

Zodiac Training Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 55491

Name of lead inspector: Tim Gardner HMI

Last day of inspection: 13 August 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: The Learning Centre
11th Avenue North
Team Valley
Gateshead
NE11 0NJ

Telephone number: 0845 330 8184

Information about the provider

1. Zodiac Training Limited (Zodiac) is a private training provider established in October 1996. Zodiac has training sites across the North East region, including Sunderland, South Shields, and Wansbeck in Ashington, with its Head Office located at Team Valley, Gateshead.
2. Zodiac hold contracts with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) North East, as well as with local authorities, the European Social Fund (ESF), local schools, local providers and Jobcentre Plus. Zodiac also has a growing number of commercial contracts directly with employers. Government-funded provision currently forms the majority of Zodiac's portfolio of training.
3. Although Zodiac provides training in many parts of the United Kingdom, the inspection focused attention on provision in the North East region, where the majority of Zodiac's learners exist.
4. The areas inspected included health and social care, children's development and well-being, retail and commercial enterprises, and business, administration and law, and these represent the vast majority of Zodiac's learners. The areas not inspected on this occasion include preparation for life and work, IT users, advice and guidance, and manufacturing.
5. About 2.5 million people live in the North East. The population is ageing and there is a relatively low proportion of people from black and minority ethnic groups. The rate of employment is lower than the national average, although the gap has narrowed in recent years. The North East has the highest proportion of workless households of any UK region. There is a smaller proportion of highly qualified people in the North East than nationally but there are also fewer skills shortages. Since 2000, the gap in attainment of five or more good GCSE results between the North East and the national average has halved. Life expectancy in the North East is lower than the national average, reflecting higher levels of illness and of smoking.
6. Zodiac provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Rathbone
 - BTCV Enterprises Employment Service
 - Skills Progression and Recruitment Consortium
 - Bskills Limited
7. The following organisations provide training on behalf of Zodiac:
 - Licensed2Train
 - Prima Training NE Limited
 - Northern Driving Solutions Limited

■ HCT Training

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	1,303 learners 2,968 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	
Health and social care	2
Children's development and well-being	2
Retail and commercial enterprises	2
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

8. Zodiac is a good training provider. In particular, outcomes for learners are now good, especially for the learners currently in training. Although success rates have been inconsistent over the last three years, actions taken and strategies introduced have resulted in learners now making very good progress, many achieving their qualification early. The quality of provision is good, as are leadership and management. Zodiac's promotion of equality and diversity and safeguarding is good.
9. Zodiac's capacity to improve is also good. Although success rates since the last inspection have been inconsistent both within subject areas and across the whole provision, more recent actions and strategies introduced are having a positive impact on learners' progress in nearly all areas of learning.
10. The leadership and management of Zodiac are good. Recent re-structuring and new appointments have strengthened the management team. Operational

management of the areas of learning is good. Zodiac sets ambitious targets for its staff. Zodiac is also making significant investments in electronic resources for both learners and staff.

Main findings

- Overall, Zodiac has maintained satisfactory success rates on apprenticeship programmes for the last three years. However, achievement rates within agreed timescales have not improved in this time and are currently low at 34%. No significant difference in performance occurs for different groups of learners, although adults do achieve slightly lower success rates.
- Previously, success rates in the sector areas on the apprenticeship programmes have been variable, with some areas performing well, such as care, warehousing and distribution, and business administration. Other areas perform less well, including business management and customer service. Success rates within agreed timescales in some areas are also low. However, current data now show a much-improved picture.
- On Train to Gain programmes, some areas are performing well, such as health and social care at level 3 and engineering and retail at level 2. Health and social care and children's development and well-being at level 2 are satisfactory but retail and wholesaling is low with success rates of 38%. The rates achieved within agreed timescales in retail and business administration programmes are low.
- Current learners are now making much better progress. Zodiac has implemented a range of effective strategies to improve both the timely and overall success rates. The detailed monitoring of progress is now reducing learner time on programme and significant numbers of learners now achieve before their agreed end date.
- Learners develop good vocational skills in all areas. Both learners and employers recognise performance in the workplace as being much improved. Confidence and self-esteem have all improved and many learners report additional responsibility, promotion, and an increase in salary because of their training.
- All learners feel safe, both at work and during their training. Zodiac's staff strongly promote and reinforce safeguarding at every opportunity. In the most recent survey, 100% of learners responded that they feel safe. Zodiac vets all employers before training starts and provides good support to those who need additional help in developing policies and procedures.
- Assessment practices are good. Assessment planning is very thorough and good use is made of the newly introduced electronic system to record evidence and monitor learners' achievement. Assessors use a wide range of good assessment methods.
- Training and coaching are satisfactory. Effective use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) and well-produced e-learning material. However, learners do not routinely use the resources. The provider's

observation of teaching and learning is mostly accurate but observers do not focus action-plans sufficiently on improving practice.

- Overall, the review of learners' progress is satisfactory. In the best cases, targets set when planning learning are clear and used well to monitor progress. However, some learners' progress reviews are insufficiently detailed.
- The good range of courses and progression routes serve the needs and interest of learners and employers well, and provide a good choice of subjects, levels and qualifications. Zodiac plans the provision well to meet the needs of both learners and employers and is both flexible and responsive.
- Partnership working is good. The provider works effectively with a number of business networks, statutory and voluntary agencies, local consortia and schools and colleges. Co-operative working has clear benefits for learners and many partnerships specifically promote inclusion and encourage participation.
- Support for learners is good. Information, advice and guidance meet the needs of learners well. Zodiac offers adequate support for literacy and numeracy and makes use of appropriate support from external sources for issues such as dyslexia. Staff are particularly knowledgeable about sources of support from specialist agencies and direct learners who need specific help to them.
- Leadership and management are good. All staff have a clear understanding of the strategic direction of Zodiac. Managers set ambitious targets to improve success rates. Management of sector areas is good. Good changes to the company structure have enabled many improvements to the provision and improvements to success rates. Considerable investment in e-working has significantly increased the speed at which learners achieve.
- Safeguarding is good. Zodiac uses its policies, procedures and systems well to monitor and regulate recruitment of staff. All staff receive appropriate training which is regularly updated. Good use is made of external audit to check safeguarding procedures. Zodiac provides good support to employers on safeguarding, health and safety, and equality and diversity. Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding.
- Equality and diversity are good. Zodiac analyses data carefully and implements effective actions to reduce recruitment and achievement gaps amongst different groups of learners. Staff receive well structured and regular training and are confident in tackling bullying and harassment in learners' workplaces. Learners' understanding of their workplace rights and responsibilities is good. Flexible training and assessment methods successfully meet different learners' needs.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory and staff are involved well in the process. Self-assessment judgements are broadly accurate but Zodiac does not give low success rates sufficient emphasis. Managers do not sufficiently focus quality improvement plans and plans arising from observations on improving practice. Quality between and within sector areas is inconsistent. Internal verification is rigorous. Zodiac acts well on users' feedback.

What does Zodiac Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Maintain and develop further the strategies to improve success rates including the close monitoring of learners' progress so that Zodiac develops further recent improvements and that learners in all sectors achieve their qualification quickly.
- Develop and maintain consistently high standards within and between sector areas by developing focused, clear and time-bound targets for quality improvement plans and lesson observation action plans.
- Continue to develop the observation of teaching and learning to ensure that staff are set clear and time-bound actions to improve training and coaching practices.
- Improve the quality of reviews of learners' progress to ensure that they have sufficient information on their progress at regular intervals and are clear about what they need to do next.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the flexibility of the assessors
- the interest assessors show in them
- the on-line learning
- the support they receive
- being able to work at their own pace
- the improvements they see in their work skills and confidence
- the opportunity to gain qualifications and progress in their careers.

What learners would like to see improved:

- to be able to gain information technology qualifications as well as the NVQ
- to receive test results and certificates more quickly
- to be visited by their assessor more quickly after being signed up
- to have fewer changes in their assessors
- to receive more formal teaching and training on their programmes.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the good relationships with Zodiac staff
- how they are kept informed of learners' progress
- the prompt support from Zodiac
- the learners' skill development
- how Zodiac match provision to meet their business needs
- how programmes complement in-house training.

What employers would like to see improved:

- better communication when assessors cancel appointments
- to receive certificates more quickly
- to have fewer changes in allocated assessors.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

11. Zodiac's capacity to improve is good. Since the last inspection, Zodiac has improved grades in equality of opportunity, and retail and commercial enterprise, and successfully introduced good provision in care. Good grades and strengths have been maintained. Areas for improvement have been resolved through a range of initiatives including the introduction of e-portfolios and e-learning, an improved focus on equality and diversity, and strengthened self-assessment.
12. The company has been restructured and managers are now well placed to support staff and drive improvements. The introduction of e-working has considerably improved the time learners take to achieve their qualification. Until 2008/09, overall and timely success rates were low and below national average. Ambitious targets to improve success have now been set. Recent improvements are apparent in many areas, with success rates now satisfactory overall. However, success rates and the quality of provision vary too much between and within sectors.
13. Zodiac acts well on feedback from learners, staff, and employers to improve provision. Self-assessment and quality improvement are satisfactory. Self-assessment judgements are broadly accurate but insufficient emphasis is given to the impact of low success rates. Staff use quality improvement plans but the plans fail to focus on specific actions to improve the provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

14. Overall, the outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes have been inconsistent and do not show any clear trends since the last inspection. The newly introduced care programmes have been successful and have both improved their success rates last year. Retail and wholesale, and warehousing and distribution have both improved and are now above the national average. Business administration has improved each year but remains just below the national average of 78%. However, business management, and customer services success rates have been low and are significantly below the national average.
15. On Train to Gain full level 3 programmes in health and social care and children's development and well-being, the success rates are good. On level 2 programmes, they are good in engineering and retail, and satisfactory in health and social care, and children's development and well-being.
16. Current learners are making very good progress and many are completing their programmes earlier than required. Good use is made of the new electronic portfolio system to monitor, track and promote speedy acquisition of evidence to support learners' progress towards their qualifications.

17. Good vocational skills are developed and acquired in all areas. Confidence and self-esteem are also improved and many learners gain promotion, additional responsibility and increased pay because of their learning.
18. All learners report that they feel safe both, at work and during their training. All employers undergo vetting to check health and safety, safeguarding, and equality and diversity policies and procedures. Zodiac make good use of online training packages to develop staff and learner knowledge and understanding.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

19. Assessment practices are good. Assessors have good and up-to-date occupational knowledge, which they use to the full benefit of the learners. Assessment planning is very thorough and good use is made of the newly introduced electronic system to record evidence and monitor learners' achievement. Assessors use a wide range of effective assessment methods, including professional discussion and the use of digital recording. They give good feedback to help learners to achieve their learning goals. Internal verification is well planned and is very effective in helping learners to make progress. The standard of work in learners' NVQ portfolios is good.
20. Training and coaching are satisfactory. Most training and coaching take place in the workplace and support for learners meets their individual needs well. Effective use is made of ICT and well produced e-learning resources are available. The observation of teaching and learning is mostly accurate, but action plans are not sufficiently focused on improving practice. In the best cases, targets set when planning learning are clear and used well to monitor learners' progress. However, progress reviews are insufficiently detailed to provide learners with enough information about what they have achieved and what they need to do next.
21. The provider's good range of courses and progression routes serves the needs and interest of learners well. Zodiac's many links with employers are well established and productive. The provision is planned well to meet business needs and many employers suggest topics that they want incorporated in the programme. The provision is flexible and responsive.
22. Partnership working is good. The provider works effectively with a number of business networks, statutory and voluntary agencies, local consortia, schools and colleges. Such co-operative working has clear benefits for learners and many partnerships specifically promote inclusion, encourage participation, and provide an alternative curriculum.
23. Support for learners is good. Information, advice and guidance meet the needs of learners well. Staff offer good support to individuals to achieve their qualifications and are highly flexible and accessible. Recent investment in an electronic information system has improved the sign up process and the tracking of learners to plan for timely visits and reviews. Learners complete a timely initial assessment to identify their additional learning needs. Zodiac offers

adequate support for literacy or numeracy needs, or makes use of appropriate specialist support from external sources where necessary, for example, for dyslexia. Zodiac staff are particularly knowledgeable about the sources of support from specialist agencies, for example, with housing, drug or alcohol misuse or other health matters.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

24. Leadership and management are good. Strategic direction is clear and well understood by all staff. The operational management of sector areas is good. Managers set ambitious targets to improve success rates, although it is not clear to all staff how those targets will be reached or what happens if they are not achieved. Good changes to the company structure last year allocated managers and internal verifiers to sector areas, introduced occupationally competent team leaders to support training advisors, and reduced training advisors' caseloads. Data are well used by staff at all levels to monitor the provision. The monitoring of learners' progress is good. Monthly one-to-one meetings for training advisors, team leaders and managers, closely examine learners' progress and any issues affecting progress. Staff are well supported and have a good range of training to help them do their jobs. All staff now receive equality and diversity and safeguarding training. Managers have received training to help them fulfil their roles and assume increased accountability.
25. Zodiac's approach to safeguarding learners and staff is good. All employer sites are vetted by Zodiac staff prior to commencing any training. Employers are offered help and support from Zodiac if they do not have the required policies and procedures to ensure a safe working environment. Zodiac's recruitment process complies with all aspects required to ensure the safety of learners. References are collected for all appointees and all staff are checked with the criminal records bureau (CRB); those working in regulated areas have an enhanced check. The Zodiac human resources department maintains good records of all CRB checks and updates. Staff training is also recorded and this includes additional and updating training.
26. Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Zodiac is working hard to narrow achievement gaps amongst different groups of learners, by analysing recruitment and achievement data in sector areas and then implementing and monitoring improvement plans. A range of initiatives to recruit underrepresented learners is having some success, for example, the numbers of male learners and training advisors in childcare and adult care have increased. A good marketing strategy promotes programmes to groups underrepresented in learning. Marketing materials and the website contain images of learners from minority ethnic groups and of learners not traditionally associated with occupational areas, such as a young man in a cleaning role. Learners understand well how to promote equality and diversity in their workplace. Staff now receive training and confidently take swift action to tackle and resolve bullying and harassment in learners' workplaces and to ensure that learners' rights and responsibilities are upheld.

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27. Zodiac acts well on feedback from learners, staff and employers to improve provision. For example, in response to feedback about poor communication in health and social care, management of the area was strengthened. A new online survey has had a high response rate and most responses are very positive. However, the questions lack sufficient detail to help drive improvement. Programme managers use feedback well to develop action plans.
 28. Self-assessment and quality improvement initiatives are satisfactory. The self-assessment process has improved and staff are now involved well in developing judgements and the quality improvement plan. The judgements in the self-assessment report are broadly accurate but pay insufficient attention to the impact of low success rates. Quality improvement plans are used by all teams, but they lack focus on specific actions to improve the provision. Internal verification is rigorous and comprehensive and improves assessment practice.
 29. Value for money is good. The company's considerable investment in e-learning and e-portfolios has significantly increased the speed at which learners achieve their qualifications, increased the flexibility of training and assessment, and enhanced learners' ability to communicate with their training advisor.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 2

Context

30. Zodiac training offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in health and social care. There are currently 95 apprentices of whom 90% are aged over 19; the 121 advanced apprentices are all adults. Most learners are female and almost all are white; 4.5% have a disability. A further six learners are on Train to Gain courses.

Key findings

- Apprenticeship success rates were low in 2008/9, but they have improved significantly during the current year and are now in line with the national average. Train to Gain success rates have been around the national average during the last two years and in the current year have improved. They are now good.
- Learners are developing good social and practical skills. They are developing good knowledge of care standards and show high levels of respect for service users. Learners enjoy their courses and appreciate the improvement in their skills.
- Learners are encouraged to adopt very high standards of health and safety, both with their service users and themselves. Most meetings with assessors include thorough and relevant consideration of a wide range of health and safety issues.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Learners and assessors work well together. Resources for learning are good. The newly introduced and well used electronic portfolio system is very popular with learners. It has contributed to improved success by learners; however, problems connecting the system to the internet in some locations reduce its effectiveness.
- Internal verification is rigorous and comprehensive. Internal verifiers are given sufficient time to also support and mentor assessors in their work. Good use is made of the electronic scheduling system, although this needs further development to capture all forms of assessment practice.
- Although the range of programmes is limited to levels 2 and 3, opportunities are well understood by learners and a good number have progressed from level 2 to level 3. Many have plans to progress into nursing.
- Employers and assessors work well together. Employers are encouraged to identify the optional units most appropriate to their candidates. Employers respect the integrity and high standards that assessors demonstrate in their training and assessment and the way the training supports and develops learners' workplace skills.

- Arrangements for initial advice and guidance are satisfactory. Learners receive advice and guidance from their assessors in the first instance. Specialist staff are available to support literacy and numeracy for those learners who need it. Staff can refer learners with more challenging needs to a counsellor.
- Leadership and management of this area are good. There has been a restructuring of the staff team since August 2009. Managers support assessors well and their caseloads have been reduced. This has contributed to the improved success rates.
- The support for assessors is good. Managers deal with problems in workplaces promptly and at a sufficiently high level. Induction of new staff is good. Review processes identify and support opportunities for staff development. Morale in the team is high.

What does Zodiac Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners continue to have regular well-planned visits from assessors so that they maintain the recent improvements in success rates.
- Improve the link between the self-assessment report and the quality improvement plan to ensure that all the weaknesses in the self-assessment report are included in the quality improvement plan. Make the improvement targets in the quality improvement plan more specific and measurable.
- Continue to develop the electronic portfolio system so that all learners and staff, regardless of their location, can make full use of its potential.

Children's development and well-being

Grade 2

Context

31. Zodiac currently has 126 learners working towards childcare courses of which 19 are apprentices, 104 are advanced apprentices and three are on Train to Gain programmes. Zodiac links with a range of employers from different childcare settings. Teaching, learning and assessment are offered in one-to-one coaching sessions within the workplace. Assessment is holistic and carried out in the workplace by a team of training advisors.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates have consistently improved. Overall success rates for apprentices are at 70% and success rates within the agreed time are at 51%. Overall success rates for the small number of Train to Gain learners are at 84% and 68% within the agreed timescales. Current learners are progressing well and they are on target to achieve.
- Learners make good progress in acquiring and developing a good range of vocational and social skills such as confidence, motivation, communication, independence, concentration, listening and writing skills. Employers confirm that learners are able to work to a good professional standard. Learners take responsibility for a wide variety of tasks in the workplace. The standard of learners' work in their portfolios is good.
- Learners feel safe. They know whom to contact if they have any concerns. Procedures for the safeguarding of learners and its coverage within the curriculum are good. All staff have undergone training in safeguarding and been CRB checked. Training advisors do not always thoroughly check safeguarding at progress reviews.
- Assessment practice is good. Advisors use technology well to support learning and assessment. Direct observations are holistic, recorded in detail and cross-referenced well to several NVQ units. Learners receive good feedback that is positive and constructive. Verifiers regularly sample assessment activity and they discuss activity reports with the assessor and at standardisation meetings.
- Progress reviews are ineffective. There are few clear targets to measure learners' progress and achievement. There is insufficient detail recorded on the review form and comments are vague and descriptive rather than evaluative. Advisors do not explore in sufficient detail safeguarding and equality and diversity.
- Programmes meet the needs and interests of learners well. Zodiac Training offers training in a range of childcare programmes and levels. Additional short courses are available. Zodiac recruits learners and decides the most appropriate level for them during their induction. Training advisors go out to workplaces to provide coaching sessions and assessments.

- Zodiac Training has initiated effective partnerships with a range of employers in the childcare sector to determine their needs and to raise their interest in learning, such as local nurseries and local councils and is now an approved training provider for Newcastle Council.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Training advisors have a range of current occupational experience and skills and provide sensitive support to learners to overcome social and personal barriers to learning. Training advisors provide some useful information about opportunities for future development for learners who wish to progress to higher levels of education and in their careers.
- Curriculum management is good. Managers promote a culture of continuous improvement and high standards have been set. Communication between staff, managers and employers is good. Managers provide staff with regular support on a monthly basis and set them challenging targets. Staff have a productive working relationship with their manager which is motivational and has raised the standard of provision.
- The promotion of equality and diversity and procedures for safeguarding and its coverage within the curriculum are good. Policies and procedures are up-to-date and appropriate to the needs of the organisation. Staff have sufficient understanding of equality and diversity and safeguarding issues and have received training. However, advisors do not always adequately explore equality and diversity and safeguarding at progress reviews.
- Quality assurance procedures have been effective in improving the practice of training advisors. Any identified issues are action planned and reviewed with the staff during their monthly progress meeting. There have been improvements in the staff team, workloads, programmes provided, and systems. Resources are good.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and Zodiac recognises that self-assessment and the inspection process are important tools for developing learning. However, the self-assessment report did not capture key areas for development in sufficient detail.

What does Zodiac Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve success rates within agreed timescales through more specific target setting and better use of progress reviews.
- Improve the quality of the review process to ensure that learners' targets are measurable and achievable and that the measurement of progress is appropriate.
- Continue to develop further partnerships with key stakeholders in the childcare sector to raise their interest in learning and help to raise the quality of childcare in the community.
- Continue to develop the self-assessment process to ensure that it makes clear evaluative judgments on the quality of provision.

Retail and commercial enterprises

Grade 2

Context

32. Zodiac provides training and qualifications in retail, warehousing and storage, cleaning support and services, hospitality and catering, and delivery and carry goods, through apprenticeships and Train to Gain. During the year 2009/10, 63% of learners were enrolled on Train to Gain programmes. The majority of learners are working towards qualifications in cleaning and support services. Currently there are 86 learners, of whom 79% are apprentices at levels 2 and 3. Programmes in hospitality and catering, delivery and carry goods, and cleaning support services are also subcontracted to other training providers. All learners are employed. Training and assessment take place in the workplace.

Key findings

- Train to Gain success rates within the agreed timescales are good, significantly above the national average. Hospitality and catering programmes achieved 100% success within agreed timescales and the service enterprise rate is 20% above the national average. However, the success rates within agreed timescales for retail and wholesale programmes remain low.
- Overall the success rates for apprentices are satisfactory and slightly above the national average. Learners on warehousing and on hospitality and catering programmes achieved success rates slightly above the national average. However, retail and wholesale programmes achieved low success rates that had declined during the previous two years.
- Learners make good progress. They have a greater awareness of their job role, are able to work independently and to be involved in decision-making. Employers identify that the training improves learners' understanding of their job and results in a better work ethic. Learners have a greater understanding of what is required of them and are able to assume more responsibility.
- Learners work in safe environments that Zodiac monitors well. Zodiac makes good reference to health and safety during induction and continuously reinforces this during training. Particular attention is paid to issues of lone working especially during early mornings and nights. For those learners within the cleaning sector there is added emphasis on the safe use and storage of cleaning materials.
- Zodiac makes good use of individual learning plans that clearly record the programme and the required NVQ units. Learners have a good understanding of their plans and use them well. Learners understand the planned completion dates for individual NVQ units. However, short-term targets identified on progress reviews lack sufficient detail.
- Assessment practice is good. Learners are involved in the planning of assessment that is undertaken using a good range of assessment techniques. Good use is made of naturally occurring evidence and learners are encouraged to identify assessment opportunities. Assessors use good and effective

questioning to assess and validate learners' understanding. Learners receive clear comments on their performance.

- The range of programmes currently provided by Zodiac satisfactorily meets the immediate needs of the learners and their employers. It allows them to improve their knowledge and skills at work in ways that are relevant to potential work goals. Zodiac assessors are flexible and schedule visits to meet the needs of both learners and employers. Progression opportunities for some learners are restricted.
- Zodiac makes effective use of technology to support learning. Assessors have good access to a range of information and systems that record learners' progress. Learners make good use of these systems to communicate with assessors and review their progress. Managers plan and manage internal verification through these systems effectively.
- Zodiac provides learners with good advice and guidance about their learning programmes. Both learners and employers are engaged in choosing the correct programme and units to meet their needs. Effective communication between the assessor and employer improves learners' support. Zodiac makes learners aware of a range of external agencies to support them and provides additional support, when required, to improve basic skills.
- Leadership and management are good. The revised management structure is effective and provides greater clarity of roles and responsibilities. The monitoring of learners' progress through monthly review meetings with the manager has improved. Internal verification is good and is effective in improving assessor performance and skills. Targets are clear and staff fully understand and monitor them.
- Equality and diversity are good and understood well by learners. Coverage of equality and diversity during learners' induction is good. Assessors reinforce this during training. Learners also gain understanding from their workplaces and through promotion of equality and diversity by employers. Zodiac reviews the range of learners on programmes and works to improve representation by underrepresented groups.
- The self-assessment process is good. The development of the report is inclusive of all staff and identifies most aspects of the provision. It clearly illustrates the positive and negative success rates between the various sectors within this area of learning. The quality improvement plan identifies the actions needed to improve the provision.

What does Zodiac Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Continue the close monitoring of learners' progress to maintain the improvement in completion within agreed timescales. Improve the monitoring of apprentices' progress against identified target dates and take appropriate actions to tackle slow progress and low achievement in some areas of learning.
- Review the quality of short-term target setting during progress reviews to ensure that they are clear, measurable and achievable and that learners fully understand how these contribute to their progress.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

33. Zodiac Training Ltd provides training and qualifications in business administration, management and customer services to learners on apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. There are currently 517 apprentices and seven on Train to Gain. Eight learners have declared disabilities. All learners are employed and all assessment and training are undertaken in the workplace.

Key findings

- Overall, outcomes for learners are satisfactory. However, success rates are inadequate in two areas. On apprenticeship programmes in business management and customer services, overall success rates and success within agreed timescales for the years 2007/08 and 2008/09 are significantly below national averages, and are inadequate. Success rates for apprentices in business administration are satisfactory for the years 2007/2008 and 2008/2009.
- Current learners however, make good progress. They enjoy training and develop confidence and self-esteem. The work they produce is of a good standard. Of the learners approaching the end of the agreed programme time, 88% of business administration apprentices, 89% of customer service and 88% of management apprentices are on track for successful and early completion.
- Learners improve their economic well-being. Some gain promotion within their workplace and move on to other roles and responsibilities. The qualification they gain leads to increased confidence when dealing with customers and colleagues. Some learners progress from level 2 to level 3 training programmes.
- Learners feel safe in the workplace and are aware of their responsibilities towards health and safety. Training staff emphasise the importance of health and safety at induction and carry out further checks during visits to the workplace. However, vetting staff do not always fully address all issues at all high-risk environments.
- Assessment practice is good. Learners are involved in the planning of assessment. Assessors make good use of evidence drawn from the learner's job role. They effectively use technology to record and comment on evidence gathered. Assessors provide both written and verbal feedback on their assessment decisions.
- The reviews of learners' progress lack rigour. Training advisors do not sufficiently check and record learners' progress against the agreed targets.
- The range of provision offered meets the needs and interests of learners and their employers effectively. Learners are more able to achieve work-related targets and they work better in teams. However, there is insufficient involvement of employers in the training process.
- Zodiac staff are involved in a wide range of partnership activities. They have contributed to a local consortium on the development of diplomas and have

participated in a pilot programme for functional skills. They also engage with employers through networks, such as retail employers to develop skills required by this sector.

- Support for learners is good. During their time on programme, learners have access to appropriate advice and guidance from qualified Zodiac staff. Training advisors make frequent visits to learners and they have developed positive links with managers. Staff have also supported learners with information and guidance in respect of financial and health matters.
- The current leadership and management are good. Managers have taken effective action to evaluate the programmes and identify areas for improvement such as staff training and internal verification. Staff are clear about their roles and have a good understanding of the company's values. They feel well supported and make effective use of resources in their work with learners.
- Zodiac's focus on safeguarding is good. A safeguarding champion who is also a qualified counsellor is a member of the team. Advisors discuss 'hot' safeguarding topics with learners, to broaden their understanding of this area of risk.
- Equality of opportunity is well promoted and embedded in the curriculum. Advisors explore learners' awareness of a wide range of equality and diversity issues at frequent review meetings. Opportunities are identified within programme units to explore and understand equality and diversity in the context of the learner's work role. Good quality resources are also available.
- Staff involvement and contribution to the self-assessment process are satisfactory. The report accurately identifies a number of the positive aspects of the provision but is too generous in the grade awarded to learners' achievement.

What does Zodiac Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Continue to focus on outcomes and success rates within agreed timescales through close monitoring of the intervention strategies, including the use of technology introduced in recent months.
- Involve employers more fully in training, through improved information about training requirements, and opportunities to contribute to assessment and the setting of targets.
- Improve the rigour of learners' reviews to ensure that they are fully effective in providing a clear and accurate record of progress to date. Ensure that clear and achievable targets are set for the next visit.

Information about the inspection

34. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's business improvement director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local skills funding agency (SFA) or other funding bodies, 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.
35. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Zodiac Training Ltd

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	1072	1072
Part-time learners	0	0
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?	3	
How well do learners progress?	2	
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?*	n/a	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	n/a	
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?	2	
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	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
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?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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