

GK Training Services Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58551

Name of lead inspector: Jean Holden-Smith HMI

Last day of inspection: 29 July 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. GK Training Services Ltd (GKTS) is a privately owned limited company that has provided government funded training since 2007. From August 2007 to July 2008, GKTS delivered customer service and retail National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for Train to Gain clients through a sub-contract with Wigan and Leigh College but since 2008/09 it has held its own Train to Gain contract. In August 2008, GKTS secured an Entry to Employment (E2E) contract and a sub-contract with ProCo NW Ltd to deliver apprenticeships. From 2009/10, GKTS has contracted directly with Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council for the delivery of customer service and retail apprenticeships for 16-18-year-old learners. GKTS has not previously been inspected.
2. GKTS employs seven staff. The Managing Director has overall responsibility for the strategic direction of the company, quality improvement and safeguarding and is supported by an operations director who manages the training centre. The proportion of GKTS's income represented by government-funded training is 96%. GKTS generates the remainder of its income through private consultancy services.
3. GKTS operates from a base in Leigh in the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan. The index of deprivation ranks Wigan as 67 out of 354 local authorities in England. In May 2010, 7.5% of young people in the Leigh area were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Wigan has the fourth highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the country.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: Foundation learning, including E2E	19 learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	48 learners 14 apprentices

Summary report

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

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

Overall effectiveness

4. GKTS's overall effectiveness is good. Success rates are good. Most learners complete their programme well within the planned period of study. Learners develop good social and work skills and increase their self-confidence. Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan learning sessions to make them enjoyable to learners. However, they make insufficient use of digital technology to enhance assessment. Learners' progress reviews are generally good but targets set for E2E learners are sometimes too general. The company meets learners' needs well. Guidance and support arrangements are good.
5. Learners say they feel safe at GKTS and arrangements to safeguard learners are good. Learners demonstrate a good knowledge of safeguarding and can apply this to all aspects of their life. GKTS's promotion of equality and diversity is good. The company's work with young learners who have significant barriers to employment, has contributed to a significant reduction in the number of NEET young people in the area.
6. Directors provide good leadership and a supportive culture for staff and learners. GKTS uses employer and learners' views very effectively to improve

the provision. The company applies quality assurance procedures systematically, clearly defining improvement actions that benefit all learners' programmes.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. The proportion of learners who complete within the planned period of study is particularly good, especially on Train to Gain programmes.
- Learners make good progress in acquiring and developing a wide range of workplace and social skills. Many learners start their programmes with low levels of prior attainment and significant barriers to learning. Their social skills develop strongly and their self-confidence increases.
- Learners are highly motivated and develop good work ethics. They are more confident when dealing with the wider community. The quality of work in all learners' portfolios is good.
- Learners feel safe and value GKTS's measures to maintain a safe and secure environment. They demonstrate a good knowledge of safeguarding and apply this in their workplace very effectively.
- Training, coaching and assessment are good. Assessment is well organised and encourages learners to complete their programmes on time. Staff use work placements very effectively to develop E2E learners' skills and increase their employability. However, targets set during E2E progress reviews are insufficiently detailed; it is sometimes difficult to measure learners' progress.
- The provision meets the needs and interests of the users very well. The range, content and context of programmes are particularly effective in enabling learners to achieve their potential. GKTS works productively with employers to provide learning and training opportunities.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Tutors have a good range of current occupational experience and skills; they provide sensitive support to learners to help them overcome social and personal barriers to learning. Tutors and workplace assessors are readily accessible and meet learners' needs promptly.
- Managers provide a strong supportive environment; they raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation particularly effectively.
- GKTS protects its learners very well. The provider prioritises safeguarding. GKTS makes good use of external sources to develop its safeguarding strategy and provide staff training.
- GKTS promotes equality and diversity well. Staff use current issues creatively to engage learners' interest and improve their understanding.
- GKTS engages particularly effectively with users. It considers the views of learners and other stakeholders well in self-assessment and quality improvement planning.
- GKTS manages its resources very well ensuring learners make very good progress and achieve their learning goals.

What does GK Training Services Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Maintain good success rates by continuing to monitor learners' progress closely.
- Increase the use of digital technology to improve the quality of assessments.
- Improve the quality of target setting for E2E learners by identifying and recording targets that are specific and measurable.
- Increase the opportunities for staff to develop their teaching skills.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the help they have from their tutors and assessors
- the approachability of the staff
- the environment and facilities at the training centre particularly the lounge area
- the good placements which often lead to jobs
- the variety of placements
- the range of activities they take part in when they are at the centre
- the small group size.

What learners would like to see improved:

- none identified.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the quick response of GKTS staff to any issues raised
- the professionalism and approachability of GKTS staff
- the positive working relationship with GKTS
- the regular contact with GKTS
- the central location of the training centre.

What employers would like to see improved:

- none identified.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. GKTS's capacity to improve is good. GKTS has continued, since taking over direct contract status, to provide training and sustainable employment for learners who have little prior achievement and diverse social needs. Success rates are good and rising; current apprentices are doing well. The proportion of learners who complete within the planned period of study is particularly good, especially for Train to Gain learners. Internal verification is thorough and detailed.
8. GKTS have a rigorous and well established self-assessment process. All staff contribute to the self-assessment report. The views of learners and other stakeholders are taken into account when reaching judgements. All staff meet regularly to review and up-date the company's quality improvement plan. The plan allocates clear responsibility for actions. The grades proposed for the subject areas in the self-assessment report, and the strengths and areas for improvement that it identifies, are broadly accurate. Directors monitor the progress of learners very carefully to ensure targets are achieved.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

9. In 2008/9, the proportion of E2E learners who progressed into further education, training or employment was good at 68%. This is considerably higher than the national rate. This is the first year that GKTS has held a direct contract for apprentices, but current achievement is good. The proportion of Train to Gain learners who complete within the planned period of study is good at 88%. This is considerably higher than the national rate.
10. Across all programmes, learners make good progress in developing social and personal skills. They are well motivated and talk positively about their learning. Apprentices increase their ability to deal with customers and colleagues in their workplaces and are highly motivated to complete their programme on time. E2E learners develop their self-confidence and acquire a range of skills that enable them to impress their employers and sustain their employment once their placement has ended. Many E2E learners achieve key skills qualifications.
11. Learners demonstrate safe working practices and an awareness of health and safety good practice. They are clearly aware of their rights and responsibilities at work and in the training centre.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

12. The quality of provision is good. Teaching, training and coaching are good. Learners enjoy their learning and sessions meet their needs. Assessment is well organised with good recording of evidence. Very good discussions with learners follow observed assessments. During training sessions, E2E learners work

creatively to research and make posters that relate to their learning, illustrating, for example, discussions about safeguarding, healthy living and equality and diversity. They also apply their communication skills effectively to produce a newsletter, which GKTS distributes to partners.

13. Assessors visit learners more frequently than required by the contract. Reviews, involving employers are carried out regularly. Assessment is generally well planned, however, targets set during E2E reviews are sometimes insufficiently detailed. It can be difficult to measure all the progress a learner makes.
14. The provision meets the needs and interests of the users very well. The range, content and context of programmes are good. There are many examples of learners progressing from lower level to higher level provision. For example, one learner who started on a programme funded by the European Social Fund, progressed onto E2E and is now making good progress as an advanced apprentice.
15. GKTS works productively with employers to provide learning and training opportunities. Consultation with employers when setting up the training provision is good. Employers demonstrate a high level of commitment to supporting the development and training of learners; they contribute well to learners' progress reviews. Assessors are careful to attend workplaces when it is convenient for both the learner and the employer so as not to disrupt business operations.
16. Care, guidance and support are good. Arrangements for the provision of information, advice and guidance are also good. GKTS works closely with Connexions. Initial assessment is thorough and learners receive appropriate additional support. The learners build good relationships with staff. Tutors have good, current occupational experience and skills; they provide sensitive support to learners, helping them to overcome social and personal barriers to learning. Tutors and workplace assessors are readily accessible and respond to learners' needs even during the evening. Resources for supporting and encouraging learners are good. The town centre training centre has a kitchen and dedicated 'learners' lounge' area with a television which learners use when socialising outside of formal sessions.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

17. Leadership and management are good. Directors promote high standards and the company provides a supportive culture for learners, many of whom have few prior achievements. Staff at all levels work hard to raise standards and improve outcomes for learners. Managers know their provision well and understand how to make improvements. GKTS's strategic direction reflects national and local priorities. The provision is relevant to learners, employers and local communities. Senior managers contribute to many local and regional networks, and work with a national awarding body. The Managing Director promotes employability training for young people in the local community. GKTS works well with a good range of employers to achieve sustainable employment

- opportunities for young people. Employers speak highly of the provider's involvement with the learners. They value the support received from the staff at GKTS.
18. GKTS safeguards and protects learners well. Safeguarding is prioritised. They have a good understanding of safeguarding and apply their theoretical knowledge in the workplace. A central register records Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. Checks are made to ensure these are renewed when necessary. All staff wear identification cards which record their CRB status. All staff have had safeguarding training. The two designated safeguarding officers have had more extensive training. All staff understand their role in implementing the safeguarding policy and make good use of workplace visits to ensure learners' safety. They take immediate action to respond to learners' welfare concerns. GKTS regularly revises its safeguarding policy in response to government changes. It makes good use of external sources to develop its safeguarding strategy and provide staff training. GKTS has promoted safeguarding in the community and has helped with awareness raising sessions for school children. Staff reinforce learners' understanding of safeguarding at the training centre through the use of posters and literature.
 19. Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity is good. GKTS is very successful in keeping up-to-date with new equality legislation. Promotion of equal opportunities through the company's marketing and publicity materials is good. GKTS's website promotes diversity effectively to potential learners and employers. GKTS has been proactive in trying to increase the number of learners from ethnic minority groups. The Managing Director has visited local mosques to talk about the provision and literature is now provided in different languages. GKTS staff have participated in community initiatives to widen participation. They have contributed to programmes for young mothers, NEET learners and young offenders. Staff have comprehensive training in equality and diversity. GKTS's analysis of trends in achievement indicates no gaps in achievement between different groups of learners. GKTS takes effective measures to protect learners and staff from harassment, bullying and discrimination. It manages complaints well. Many of GKTS learners have very little prior achievement and many have social needs. They work well with these learners to maximise their potential.
 20. GKTS has a good learner and employer involvement strategy. The provider gathers feedback from learners individually during their training and through regular learner focus groups. It uses the views of the different groups to improve all aspects of the provision. Employers complete questionnaires on different aspects of the provision regularly; findings are analysed and used to improve the provision.
 21. Arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement are thorough. They lead to improvements in the quality of the provision and the outcomes for learners. The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan have clear targets that show how the provision will be developed. However, the grades in

the report did not always reflect the strengths and areas for improvement identified. An observation programme includes all aspects of teaching and learning. Tutors and assessors are observed completing interviews, reviews and delivering teaching and learning sessions. The observations are well planned and frequent however, they focus very heavily on teaching rather than learning. Staff are offered a variety of professional development opportunities, however, too few have completed more than an introductory teaching course.

22. GKTS provides good value for money. Learners progress, develop skills and knowledge and attain their learning goals very well in relation to their starting points. Resources are well managed and are continually being improved to meet learners' needs. The company's financial rating is outstanding.

Subject areas

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 2

Context

23. GKTS currently has 62 learners working towards qualifications in retail and customer care. Of these 14 are on apprentice or advanced apprentice programmes and 48 are completing NVQ awards through Train to Gain. Most training and assessment takes place on a one-to-one basis in the workplace but a few apprentices attend weekly off-the-job training. Progress reviews take place every six weeks.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates for Train to Gain are good and improving; they exceed the national average. Timely success rates are excellent as all learners achieve within agreed time scales. There is no historical data for apprentices; however, in-year achievement is good with six out of seven learners achieving all of their learning goals.
- The standard of work produced by learners is good. Portfolios contain a wide range of evidence. Learners' work in the workplace is particularly good, demonstrating a clear understanding and application of customer service and retail principles. All learners spoke positively about their improved confidence and increased knowledge. Employers noticed improvements in learners' performance at work, especially towards the end of their programme.
- Learners feel safe in the workplace and when attending the training centre for off-the-job training sessions. Learners work in a safe working environment and demonstrate safe working practices. GKTS assesses all employer premises prior to training taking place.
- Teaching, coaching and assessment are good. Assessment is well organised, with detailed action planning, good recording of evidence and good discussions with learners following an observation. Evidence is well referenced and assessment is good. Assessors act professionally. Employers and learners hold them in high regard. Internal verification processes are good. However, insufficient use is made of digital technology during the assessment process.
- The range, content and context of programmes meet the needs and interests of learners well. There are examples of learners progressing from lower level provision. For example, a mature learner with no qualifications or education since leaving school completed a retail NVQ level 2, then a further NVQ in customer service at level 2 and is now on a level 3 qualification. This learner has recently received promotion at work as a direct result of skills, qualifications and increased confidence gained during the learning programme.
- GKTS works effectively with partners to meet the needs and interests of learners. Training consultants have good working relationships with employers. They involve employers in the learning process through progress reviews and

informal meetings. Assessors are careful to attend workplaces when it is most convenient for both the learner and the employer.

- Learners receive very good support from assessors and senior managers at GKTS. Learners use the training centre well as they build up relationships with staff. Situated in the town centre in Leigh, the centre is very accessible to learners. Information, advice and guidance are accurate and relevant to the individual. Initial assessment is detailed and learners receive additional support whenever appropriate. Reviews, which are detailed, take place significantly more often than the contract requires. Exit reviews ensure the learner receives advice and guidance on progression routes.
- Leadership and management are good. Learners receive well-planned training relevant to their own specific needs and aims. Training consultants work well with employers and workplace supervisors to ensure that they link training well to learners' work activities. Programmes are planned appropriately to meet both learners' and employers' needs. Assessors are appropriately qualified. They receive good support from managers.
- GKTS staff promote safeguarding effectively. They are confident when discussing safeguarding issues. Learners have a good level of knowledge concerning safeguarding and are able to cite incidents when they have appropriately applied the theoretical knowledge they have to work situations. For example, one learner was able to explain how she now considered safer working practices relating to lone working.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners have a good understanding of relevant issues. GKTS staff use workplace visits well to reinforce learners' understanding and check that they are safe and protected from harassment or bullying at work.
- GKTS seeks learners' views and uses them effectively to improve the provision. Staff use information from detailed exit interviews to improve the programme.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded. The quality development plan is appropriate. Management information is detailed and effective in tracking the progress of learners. Quality forums and regular standardisation meetings are very effective in identifying and sharing best practice.
- The training programme represents good value for money. Learners achieve well and within the anticipated time. Resources are appropriate to the needs of learners. Assessors maintain appropriate caseloads and have the spare capacity to address learners' needs as necessary.

What does GK Training Services Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of assessments by increasing the use of digital equipment and ensuring that assessors are confident and competent when using it.

Preparation for life and work

Grade 2

Context

24. Nineteen learners are on the E2E programme. The programme offers preparation for further education, apprenticeships and employment within the retail sector. Qualifications in key skills up to level 2 are offered as part of the programme.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. During 2008/09, 68% of learners achieved positive outcomes. The majority of learners progress onto apprenticeships and employment. Some learners have progressed from their placement directly into employment. Many learners achieve key skills qualifications in communication, application of number and working with others.
- Learners are well motivated and talk with confidence about their learning, which they enjoy. They develop good personal and key skills. Through their placements, learners develop a good working knowledge about the retail industry. They also develop good employability skills. Some learners have also developed vocational skills through voluntary work in the community.
- Learners work well in class and during placements. Feedback from employers about learners' work is good. Learners demonstrate positive attitudes towards work, are punctual, show initiative and get on well with their colleagues.
- Learners feel safe and work safely during sessions. They have a good understanding about safe working practices and know whom to contact if any safeguarding issues arise.
- Training is good. GKTS staff plan placements effectively to give learners the opportunity to develop employability skills and extend their vocational knowledge and skills. They apply learning about the retail sector and about customer service effectively during their work experience placements.
- Monitoring of learners' general development and progress is good. Initial assessment is satisfactory and provides sufficient information about learners' background, interests and goals. There is satisfactory use of the E2E passport to plan training. Reviews of progress are satisfactory, however, targets are insufficiently detailed and progress is difficult to measure.
- Provision meets the needs and interests of learners well. Staff use a range of teaching and learning in sessions to engage and stimulate learners. All learners gain direct experience of retail and customer service work through placements. Although the main vocational strand of the programme is retail, staff secure opportunities for learners who express interests in other vocational areas.
- Partnerships generate very good learning and training opportunities. Marketing of the E2E programme to local employers is effective. Employers demonstrate a high level of commitment to supporting learners' development and contribute well to their reviews. Learners use their communication skills well to produce a newsletter, which GKTS distributes to partners.

- Personal support for learners is good. Learners feel welcome and have good relationships with tutors and staff. They are signposted to external agencies for support as appropriate and receive satisfactory information and guidance about education, training and employment opportunities.
- Management of the programme is good. Staff work effectively as a team. Communication with employers is good. Internal verification processes are satisfactory. Resources for training are good. Accommodation is good and learners have a dedicated 'lounge' area with a television, which they use to socialise outside of formal sessions.
- Promotion of safeguarding to employers is good. One employer adjusted a learner's working hours to minimise risks to their safety when travelling home from work.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners discuss a range of equality and diversity topics such as racism and discrimination in the workplace. They research and produce good work such as posters for display, which reflect their understanding.
- GKTS engages with learners well. A learner forum, held at least four times a year, provides an opportunity for learners to suggest improvements, share ideas and express any concerns. The self-assessment process is effective and the report was broadly accurate.

What does GK Training Services Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of target setting by identifying and recording targets that are specific and measureable.

Information about the inspection

25. 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, comments from the local Skills Funding Agency and data on learners and their achievement.
26. 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)
GK Training Services

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	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	19	19	0
Part-time learners	62	0	62
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2		
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2		
How well do learners progress?	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?*	2		
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2		
Quality of provision	2	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	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?	2		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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