

# Outsource Vocational Learning Limited (formerly Troy Solutions Limited)

Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 58560

Name of lead inspector: Andy Harris HMI

Last day of inspection: 2 July 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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## Information about the provider

1. The original company that has now become Outsource Vocational Learning (OVL) Limited was Troy Solutions Limited. Troy was founded in 1999 to provide customer satisfaction monitoring services to manufacturing and service organisations. The company introduced training and development programmes in 2007 and started to deliver government funded projects in 2008.
2. Outsource Vocational Learning aims to deal with larger employers rather than small businesses. At the time of the inspection it had just over 400 learners with around 50 in the north west, 220 in the London region and 130 elsewhere. It delivers, under sub-contracted arrangements, apprenticeship programmes for a London borough. The main programmes delivered by OVL are business administration, customer service and management and this provision was directly inspected. Other programmes offered include a vehicle body and paint operations contract with a national company; this 400 learner, near completed programme, was sub-contracted to Outsource Training and Development working with the Thatcham Automotive Academy. A 100 learner programme for a major retailer has just been completed. Aspects of those two programmes, and other smaller areas of learning, such as assessor training, were considered in reaching overall judgements. As well as senior staff and administrators, OVL has 13 assessors, two of whom have management responsibilities.
3. Most of OVL's delivery staff work from home locations. Just before the inspection the employer responsive elements of Troy were purchased by Outsource Training and Development who have just changed the company's name. Troy's small office in Oxford has closed and will re-open in Swindon, with a London training facility also being relocated at the time of the inspection. The vast majority of OVL's work is government funded. Neither Troy or Outsource Training and Development has been previously inspected.
4. OVL provides training on behalf of:
  - The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of OVL:
  - Thatcham Automotive Academy
  - Outsource Training and Development.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	586 learners
Apprenticeships	204 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 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	
Business, administration and law	3

## Overall effectiveness

6. Troy (now OVL) has been providing government funded training programmes for just over two years. In that time it has very effectively set up many very helpful programmes with employers. The programmes are delivered by experienced and supportive staff, working closely with employers. This work clearly develops learners' skills, improving their job related performance. The achievement of the appropriate qualification is satisfactory, although initially learners were not completing their programme on time. That problem has been recognised and now learners complete in a generally satisfactory timescale.
7. The regular visits to the workplace and the off-site training provided by OVL are effective and are appreciated by learners. However, support for those needing to improve their key skills ranges from good to unsatisfactory. The use of electronic portfolios is helping many learners in their course, although not all learners are comfortable with the concept yet. A new internet-based virtual learning environment is being developed, but is not being used comprehensively. There are good routine links with most employers and with other agencies.
8. The management of the day-to day-operations at OVL has improved, and is now good. There is a proper focus on the needs of the learner and the performance of staff. The overall management of the company is also good,

with recent major changes being sensitively and effectively handled. Communication within, and outside, the company is good. A lot of potentially useful information is kept, but this is not yet used effectively as it could be to plan improvements. However, OVL has shown that it has capacity to improve things well, shown by changes in the timely achievement of qualifications, the continuing close work with employers, and a self-assessment process that involves all the staff.

## Main findings

- Timely success rates on Train to Gain programmes were low, but have improved recently to satisfactory levels. The number of apprentices that complete their framework successfully has also improved to satisfactory levels. Learners, aided by their training programme, develop their personal and employment skills effectively, and progress well in their employment.
- Vocational training, coaching and learning in business administration are good, with lively and interesting training sessions. One-to-one coaching and assessment are mainly good, although occasionally activities are too rushed. Learning resources are generally good and improving, although a new virtual learning environment is not yet being effectively used by relevant learners.
- Support for business administration learners to improve their key skills varies from good to unsatisfactory. Initial assessment is satisfactory, but results are not used effectively to plan learning. A few assessors actively coach learners, but others simply direct them to websites to practise, and several struggle. Most assessors have insufficient specialist qualifications to teach key skills.
- Target setting, to guide learners through their business administration course and aid assessment, is of a variable standard. The best targets are specific and help the learner, the worst are too vague. The use of electronic portfolios is improving target setting, progress and communication, although there has been insufficient evaluation of whether this system is appropriate for all learners.
- Outsource Vocational Learning meets the needs of learners and employers in an outstanding way. Extremely good partnership working, with detailed initial planning, leads to training programmes that very closely match employers' business needs. Programmes build well on learners' previous experience. In many cases OVL aids recruitment and induction and works with employers to provide coherent routes for progression. Supportive assessors, with a flexible approach to their task, help improve learners' skills and efficiency.
- Business planning is clear and effective. Major changes at OVL are being very well handled. Communication is good. Management of the day-to-day operations has improved recently and is now effective, with a proper focus on learners and their progress.
- Quality assurance arrangements are effective and quality improvement plans are managed well. Well-established self-assessment processes involve all staff and use a wealth of employer and learner information. However, insufficient

attention was, for a while, given to timely completion of programmes; this now has a better focus.

- Management information systems and data are not currently used properly. Data are comprehensively maintained, and are constructively used for the staff's key performance indicators. However, there is no routine system of evaluative reports to drive quality improvement or strategic development. The entry of data on external systems is not always prompt, leading to data anomalies.
- Outsource Vocational Learning's arrangements for the safeguarding of learners are good. Policies and procedures are clear and are understood by staff. Necessary checks are rigorously carried out and recorded. OVL completes robust risk assessments of all work locations and learners feel safe. Action, where necessary, is taken promptly. Many measures are still relatively recent, although they are having an impact.
- Learners are well supported in environments free of harassment and discrimination. Equality and diversity matters are adequately promoted to learners as part of their programmes. Assessors, now acting as equality and diversity 'champions', further promote awareness to learners and partners.

### What does OVL need to do to improve further?

- In order to maintain the better timely success rates build on the improved systems for closely monitoring learners' progress, and ensure that learners making slow progress are fully supported by OVL and employers.
- Develop staff expertise in delivering communication and application of number key skills to improve the consistency and quality of support for all learners. Improve the range of learning resources for key skills.
- Make better use of target setting and opportunities for assessment to help learners to make faster progress.
- Improve promotion of the virtual learning environment to raise learners' awareness of its availability and benefits, and monitor its use to ensure any necessary changes are made promptly.
- Develop further management information systems in order to fully meet companies' needs. Produce evaluative reports to drive quality improvement. Incorporate routine collection, simple analysis and use of comparative data to identify trends and improve the performance of different groups of learners when differences are identified.
- Ensure that data on learners' performance are promptly and accurately entered into the relevant data agency systems. Use the more accurate results generated to help with strategic planning, improvement target setting and routine review.
- Complete an evaluation of the use and impact of electronic portfolios to ensure equality of opportunity of their use for all learners and to measure their effectiveness in improving learners' success.

## Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

### What learners like:

- the good on-the-job training and interesting and high quality workshops
- the effective, regular and supportive visits by assessors
- initially developing skills that support the job, but then being given the chance to extend knowledge and skills
- the electronic portfolio, leading to simplifying recording of work, making the cross-referencing to qualification standards easier and improving communication
- the time spent on the initial explanations of what the programme involved.

### What learners would like to see improved:

- the support for key skills
- on a minority of visits to learners by assessors, additional time for coaching
- clearer explanations of how the virtual learning environment can be used.

## Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

### What employers like:

- the flexibility offered by Troy – and now OVL
- the very strong support given to learners to enable them to complete their training and improve their performance at work
- the frequent, prompt visits and meticulous work of the assessors
- the fact that Troy and now OVL understands business needs well.

### What employers would like to see improved:

- how well new managers are informed of programme arrangements
- systems to help employers monitor learners' work as paper portfolios disappear
- Troy's/OVL's capacity to take on more learners.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

9. Troy, and now OVL, has demonstrated a sound record of working well with employers. They have established well-regarded training programmes that clearly improve learners' individual skills and improve efficiency. Qualification success rates for these programmes have ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. However, it took Troy around a year to identify that timely success rates were poor. Action to remedy this on the large sub-contracted programme for vehicle operations was effective and rates are now good. Subsequent work to improve the business administration rates was slower to have an impact. However, after significant management changes at OVL, this area has also improved significantly to a satisfactory level.
10. The good operational management in OVL is now ensuring that the performance of staff and learners is closely and routinely monitored, with effective intervention where necessary. Strategic management is improving and clear development plans are having a positive impact on the provision. A range of quality assurance measures, together with inclusive self-assessment, lead to effective quality improvement actions. Target setting in the business and successful use of performance indicators and bonuses are driving up standards. Experienced staff have always maintained professional standards and are now responding well to the need to improve aspects such as timely completions.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

11. The vehicle operations Train to Gain programme had an inadequate 27% timely success rate in 2008/09, although the overall success rate was satisfactory. Three quarters of the way through the current year timely rates have improved significantly, to around 91%, with the overall rate a very good 94%. The recently completed retail programme had an outstanding overall success rate of just under 100%, with a good timely rate of 76%. In a London-wide assessor training project outcomes were satisfactory.
12. In the business administration area learners are gaining good personal and employability skills. They quickly become confident and assertive in their relationships with managers, give better customer service, and better manage their time. Management learners are also developing good presentational skills. Learners make good progress within employment, taking on extra responsibilities or gaining promotion. Many progress on to higher level qualifications. The standard of work presented for the National Vocational Qualification is good. Learners generally enjoy their work and training and feel safe.
13. Outcomes overall are satisfactory in the business administration area. Timely success rates for Train to Gain were low in 2008/09 at 40%, but are now satisfactory at 68%. Overall success rates for apprentices have improved from

62% in 2008/09 to a satisfactory 76% during the first 10 months of 2009/10. Success rates are very good on apprenticeship programmes delivered for Richmond Borough Council. Timely achievement is still unsatisfactory for apprentices, although it is now improving. There is no significant variation in outcomes for differing groups of learners at present.

## The quality of provision

Grade 3

14. Vocational training, coaching and learning in business administration are good. Workshops for technical certificates are lively and interesting. Learners enjoy discussing each others' business practices and take good ideas back to their own workplaces. One-to-one coaching is mainly good, although a very small minority of sessions are too rushed. Learning resources are good, but the virtual learning environment is not yet used routinely by appropriate learners. Many learners are now using electronic portfolios which speed up their rate of progress and improve communication with assessors. Good use is made of a variety of evidence, including photographs and professional discussions. A few learners map evidence against criteria themselves, and have greater understanding of the evidence. Where employers are closely involved in assessment planning and progress reviews learners make good progress.
15. In business administration the support for key skills varies from good to unsatisfactory. Although initial assessment has been improved, the results are not always used effectively to plan individual learning. A few assessors give good key skills coaching but others are less confident and often just direct learners to websites to practise. There are few group workshops for key skills. Although pass rates are satisfactory, a small minority of learners struggle to gain the necessary skills.
16. The quality of target setting for learners is also variable. Learning plans do not always specify target dates for individual parts of the programme; where they are given they are not always updated when appropriate.
17. Across all areas OVL meets the needs of learners and employers in an outstanding way. After detailed and constructive initial negotiations, programmes are set up to meet specific employer requirements. Qualifications are very clearly linked to employment practices. Many of the programmes are neatly interwoven with employers' training. In one hotel chain OVL assists with recruitment, initial training, skills enhancement and management development. In another company they work very closely with training staff to help with all aspects of delivering apprenticeships in the work place. Assessors visit at times to suit the needs of learners and their employers. There is good progression and acquisition of additional qualifications.
18. Partnership working is good. The company works collaboratively with other training providers, sharing good practice and facilities, and providing learners with more choice in the selection of programmes. Assessors have good

relationships with employers, attending award ceremonies and open days and working closely with employers to resolve any issues in the workplace.

19. Assessors give satisfactory support to learners when they are moving jobs or have personal problems, referring them to appropriate agencies when necessary. Extra time is given to learners with personal or social problems. Induction has improved and now satisfactorily prepares learners for their programme.

## Leadership and management

Grade 2

20. Clear business planning is underpinning effective management during a period of considerable company change. Transition strategies have been properly planned. Staff and services are well managed with openness and sensitivity. Communication is good, both within and beyond the company. A well-established framework for company meetings gives ample opportunity for assessors and managers to discuss training matters and exchange ideas. Line managers monitor staff performance through frequent individual review meetings; the rigour of these meetings has improved this year and now better uses information to review learner progress. Employers are well supported and in most cases are provided with full information on training matters and learners' progress.
21. Quality assurance arrangements are effective, and well-monitored quality improvement plans lead to appropriate change. A strategic development plan clearly identifies emerging needs and company direction. A well-used system of observing staff activity places a good emphasis on evaluating learning, although many recorded actions for improvement are too general to guide staff clearly.
22. Management information systems are not fully effective. Data are maintained in great detail but are not used routinely to produce evaluative reports and drive quality improvement. This is due to be changed. At times assessors do not use data routinely or confidently to provide a comparative evaluation of the performance of their learners. Recording of learners' achievement on external databases has been slow, leading to potentially inaccurate figures.
23. Outsource Vocational Learning has clear, well-documented and helpful strategies and procedures for safeguarding learners that staff implement effectively. A senior manager has completed designated officer training and briefs staff on relevant issues. Nearly all staff have completed on-line safeguarding training and all have a good understanding of their responsibilities. Proper checks on staff are made and carefully recorded. Some of this activity is recent, although it is already having an impact on learners. OVL completes robust risk assessments of all work locations. Safeguarding arrangements for learners on residential block release at Thatcham Automotive Centre are well planned and enacted.

24. Learners are well supported in environments free of harassment and discrimination. OVL, its subcontractors and employers have appropriate and current policies and procedures in place. Generally, learners have adequate awareness and understanding of equality and diversity matters which they use effectively when dealing with customers or managing staff. This understanding is reinforced satisfactorily during induction and as part of workshops and review sessions. Equality and diversity matters are discussed routinely at assessors' meetings. Two assessors now act as equality and diversity 'champions'. They link effectively with local voluntary organisations, and provide support, information and guidance to learners, colleagues and employers. Data for equality and diversity monitoring are collected routinely, but are not used routinely and effectively to guide action planning. The way learners use electronic portfolios has not been reviewed from an equality perspective. The work with employers to develop learners' skills, regardless of their background, is satisfactorily helping close any achievement gaps between them and fully-trained employees.
25. The monitoring of sub-contracting arrangements is done well, with good communications between OVL and other providers. OVL managers have maintained useful networking arrangements which have led to new partnerships and widening of the training provision.
26. Arrangements for self-assessment are well established and involve staff particularly well. Views of learners and partners are properly reviewed, using information from questionnaires and externally managed surveys. The report is largely accurate in its judgements and identification of areas for improvements, although insufficient emphasis was given to low timely success rates in an earlier period.
27. Outsource Vocational Learning makes good use of resources to secure value for money. Appropriately experienced staff are used effectively. Accommodation is used effectively. OVL is making good investment in e-technology to support learning and improve learners' outcomes. Managing resources in a sustainable way is not yet a significant aspect of OVL's work.

## Information about the inspection

28. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors, assisted by the director of OVL, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of Troy's most recent self-assessment report and development plan, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since Troy started government funded training.
29. 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 that OVL offers.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## Outsource Vocational Learning Limited (formerly Troy 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	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners		
Part-time learners	420	420
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	4	
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?	3	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*		
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*		
Quality of provision	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?	1	
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?	3	
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?*		
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?	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?	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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