administration, customer service, management, learning and development, information and communications technology, and training for Entry to Employment (E2E). In addition, it provides training for pupils in Years 9 and 10 from local schools. STS is a subcontractor for Train to Gain.
3. North Nottingham has an unemployment rate of 11.9% (2009) that is much higher than the UK and East Midlands rates. The proportion of the population in the Mansfield area with a minority ethnic heritage is under 2%.
4. STS provides training on behalf of the following provider:
 - South Nottinghamshire College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: Entry to Employment	56 full-time learners
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	148 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Preparation for life and work	3
Customer Service	2

Overall effectiveness

5. The number of learners who achieve their learning goals is satisfactory overall with those learners training in administration, customer service and business management achieving particularly well. Learners develop good workplace skills and develop confidence. Learners progress from entry to employment at a satisfactory rate. However, too few learners on apprenticeship programmes achieve in the planned time. The success rates in hairdressing and horticulture were low although improving this year.
6. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall and STS recognises it has areas for improvement. The range of programmes meets the needs and interests of learners and most employers. Partnerships with schools and other local organisations work well and benefit learners. Individual support and guidance for learners are good.
7. Managers provide effective leadership and actively seek improvement, although some quality improvement arrangements are not working effectively and the management of the feedback from employers lacks rigour. Staff work well with learners and listen to their ideas about improvements. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. Learners feel safe. STS promotes equality and diversity effectively.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners overall are satisfactory. In business administration and law outcomes are good. Learners progress at a satisfactory rate from the E2E programme but the number of learners entering jobs with training remains low. The number of placements providing opportunities for a job are low. Achievement of qualifications in E2E is low but improving.
- The numbers of apprentices who succeeded in hairdressing and horticulture were low in 2008/09 although improving in the current year. Too many learners do not complete within the planned time.
- Learners improve their social and economic well being effectively and develop employability skills, including a wide range of work related skills. Learners enjoy their learning and develop confidence. Learners use safe working practices. Learners say they feel safe.
- The quality of provision is satisfactory. Learners in customer service experience good on-the-job training with employers. The way in which short-term learning objectives are set and reviewed in E2E is underdeveloped and lesson planning lacks sufficient focus on individual needs.
- Learners have a satisfactory choice of programmes that meet their needs well. Programmes meet most employers' needs. E2E training is tailored to the individual personal and social development needs of learners well.
- STS works effectively with a wide range of local and regional partners, particularly schools, local youth agencies and community groups that benefit learners who develop confidence and skills by their involvement in supportive learning environments.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Learners value the supportive visits by STS to the workplace that help them progress. Learners in E2E develop confidence and skills through working in a supportive environment on STS projects.
- Managers provide leadership, actively seek improvement and promote high standards. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and work well as a team to achieve the company's aims and objectives. Staff put a high value on the welfare and development of each individual learner.
- Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and learners feel safe. STS promotes equality and diversity effectively through its work with learners. Data are not used well to monitor any gaps in progress and achievement.
- STS operates an effective quality management system that uses self-assessment to inform improvement planning. Whilst much of the system works effectively, the evaluation of the quality of training, teaching and learning by observation lacks rigour and is not having sufficient impact on improving the provision. STS has recognised the need to improve this area and has reasonable plans for so doing.
- The policy to engage users formally in improvement is not working fully. Learners' feedback is collected and suggestions for improvements made by learners are identified. These suggestions are discussed with learners at regular

quality improvement group meetings and actions taken result in improvements to the quality of the learners' experience. However, STS has not operated a formal process in the recent past for collecting and analysing employers' views although there are plans to introduce one in the near future.

- Value for money is satisfactory. There are variations between subjects in the number of learners who achieve their learning goals. Too many learners do not complete on time.

What does Strategic Training Solutions need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of apprentices who succeed and complete on time particularly in hairdressing and horticulture by improving planning, training and individual reviews with learners.
- Increase the number of learners in E2E who make progress to further training and a job by improving the links with local employers and using more placements that might lead to jobs.
- Improve the quality of training and learning by introducing better observation methods and by managing feedback to staff better.
- Improve training by managing feedback from employers and by consulting with them more regularly.
- Make better use of activity plans and reviews in E2E by providing learners with more detailed information on their progress and by identifying and reviewing more short-term learning objectives.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the enjoyable training
- learning new things
- good teaching
- programmes that meet individual's needs very well
- the various ways used for assessment that make it enjoyable
- increasing their confidence in their abilities
- very supportive, helpful and readily available STS staff
- being treated like an adult.

What learners would like to see improved:

- help with job sheets
- better equipment
- improved organisation and consistency when staff leave

- better detailed explanations about how to achieve qualification
- more frequent training sessions.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the excellent service provided
- being involved in planning and choosing NVQ units
- provision of a high standard of education, advice and guidance
- clear understanding of work requirements, business practices and job roles
- good advice about health and safety
- the way STS meets the training needs of business very well
- highly skilled, helpful and motivated staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- fewer staff changes
- more effective ways of dealing with learners' completed work and feedback.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

8. A trend of steady improvement in overall performance has taken place, particularly with the current year's achievements and those in business administration and law that forms over half the provision. The E2E progression rate has improved since the last inspection by 10 percentage points to 63% although the number of learners who enter employment remains low. More apprentices complete on time than at the time of the last inspection but this is still only half of the total learners.
9. Self-assessment and quality improvement planning are satisfactory. Staff involvement in the quality process is good. However, aspects of the quality improvement process are underdeveloped. STS uses learners' feedback well but the collection and use of employers' feedback is underdeveloped. The self-assessment report is comprehensive, self-critical and generally accurate. The quality improvement planning process is satisfactory although some actions require more precise specification to allow progress to be measured.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. The proportion of learners in business administration and law who successfully complete the apprenticeship is high. In 2008/09, 79% of the learners in business administration and law successfully completed the apprenticeship framework with 71% of them within the planned time. Learners progress at a satisfactory rate from E2E although the proportion that enter jobs with training remains low. The number of learners who achieve a qualification whilst on E2E has been low but is improving in the current year. The number of learners who succeed in hairdressing and horticulture were low in 2008/09 and are now increasing.
11. Learners gain skills and develop their self-confidence. Learners develop employability skills and put them into practice effectively when on work placements in E2E. Apprentices take the opportunities available to progress to higher-level qualifications in customer service. They improve their social and economic well being effectively and develop skills, including a wide range of work-related skills that increase their prospects for internal promotion and progression at work.
12. Learners demonstrate safe working practices. They say they feel safe and enjoy their learning programmes. They feel protected from bullying and harassment and develop a good understanding of stereotyping and discrimination in the context of work and learning. Learners improve their behaviour and treat others with respect. Attendance is satisfactory in E2E.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Training and learning are satisfactory, with learners in customer service experiencing good learning support from assessors and good on-the-job training. The way learning is planned and short term learning objectives set and reviewed in customer service are good. Additional learning support is effective for those learners who require it. Assessment in the workplace for customer service apprentices is thorough. The use of information and communications technology such as voice recorders motivates learners although in some cases recordings are too long and insufficiently judgemental to enable clear assessment decisions to be made. The training sessions in E2E are satisfactory or better. Most learners are attentive, work purposefully and make progress during the taught lessons. Tutors promote equality of opportunity and awareness of cultural diversity effectively. Resources are satisfactory and tutors use imaginative activities in many of the sessions. Tutors do not take sufficient account of individual learner needs when planning the training sessions. Learners do not have sufficient feedback on the short-term learning steps they have taken in their personal development and skills acquisition, nor of what they need to do next to progress. The provision of additional learning support for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory.
14. STS meets the needs and interests of learners effectively. Learners have a satisfactory choice of programmes that meet their needs. In business administration and law, there is a range of programmes available that enable learners to progress. Programmes meet most employers' needs. E2E training responds well to the individual personal and social development needs of learners. Staff consult with E2E learners who influence the design and delivery of their individual programmes. Learners are provided with vocational options and placed in work to develop employability skills but too often they are in placements that will not lead to a job.
15. Partnerships, particularly with schools and local youth agencies, benefit learners who progress into work-based learning. Partnerships with employers benefit learners who experience good on-the-job training in customer service. STS works effectively with a variety of local partners to provide appropriate learning experiences for learners who have learning difficulties or other barriers to learning. Aspects of the provision, such as the horticulture programme, respond particularly well to the needs of such learners. STS promotes inclusion and engages effectively with the community through work on local projects. STS plays a prominent role in the local provider network and works closely with the other providers and regional groups to widen participation and support initiatives to promote work based learning. The partnership with the South Nottinghamshire College to provide Train to Gain programmes is effective.
16. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Learners value supportive visits by STS to the workplace that help them progress. Learners in E2E and school pupils aged 14 to 16 develop confidence and skills through working on STS projects in a supportive environment provided by STS staff and external

specialist agencies. Learners benefit from the very good individual care and guidance provided by STS staff to overcome additional barriers to their learning and employment. The provider ensures that learners have access to support from a wide range of external agencies that covers, for example, sexual health, homelessness and substance abuse. STS carries out initial assessment effectively and the outcomes inform individual learning programmes well.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. Managers provide good leadership and actively seek improvement. STS has a clear set of values that prioritises the quality of the learners' experience, their safety and welfare. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and work well as a team to achieve the company's aims and objectives. Staff make good use of training and development to enhance their skills and develop professionally. The monitoring of learners' progress is effective and managers review performance data and take actions to improve although the impact on improvement in some programmes is slow. Value for money is satisfactory overall but too many learners across all apprenticeship programmes do not complete on time. Resources are satisfactory. Overall accommodation is fit for purpose but some aspects are below the standard required for the provision.
18. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and learners feel safe. Managers prioritise safeguarding; suitable training with staff takes place and STS recognise that more is required and have plans for this. Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks cover most staff with some recent applications pending. STS uses its links with the local safeguarding board to develop the approach to safeguarding and cooperates on individual cases appropriately. Learners have a good understanding of the importance of safeguarding and STS integrates learning about safeguarding into training programmes well. Staff review learners' welfare and wellbeing by regular conversations with individual learners at work and during training sessions. Although some employers are very well aware of safeguarding, others are not. STS recognises that further actions are required to develop employers' awareness and embed safeguarding as a priority into every day practices and documentation.
19. STS promotes equality and diversity effectively. Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity. Induction training introduces equality and diversity to learners effectively and regular reinforcement of learners' understanding follows. Employers' practices and their awareness of equality and diversity are checked regularly. Further information, advice and guidance is given when required. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups corresponds to the local population. STS promotes work-based training to young people and works actively in the local community to widen participation and engage learners who are hard to reach. STS is aware of the need to examine differences in performance between different groups of learners on the same programme although the use of data to provide this analysis is underdeveloped.

20. The policy to engage users formally in improvement is not yet fully implemented. Learners are involved effectively in meetings; they provide feedback and discuss improvements with staff. Other informal methods enable feedback during the normal course of working with learners at, for example, review meetings. Adjustments and improvements to the provision take place as a result. STS has not operated a formal process in the recent past for collecting and analysing employers' views but has plans to introduce one in the near future. Other methods of collecting employers' feedback and responding to it lack rigour and are not working in some cases.
21. STS operates an effective quality management system that uses self-assessment and improvement planning. Self-assessment is used effectively in reviewing the quality of the provision and staff are fully involved in the process. The evaluation of the quality of training, teaching and learning is underdeveloped. The management and implementation of lesson observations and the use of the outcomes across all the provision lacks rigour and is not having sufficient impact on improving the provision. STS recognise this and work is underway to introduce improvements to the evaluation process although progress is slow.

Subject areas

Preparation for life and work

Grade 3

Context

22. STS delivers an E2E programme for 22 learners, of whom twelve are female, at the Regent Street town centre site. The programme manager and three members of staff provide the training.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. In 2008/09, 63% of learners progressed to either employment or further training however only 11% was into employment with training.
- Achievement of qualifications by learners was low in 2008/09. However, this has improved in 2009/10 and the success rate for learners taking level one literacy and numeracy is good in the current year.
- Learners enjoy their learning programmes. They increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, and they benefit well from working collaboratively with other learners on tasks. Learners develop employability skills and put them into practice effectively when on work placements.
- Learners feel safe and adopt safe working practices. They feel protected from bullying and harassment and develop a good understanding of stereotyping and discrimination. Learners improve their behaviour and treat others with respect. Attendance is satisfactory.
- Learners gain a particularly good understanding of safe health practices, healthy eating and well-being that enables them to make informed choices about their lifestyles. They engage in a range of physical activities that they enjoy. Learners appreciate the breakfast club at the centre that provides them with good nourishment each morning.
- Learners benefit well from taking part in additional community development activities and projects. They gain a good understanding of how they can contribute effectively to their local communities. Learners have a voice in the community as members of the Connexions Youth Board.
- Teaching, training and learning are satisfactory in supporting learning and development. Training sessions are satisfactory overall. Most learners are attentive, work purposefully and make progress. They benefit from good individual support from the tutors. However, tutors do not focus sufficiently on individual learner needs when planning the training sessions or use sufficient information communications technology to support teaching and learning.
- Learners have individual long-term goals that they review regularly. Learners' activity plans and reviews do not provide them with sufficiently detailed information on their progress and on what they need to do to achieve their immediate learning objectives.

- The range of activities programme is good and the choices available meet the needs and interest of learners satisfactorily. Staff consult learners about the design and delivery of their individual programmes. Learners value the range of activities offered and participate well.
- STS works particularly well with external partners, agencies and community groups to benefit learners. For example, links with local youth agencies and community projects enable learners to take part in constructive local projects that enhance their employability. Learners progress into E2E and onto vocational training through the good links with the local schools.
- Learners value and benefit from particularly good individual support to overcome barriers to learning and employment. The provider ensures that they have access to support from a wide range of external agencies. The number of STS staff with appropriate qualifications to support learners' development of literacy and numeracy skills are insufficient.
- The programme manager evaluates the programme effectively and makes improvements that are beginning to have an impact on the quality of the provision.
- Learners' understanding of safeguarding and equality and diversity is generally good. Staff prioritise safeguarding and effectively promote learners awareness. Equality and diversity training is integrated into training sessions and reinforced effectively.

What does Strategic Training Solutions need to do to improve further?

- Increase positive progression outcomes for learners and in particular entry into jobs with training by improving the links with local employers and identifying more placements that might lead to jobs.
- Make better use of activity plans and reviews by providing learners with more detailed information on their progress and by giving them sufficient guidance on what they need to do to achieve their short-term learning objectives.
- Improve teaching and learning by planning effectively to meet the different needs of individual learner's and to make lessons interesting by making better use of technology in teaching.
- Improve the provision by ensuring that tutors gain qualifications in literacy and numeracy teaching.

Customer Service

Grade 2

Context

23. Currently, 42 learners are working towards qualifications in customer service of which 78% are apprentices and 20% males. STS provides assessment and one-to-one coaching for apprentices in the workplace.

Key findings

- Overall success rates for customer service apprentices since the last inspection are good, with 82% of learners who started achieving the full qualification. In 2008/09, 77% of the learners who started completed a full qualification and for learners aged 16 to 18 the rate was outstanding at 100%. The number of learners who complete within the planned time is good.
- Learners' progress from one qualification on to another either at the same level or higher is good. Many learners have successfully completed two or more qualifications with STS. Learners improve their social and economic well being effectively and develop skills, including a wide range of work-related skills that increase their prospects for internal promotion and progression.
- Learners feel safe in the workplace. They have a very clear understanding of health and safety in the workplace and adopt safe working practices.
- Training, assessment and learning are good overall. Learners receive effective one-to-one coaching in the workplace that they value highly. On-the-job training is good. The way learning is planned and short-term learning objectives set and reviewed are good. Additional learning support is effective for those learners who receive it.
- Assessment in the workplace is thorough. The use of information and communications technology, such as voice recorders, motivates learners. Use of the electronic portfolio process to support assessment enables learners to progress at a good pace, although in a few cases recordings are too long and insufficiently judgemental to enable clear assessment decisions to be made.
- Programmes in customer service meet the needs and interest of the learners well. Learners and employers value the flexible approach and the way the programme responds to workplace requirements although some employers require better communication with STS about progress.
- The partnership arrangements with employers are satisfactory. Employers work with STS staff and learners and they contribute well to the training in the workplace. However, in a few cases aspects of partnership working are underdeveloped such as the employers' contribution to assessment by witness statements. A few employers feel that they do not get sufficient response to their feedback from STS.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Learners value the regular visits and contact from their assessor. Learners receive good information and

timely advice to enable them to consider their next steps. Learners have a clear view of their progression opportunities.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The assessment team are well qualified and have a wide range of current occupational expertise appropriate to the qualification they deliver. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Internal verification is satisfactory. Some reviews are not quality assured sufficiently well to identify when, for example, employers have not contributed sufficiently.
- Equality and diversity learning is integrated into the customer service apprenticeship programmes. Learners' awareness of equality and diversity issues is good. Self- assessment is satisfactory. Some improvement planning lacks specific criteria to enable the measurement of the achievement of objectives set.

What does Strategic Training Solutions need to do to improve further?

- Improve the implementation of the electronic portfolio process by improving the use of voice recordings and by providing clearer evaluative feedback.
- Make better use of employers' feedback by consulting more regularly with employers especially when assessment staff changes occur and by ensuring managers thoroughly monitor employers' contributions to reviews.
- Improve the quality improvement plan by identifying specific actions that are measurable.

Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
25. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, visits to employers, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected detailed evidence from programmes in two of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Strategic Training Solutions

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	16-18 Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	204	56	148
Part-time learners	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3		
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	Na		
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	Na		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
Leadership and management	3	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2		
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	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?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*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 0300 1231231, 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: 0300 1231231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010