

The Training Partnership

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 54942

Name of lead inspector: Derrick Spragg HMI

Last day of inspection: 5 March 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. The Training Partnership (TTP) is a privately owned company limited by guarantee founded 10 years ago. Its main offices are in Stoke-on-Trent. The operations manager has overall responsibility for work-based learning, supported by the quality manager. The operations manager reports to the chair of the company. Three assessors support the learners. All training and assessment takes place at work.
2. TTP has a contract with the Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide work-based learning to existing apprentices, but not to recruit new ones. About half of the learners come from the Stoke-on-Trent area. At the time of the inspection, the company had 18 apprentices and 13 advanced apprentices in retail and commercial enterprise, mainly in hairdressing, and 19 apprentices and 10 advanced apprentices in business, administration and law, mainly in customer service. This represents less than 5% of the company's business. TTP's main business is providing NVQ assessment services to colleges in England and Wales.
3. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups in Staffordshire is 2.4%, which is much lower than the proportion in the West Midlands region at over 11%. Between June 2008 and December 2009 the number of clients in the Stoke-on-Trent area in receipt of jobseekers allowance doubled; employment vacancies have decreased by more than one third during the same period.
4. TTP provides training on behalf of the following colleges:
 - Stockton Riverside College
 - New College Swindon
 - Redcar and Cleveland College
 - Neath Port Talbot College
 - The Manchester College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	60

Summary report

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

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

Overall effectiveness

5. Learners progress at a satisfactory rate although completion has been slow in the past. Advanced apprentices have achieved well over the past 18 months. The success rate for apprentices is low. Learners gain skills and develop confidence. Learners say they feel safe.
6. The overall quality of provision is satisfactory. All training and assessment takes place at work. TTP does not offer any off-the-job training. Learners do not receive sufficient structured training. TTP works well with employers although they would like more information about the content of the apprenticeship framework and the timescale in which learners are expected to complete it. Assessors visit learners frequently and the support for learners is good. Important information about the overall objectives and timescales for completion are often missing from learners' plans. There are insufficiently frequent reviews of learners' overall progress to ensure timely completion of programmes.
7. Senior managers provide clear leadership although they do not review and evaluate the provision using measurable objectives. Staff have a strong sense of purpose. TTP has been slow to make improvements and to respond to

changes in the business that affected contracts and performance, although success rates are now much higher than at the previous inspection. A thorough review of operations has highlighted key areas for development. TTP has a reasonably clear understanding of what is required to improve its provision, although the approach to self-assessment is not systematic. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. TTP promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily.

Main findings

- Success rates are satisfactory overall. Over the past 18 months, the proportion of advanced apprentices in administration, customer service and hairdressing who achieved their framework is high although it is low for level 2 apprentices in hairdressing. Current learners are making satisfactory progress, although learners' completion of key skills and full frameworks has been slow in the past.
- Learners gain skills, develop confidence and use safe working practices. They say they feel safe. Learners enjoy their work, attend well and achieve good standards at work.
- Assessment and learning are satisfactory with many learners experiencing supportive on-the-job training and additional training at work that increases their employability skills and personal development. TTP does not provide any off-the-job training.
- Assessors provide learners with clear short-term schemes of work and review progress regularly and thoroughly. However longer-term planning is less effective and often overall objectives and timescales are missing on the individual learning plan. The absence of longer-term goal setting does not help learners or their employers with making progress towards completing within the planned time.
- Learners have an adequate choice of programmes that meets their needs. They are given adequate information, advice and guidance on routes for progression. Programmes meet employers' needs although in some cases they have insufficient information about apprenticeship frameworks and timescales.
- Effective partnerships with employers benefit learners. TTP works with local schools to develop vocational modules as part of the foundation diploma.
- Support for learners is effective. Learners value the regular and well-planned visits by TTP's staff to the workplace that help them to progress.
- Senior managers provide clear leadership. Recent changes in the organisation have given staff a stronger sense of purpose and motivation to raise standards and achievements.
- Effective operational management systems are in place. Performance management is carried out thoroughly. Not all elements of apprenticeship frameworks are integrated into management progress reports.

- Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and learners feel safe. TTP promotes equality and diversity. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity.
- TTP involves learners and employers in improving the training provision. The process for collecting feedback from learners is systematic but not from employers.
- A thorough review of operations has highlighted key areas for development. Managers and staff at TTP have a clear understanding of what is required to improve. The approach to self-assessment has not kept pace with the changes in the organisation or the relevant requirements of the new Common Inspection Framework.

What does TTP need to do to improve further?

- Improve overall and timely success rates by planning and providing structured training.
- Improve the self-assessment process by involving all staff, being more self-critical and responding directly to relevant questions in the Common Inspection Framework.
- Improve the overall approach to the evaluation of the apprenticeship programme by sustaining the current performance review by senior managers and by using a more formal periodic reporting system based on measurable objectives.
- Specify more clearly with individual learners their learning objectives and the period over which they are to be achieved.
- Communicate clearly to employers about the learners' framework, their role in supporting achievement and the timescales involved.
- Carry out the required work on the database to integrate reports on all elements of the apprenticeship framework into the management information system.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- Gaining a better insight into their job
- developing confidence
- clear guidance
- the good standard of training
- the audio assessments
- supportive and helpful assessor
- flexible learning that fits around work

What learners would like to see improved:

- The quality of training
- fewer changes of tutor
- not extending the time the programme takes after it has started
- more training away from work
- more information at the start to explain the amount of work involved
- help with key skills.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- The good progress made by their learners
- the good standard of skills developed by learners
- TTP meets their needs well
- TTP trainers do not interfere with working routines.

What employers would like to see improved:

- Fewer changes of staff
- more frequent learners' progress reviews
- better communication with TTP
- more notice when TTP trainers are visiting the workplace.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

8. Overall success rates have improved since the previous inspection. Leaders and managers have conducted an organisational review and have identified key areas for development. They have made improvements to the apprenticeship programme. It is too early to see the full effect of the recent changes, although more recent learners are progressing at a better pace and the management control of the programme is improving. Staff and managers are involved in improvement planning.
9. TTP managers carry out regular quality audits of key processes which highlight areas for improvement. Action plans lead to improvements. Systematic collection and analysis of learners' feedback is carried out and improvements are made. Although TTP managers have a reasonably clear understanding of what needs to be done to continue to improve, the self-assessment process is not sufficiently systematic and overall quality improvement plans are not coherent. The current self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical and is not in a format to respond adequately to the new Common Inspection Framework. TTP is aware of the need to improve the self-assessment process and has already begun to do so.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Overall outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Over the previous 18 months, the proportion of advanced apprentices in business administration, customer service and hairdressing who achieve full frameworks is high at 75%. Success rates over the same period for apprentices in customer service are satisfactory at 66%. Success rates for apprentices in hairdressing are low at 54%. Success rates have fallen as local economic conditions have deteriorated. The majority of current learners are making satisfactory progress towards achieving the goals in their individual learning plan. The completion of key skills has been slow in the past and prevented some learners completing their full framework on time.
11. Most learners produce high standards of work. For example, learners provide a reliable customer service to their clients dealing with enquiries in a courteous manner. Portfolios are well structured and learners' presentation of evidence, including written work, is satisfactory. Most learners produce good quality, well-researched portfolios although for a few learners there is reliance on a limited range of evidence.
12. Learners take advantage of good opportunities to learn skills at work. Learners enjoy their work, are confident and have good records of attendance and time keeping. Learners have progressed in their work roles while on the

apprenticeship programme. Some learners have been promoted and now manage other staff. All learners have a good understanding of, and adopt, safe working practices. Learners feel safe and know their rights and responsibilities at work.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Training, assessment and learning are satisfactory. Many learners experience supportive on-the-job training and additional training at work that increases their employability skills and contributes to their personal development. Assessors provide effective coaching and mentoring in the workplace and have recently started using voice recorders to engage learners and identify evidence. Well-planned assessments and reviews ensure learners have clear short-term schemes of work and regular reviews and updates. Longer term planning is less effective and individual learning plans often do not have any records of overall objectives and timescales. More able learners have insufficient scope to progress quickly. TTP does not provide any off-the-job training.
14. The provision adequately meets the needs and interest of the learners. Learners have a reasonable choice of programmes and progression routes are explained to them. Learners progress from apprenticeship to advanced apprenticeship programmes and many learners take customer service as an additional qualification. Programmes mostly meet employers' needs. Employers have insufficient information about apprenticeship frameworks and the timescale of the programme. A few employers would appreciate more involvement and more frequent progress reviews.
15. Effective partnerships with employers benefit learners. TTP's staff work closely with employers to provide good learning opportunities in the workplace from which learners benefit. Employers plan and organise additional training. This includes arranging training and assessment by TTP staff for young learners working part time prior to entering work at age 16. Recently TTP commenced work with a local cluster of schools to develop vocational modules as part of the foundation diploma and with a school to provide employability training modules.
16. The quality of care, guidance and support for learners is satisfactory in helping learners attain their learning goals. Assessors develop a good rapport with their learners and learners value the regular assessor visits to their workplace. Assessors are quick to identify learners who may require additional support or further coaching to meet their learning needs and are able to offer appropriate training.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. Senior managers provide clear leadership that raises expectations to improve performance. Positive results from the recent reorganisation of roles and

changes in personnel are apparent. Staff express a strong sense of purpose and a motivation to raise standards and achievement. However, difficult business conditions in the main part of the business over the previous 12 months contributed to a slow response to improve the performance of the LSC contract. A review of the apprenticeship programme by senior managers is insufficiently systematic and no specific measurable objectives are used for evaluating performance.

18. Effective operational management systems are in place. The introduction of a thorough management system for monitoring learners' progress and assessors' activities is having a positive effect on performance. Managers are able to manage the assessment team and resources, as well as prioritise and identify learners who require additional support to maintain progress. Use of data to inform operational management decisions is effective. TTP recognises that the management information system requires further improvement. The current system meets the needs of the main part of the business, that of NVQ assessment, but not the apprenticeship programme. Not all aspects of the apprenticeship frameworks are included in management reports.
19. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and learners say they feel safe. Staff training and awareness-raising of safeguarding takes place and more is planned. Senior managers prioritise safeguarding, enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks cover all relevant staff and TTP has links with the local safeguarding board. Learners understand the importance of safeguarding. Effective use of specific learning materials in the workplace reinforces their understanding and that of employers. As well as regular assessor visits, other members of staff visit learners at work to review their welfare and wellbeing.
20. TTP promotes equality and diversity effectively. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. Induction training introduces equality and diversity and regular reinforcement of learners' understanding follows. Employers' practices and their awareness of equality and diversity are checked. Further information, advice and guidance is given when required. The proportion of learners from ethnic minority groups corresponds to the local population. There are no differences in performance between different groups of learners on the same programme. TTP promotes work-based training to young people and challenges assumptions about gender stereotypes in occupational training.
21. The provider involves learners and employers in improving the training provision. TTP collects feedback from learners systematically on three occasions during each year. The response rate is reasonable, thorough analysis takes place and areas for improvement are identified. The collection of feedback from employers is not sufficiently systematic. It takes place through regular contact during the course of work activity without any written records or any analysis.

22. TTP has adequate quality management systems. Together with effective internal verification, these provide reasonable checks of compliance with procedures. They are then a basis for correcting those activities that do not meet internal standards. Recently, a thorough review of operations highlighted key areas for development. TTP has a good understanding of what is required to improve. However, the current improvement plan is not coherent. It does not address sufficiently well the Common Inspection Framework or specific areas for improvement in the apprenticeship programmes. The approach to self-assessment is not a part of the quality management process and has insufficient involvement by staff.

Information about the inspection

23. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's head of human resource and verification, 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 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 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.
24. 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)

The Training Partnership

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	60	60
Part-time learners	0	0
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
How well do learners progress?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
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	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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