

Smart Training and Recruitment Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

13–16 June 2017

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for apprentices and trainees	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have developed excellent relationships with employers, enabling them to deliver high-quality programmes that meet local and regional needs and the needs of apprentices.
- Leaders and managers are very ambitious and have created a culture of openness and clear accountability which is valued by staff and results in rapid improvements to outcomes for current apprentices and trainees.
- Apprentices' standard of work is good and the large majority make at least good progress on their programmes; as a result, they are well prepared for their next steps.
- Almost all apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeship remain in employment and a significant minority gain additional responsibilities or promotion.
- Apprentices benefit from highly effective support from training advisers and employers. They develop high levels of confidence and good industry skills which enable them to progress well and make a valuable contribution to the businesses in which they work.
- Leaders and managers have implemented well-thought-out improvement strategies which they have applied rigorously to rapidly improve the quality of the provision.
- Too many training advisers set targets that focus only on the achievement of qualifications and do not recognise or set individual employability targets to develop the apprentices' skills.
- Training advisers do not provide apprentices with sufficient opportunities to extend their basic knowledge and understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Information about the provider

- Smart Training and Recruitment Limited (Smart) is a private limited company, established in 2003, with a head office in Newport, Isle of Wight. It provides apprenticeships in a range of vocational areas including hospitality and catering, business administration, health and social care, customer service, team leading, business improvement techniques, management, retail, warehousing, logistics, cleaning and support and information and communication technology. Five regional managers coordinate the provision which extends across most regions in England.
- Smart has a contract with the Education and Skills Funding Agency and provides apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced and, more recently, at higher levels. Smart also has a small traineeship programme.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers must ensure that they maintain the quality of provision and improve further the outcomes of apprentices through:
 - continued scrutiny of improvement plans and sustaining the strong focus on managers' accountability for the improvement actions allocated to them
 - accurately assessing the impact of their interventions on achieving improvement targets so that they can measure progress and prioritise future actions.
- Managers need to ensure that training advisers use reviews effectively to recognise and record apprentices' and trainees' wider employment-related skills and to set individual targets so that apprentices and trainees know what they need to do to improve.
- Managers must support tutors and training advisers to improve their skills and confidence so that they are able to successfully broaden apprentices and trainees' understanding of the risks of extremism and radicalisation, and help them understand the value of diversity and how this applies in the workplace.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The managing director, appointed since the previous inspection, and the senior leadership team have taken decisive and successful action to address the decline in overall achievement. Through a comprehensive review of business practices and procedures, leaders and managers have accurately identified a number of areas requiring improvement. Following subsequent changes to the management structure, which enabled greater scrutiny and accountability at all levels, leaders and managers now make effective use of targets and focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for apprentices and trainees.
- A significant cultural shift within the organisation has resulted in greater transparency for all staff and good working relationships between managers and staff; this has resulted in rapid improvements. Staff across the organisation have embraced the change and recognise that the actions taken by leaders and managers have been effective in securing improvements. New management processes are focused on apprentices' and trainees' outcomes and training advisers now have access to effective and timely data, which they use well to track and monitor learners' progress.
- Leaders provide excellent opportunities for continuous professional development and the vast majority of staff develop their skills and qualifications well. As a result, many are promoted to more senior roles with greater responsibility. Staff benefit from regular training and updating and are therefore able to carry out their roles successfully. Leaders and managers are ambitious for the business and set challenging targets to ensure continued improvement across all areas. Extensive improvement plans contain detailed and thorough descriptions of actions taken to meet targets. However, managers do not always sufficiently focus on evaluating the impact that their actions have had on the quality of provision and apprentices' and trainees' experience. As a result, they are not always clear about why improvements have occurred or how to sustain them.
- Leaders and managers have developed highly productive working relationships with employers. They have worked collaboratively to improve the choice and relevance of the qualification units available to their apprentices and to develop in-house training packages. Frequent and effective communication by managers and training advisers with employers ensures that any concerns are resolved swiftly. Regionally based business development consultants use their local knowledge well to meet local and regional skills priorities.

The governance of the provider

- The governance arrangements at Smart are effective. The managing director and senior managers know the business well and provide good challenge and support by scrutinising the performance of managers, training advisers and business development consultants successfully. Consequently, they have a good understanding of the strengths of the business, and its areas for improvement.
- The chief executive officer and owner retains financial control of the business, providing sound financial management and financial stability. He remains well informed as a result

of regular and detailed reporting by the managing director, who he holds to account for improving the quality of provision.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding and respond quickly to any safeguarding concerns raised by apprentices or employers. They make good use of their well-established local links with support agencies to understand risks and to support any apprentices or trainees at risk. Managers keep detailed records, which they use to good effect to monitor, identify and address trends.
- Apprentices and trainees feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They know who to report any concerns to and have a good awareness and understanding of general safeguarding and health and safety, which they demonstrate well in the workplace.
- Managers conduct effective recruitment checks and rigorous procedures are in place to ensure the suitability of all staff.
- Leaders and managers have successfully implemented the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty, ensuring that all staff have been trained and that apprentices have undertaken a detailed induction which introduces them to relevant topics. However, not all training advisers are confident in supporting apprentices beyond induction, to consolidate and deepen their understanding of extremism and radicalisation or to understand fully the implications for their individual workplaces.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff have high expectations for apprentices and trainees, and the majority use knowledge of apprentices' and trainees' starting points to plan relevant and motivating programmes. Training advisers use their recent industry experience effectively, enabling apprentices and trainees to apply their learning in a variety of work contexts. As a result, they gain high levels of confidence and develop good, industry-standard skills quickly. For example, trainees with education, health and care plans develop good work-related skills in catering and events services.
- Training advisers support apprentices well through regular and timely review meetings, during which they monitor their progress and provide effective feedback which enables apprentices to make good progress.
- Training advisers adapt their assessment methods effectively to suit the learning styles of their apprentices. For example, they use digital witness statements to record reviews of progress and digital recordings to provide feedback on assignments. As a result, apprentices are able accurately to assess their own work, record and monitor their progress and set their own targets.
- Apprentices use a good range of online resources well to develop their independent learning skills. They use these effectively to extend and consolidate their knowledge and understanding between learning sessions. For example, in a coaching session on information technology the training adviser provided a wide selection of video tutorial links for the apprentice to practise their newly developed skills independently.

- In the majority of coaching sessions, training advisers skilfully probe apprentices' understanding to help them make relevant links between theory and workplace practice. In a minority of sessions, although learning is highly relevant to the workplace, training advisers do not sufficiently challenge advanced and higher apprentices to deepen and extend their knowledge of their subjects.
- The majority of training advisers challenge and motivate apprentices and trainees to work hard. As a result, the majority of apprentices and trainees make at least good progress. In a minority of cases, training advisers do not use sufficiently challenging assessment strategies to ensure that apprentices make the progress that they are capable of making.
- Training advisers develop apprentices' and trainees' English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills well. They assess their skills accurately at the start of their course and make good use of this information to plan and support apprentices and trainees to identify gaps in their skills. In a small minority of cases, training advisers' feedback on apprentices' work does not give sufficient guidance on how to improve their work and they do not routinely correct grammatical errors. As a result, these apprentices do not understand how to improve their English skills.
- Too frequently, training advisers set targets that focus only on the completion of qualification units. They do not use one-to-one reviews sufficiently well to recognise the broader employment-related skills that apprentices have developed or to set individual targets to improve these skills.
- Training advisers promote the principles of equality well during learning sessions, helping apprentices and trainees to understand key principles, which they are able to apply to their workplace.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices enjoy their learning and become rapidly more self-assured and confident. Apprentices' attendance at their learning sessions is good. They have a positive attitude to work and are responsive to the needs of their employers. Apprentices are punctual and arrive at their learning sessions ready to learn.
- Employers value the expertise that apprentices develop during their programmes and they recognise the improved contribution that apprentices make to the businesses. Apprentices become better at their jobs and develop higher-level skills. Apprentices value the skills and knowledge that they develop at work and, as a result, they become more confident in their job roles and make progress in their working lives.
- Experienced and well-qualified training advisers provide apprentices and trainees with good information, advice and guidance. They ensure that apprentices and trainees are on the correct programmes and prepare them well for their courses. Apprentices and trainees benefit from very good advice and guidance while on their programmes and as a result, they are well prepared for their next steps and able to progress to the next level of training.
- The majority of apprentices develop their confidence in English and mathematical skills. For example, advanced apprentices develop skills in formal report writing which enables them to carry out their management roles more effectively. Hospitality learners with moderate learning difficulties were able accurately to weigh ingredients and compare

metric and imperial weights. A small minority of training advisers do not develop apprentices' English skills sufficiently well, for example in the use of relevant industry terminology.

- Apprentices and trainees are highly motivated to progress in their learning and the majority produce work that is at, or above, the level expected. Apprentices develop very good industry skills which they use effectively in the workplace. As a result, a significant minority of apprentices gain promotion or take on additional responsibilities. For example, one apprentice on a higher apprenticeship is a part of the working group involved in developing the business disaster recovery plan, and another has taken on managing a vehicle fleet.
- Apprentices and trainees benefit from high-quality support from training advisers who make appropriate adaptations to their programmes to support them to remain on programme and to succeed. For example, managers financially supported trainees with childcare needs, enabling them to attend work in the mornings and study independently in the afternoons.
- Apprentices and trainees feel safe at work. They know how to keep themselves safe and how to report issues that concern them. Apprentices wear appropriate personal protective equipment in the workplace and they have a good understanding of the importance and value of risk assessments in the workplace.
- Training advisers ensure that apprentices gain a basic awareness of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism during induction. However, too few training advisers have sufficient confidence to support apprentices in developing a deeper and wider understanding. As a result, apprentices are not consistently able to understand and apply these to workplace situations. Training advisers support trainees to develop a very good understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Training advisers ensure that apprentices gain a good basic awareness of fundamental British values and diversity but do not always ensure that this is linked to their workplace responsibilities. Trainees have a more thorough understanding of fundamental British values and how these apply in the workplace.
- Apprentices' and trainees' behaviour is excellent. They behave professionally in the workplace and in their taught sessions, showing high levels of respect for colleagues, managers and their training advisers.

Outcomes for apprentices and trainees

Good

- Following a three-year decline in achievement rates, the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications in 2015/16 required improvement. Leaders' and managers' robust and rigorous interventions to reverse this trend have resulted in in-year achievement rates showing substantial improvement. In particular, the progress of intermediate apprentices on retail, hospitality and catering and administration and on advanced ICT programmes has improved considerably.
- The number of apprentices who complete their qualifications within the planned timescales has improved greatly. Current progress is above the provider's target, which is set above the rates achieved nationally in 2015/16.

- The large majority of apprentices work to a high standard, make good progress and develop the skills and knowledge that they require in the workplace. Apprentices enjoy the success that they achieve and, as a result, are highly motivated to continue learning and to progress. The majority of apprentices progress well onto the next of level apprenticeship or gain additional responsibilities in their place of employment.
- A good proportion of trainees achieve their qualifications and a large majority progress onto apprenticeships, further education or employment. For example, one trainee progressed from a traineeship through intermediate and advanced apprenticeships and is now studying a higher apprenticeship. Trainees with education, health and care plans, who participate on a project in association with a local social enterprise, achieve well, with many going onto apprenticeships.
- Leaders and managers have accurately identified achievement gaps between different groups of apprentices and now monitor these regularly. They have put appropriate interventions in place and in the majority of areas, achievement gaps are narrowing. The achievement of male apprentices has improved, particularly in hospitality and catering, and now is at least as good as that of females. Apprentices with a declared learning difficulty or disability now achieve at least as well as their peers. However, managers acknowledge that they need to do further work to understand fully the impact of their interventions if achievement gaps are to be narrowed further.
- In 2015/16, too few apprentices achieved functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and ICT. In-year data shows that there has been a considerable improvement in achievement to date. Trainees make good progress in the development of English and mathematical skills both in the workplace and in lessons.
- In the current year, the proportion of apprentices who achieve their functional skills examinations at the first attempt is high.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54434
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of apprentices and trainees	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all apprentices and trainees over the previous full contract year	2,153
Principal/CEO	Stuart Prior
Telephone number	07791 297698
Website	www.smarttar.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	0	0	0	4	1	22	0	0
Total number of apprentices and trainees (excluding apprenticeships)	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	126	985	17	726	0	164		
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16–19		19+		Total			
	22		11		33			
Number of traineeships								
Number of apprentices and trainees aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of apprentices and trainees for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Nil							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and trainees and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Lynda Brown, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Mark Shackleton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Megan Whittaker	Ofsted Inspector
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Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Bealey	Ofsted Inspector

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