

# Southern Learning Hub Limited

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

#### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Information and communication technology
- Business, administration and law

## Description of the provider

1. Southern Learning Hub Limited (SLH) is a limited company based in Fareham, Hampshire. The chief executive owns and directs the company, supported by an administrator, three full-time trainer/assessors and four part-time trainer/assessors. The company has a Train to Gain contract with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Learning and Skills Council. Between 2006 and 2008 the company had a European Social Fund (ESF) contract for the provision of two units of a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in information and communication technology (ICT) to learners employed in small and medium enterprises (SME). The Train to Gain programme is offered in ICT, retail and commercial enterprise and business, administration and law. Learners receive all of their training and assessment in the workplace either on an individual or small group basis. Approximately 90% of SLH's business is government funded training. SLH has the Matrix Award accreditation and is an approved training academy for the Microsoft Corporation.
2. Fifty-eight learners are following programmes in ICT, 33 in business, administration and law and eight in retail and commercial enterprise. The programme in retail and commercial enterprise was considered in the inspection of leadership and management but not specifically inspected due to the small numbers of learners.
3. The proportion of the population in Hampshire, which is economically active, is 83%. Seventy-one per cent have achieved qualifications equivalent to a NVQ at level 2 or above compared with United Kingdom averages of 79% and 65% respectively. This is the first inspection of SLH.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

## Sector subject areas

Information and communication technology	Good: Grade 2
Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2

## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision in ICT and business, administration and law are good. Leadership and management are good. The organisations' approach to equality of opportunity, diversity and social inclusion are satisfactory.

### Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

5. SLH's capacity to improve is good. The provider sets high standards for the implementation of the Train to Gain contract that builds on its experience and delivery of the ESF contract. SLH realises that potential learners would benefit from a wider selection of NVQ options and the provision for literacy and numeracy. The programme for business, administration and law is particularly well implemented. While it is too early to judge success rates, learners are making good progress. Teaching and assessment are good. Detailed action planning supports the introduction of the literacy and numeracy programmes.
6. The self-assessment process is fully inclusive of staff, employer, learner and other key stakeholders' views. The self-assessment report is comprehensive, self-critical and accurately reflects the provision.

## Key strengths

- High success rates in ICT
- Good teaching and learning
- Well designed programmes to meet employer and learner needs
- Well managed provision

## Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient recording of individualised learning
- Incomplete arrangements for discrete Skills for Life provision

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good. ICT learners who start the ESF programme achieve high success rates. Of the 215 learners who started this programme during 2006/08, 200 achieved the two NVQ units. A further 47 learners progressed to a full NVQ of which 41 were successful. Of the current ICT learners, success rates were satisfactory in 2007/08. Success rates have since improved and are now high. It is too early to judge the success rates for the business, administration and law programme. However, all learners are making good progress. Learners demonstrate good acquisition of workplace skills. The self-assessment report accurately describes this aspect of the provision.

### Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

8. The quality of provision is good overall. Teaching and learning are good. All tutors prepare their individual and small group sessions well and manage them effectively. Use of a mixture of teaching and learning styles maximises learner potential. Good teaching and learning resources are available across all programme areas. The planning and the monitoring of learner progress are good. Trainer/assessors give good support to help learners complete their programmes. Assessment feedback to learners is provided with a minimum of delay. It is accurate and accompanied by informative comments. Learners are set individual, achievable and measurable learning targets which they use to guide learning, however, they are insufficiently detailed and recorded in learning plans and reviews. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the strengths of this aspect of the provision.
9. The programmes meet the learners needs and interests well. SLH is very responsive to the needs of learners and employers in the identification and delivery of learning and NVQ assessment. Trainer/assessors visit the workplace very frequently at times most suited to business needs. Programmes are highly individualised. They recognise the prior achievements of learners and build on these in developing learners to the standards required of the NVQ. Assessment only programmes are available for learners whose prior attainment reaches the requirements of the NVQ and are seeking accreditation only. Employers are actively involved in the planning and monitoring of the programmes which meet local circumstances. The self-assessment report accurately describes this aspect of the provision.
10. Support for learners is good overall and in ICT. Support is satisfactory in business, administration and law programmes. Many employers are actively involved in supporting learners to achieve the tasks identified in action plans. Tutors provide good individual support and learners enjoy their training sessions. Learners are enthusiastic about the opportunities available to improve and

accredit their skills. However, there is insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity within some reviews.

## Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

### Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. Leadership and management are good. SLH manages the Train to Gain programme well. Sound strategic and operational planning clearly identifies how the organisation is set to develop. The implementation of effective retention strategies ensures that employers and learners fully understand the requirements of the programme from the start. Results of initial assessments are particularly well used in training needs analysis, which is then used to develop a highly individualised training and assessment plan. Performance monitoring of the programme is good. Clear records are kept of learner progress and the use of management information is good. Risk assessment procedures enable the management to be well informed and take appropriate actions should they appear not to be making good progress.
12. Quality assurance processes and improvement actions are good. Whole organisation team meetings are undertaken each month. The full day meetings include reviews of learner progress, sharing good practice and equality of opportunity and diversity training. Minutes and actions are well documented. The observation of teaching and learning is satisfactory and includes all aspects of the learners' experience. All training and assessment activities are observed. Observations are frequent with good feedback to trainer/assessors to enable them to improve performance. The collection and analysis of employer and learner feedback is satisfactory. SLH have good responses to feedback questionnaires which are well analysed for improvement actions. Staff are appropriately qualified and have considerable experience in their subject areas. New assessors are all working towards assessor qualifications.
13. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the report uses staff, employer and learners views well. The report is detailed and provides an accurate description of the provider. Judgements are made against all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework. The strengths of the provision are recognised and areas for improvement have either been resolved since the compilation of the report or are under an improvement initiative. Inspectors awarded higher grades than those given by the organisation. The development plan is a thorough document which clearly identifies actions, timescales and the person responsible for the improvement.
14. SLH's approach to equality of opportunity, diversity and social inclusion are satisfactory. SLH have an equality of opportunities policy which covers all aspects of legislation and is regularly reviewed. SLH predominantly work with staff of SMEs, traditionally under represented in government funded learning programmes. The recent increase in subject areas available for learners has increased participation of other traditionally under represented groups. All staff

receive topical training on equality and diversity issues on a monthly basis. Data to show participation of under represented groups is regularly analysed and, recently, this data is also analysed by success. Learners receive satisfactory training at induction and understand their rights. However, the promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is not sufficiently undertaken during work place reviews. The provider satisfactorily meets the requirements of current legislation for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults. While SLH does not have current learners who are declared as vulnerable, the provider has identified that it may in the future and is currently undertaking criminal record bureau checks of its entire staff. The provider is working towards the October 2009 compliance standards set by the independent safeguarding authority for providers of work-based learning.

15. Arrangements for discrete Skills for Life provision are incomplete. The company is at advanced planning stages to start discrete literacy and numeracy training leading to accredited adult literacy and numeracy qualifications, but have not fully implemented their plans. The initial programme is at an advanced stage for learners with identified support needs in the business, administration and law and retail and commercial enterprise programmes. Future business planning activities include ICT learners. SLH does not provide courses for speakers of English as a additional language.

## What learners like:

- 'I enjoy learning where I work'
- 'I thought I would never understand PowerPoint, now I've produced a presentation for the school reception area'
- 'My assessor is patient and understanding'
- 'The training has shot our business forward'
- The outstanding training that has provided real benefit to our employer
- The assessor puts you at your ease
- SLH are very efficient and helpful
- 'It's a lot more than I was expecting from them'
- SLH are very informative and reliable

## What learners think could improve:

- No comments were received from learners

## Sector subject areas

### Information and communication technology

Good: Grade 2

#### Context

16. Fifty-eight learners are following Train to Gain programmes in ICT. No learners have declared a disability or learning difficulty. Learners enrol on a level 2 information technology qualification (iTQ) and can start their programme at any time of the year. All learners receive an induction and initial assessment. Literacy and numeracy support needs are identified during informal discussions during initial assessment. Tutor/assessors provide regular training and assessments of learners' practical skills in the work place either on an individual or small group basis. During 2006/08, 215 learners followed an ESF programme for the provision of two units of an NVQ for employees of SME's.

#### Strengths

- High success rates
- Good teaching and learning
- Good planning and monitoring of learner progress
- Well designed programme that meets employer and learner needs

#### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient arrangements to identify and provide for additional learning needs

#### Achievement and standards

17. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high and improving significantly. In 2006/07, success rates for iTQ level 2 were 29%. In the first six months of 2008/09, they have increased to 92%. During the period of the ESF programme, 200 of the 215 learners who started achieved their learning outcomes. The standard of learners' work in relation to their learning goals is good. Learners are highly motivated to gain new skills. They increase their confidence and make good progress in achieving their learning aims. Many learners are ahead of their learning targets and most plan to complete their programmes ahead of the planned completion date. Learner and employer satisfaction is high. Learners demonstrate good work skills that they frequently use in their personal lives. In one example, a learner had used the PowerPoint training he had received in the workplace to present a training session to Scout leaders on 'The Skills of Leadership'.

#### Quality of provision

18. The quality of provision overall is good. Teaching and learning are good. All tutors prepare their individual support sessions thoroughly and manage them well. Training sessions are a mixture of short exposition and frequent learner activity.

The pace of most lessons is good. Tutors work individually with learners to maximise their potential. Specialist training is available when required. In one example SLH provided specialist software accountancy training to a learner who was managing the company accounts and payroll. Tutor maintained learner profiles are used to record progress and action plan future learning. The development of Information Technology (IT) skills and learner confidence is good. Employer based learning accommodation is mostly satisfactory. However, one session took place in a school library with other teaching staff present. In a second school the training room was too small with insufficient space for the learner to open her portfolio adjacent to the computer.

19. Planning and the monitoring of learner progress are good. Assessors and support staff are committed to helping learners complete their programmes. Progress reviews are designed to provide encouragement and support to learners. Learners are set individual achievable and measurable learning targets which they use to guide learning. However, the recording of targets is insufficiently detailed. Assessment feedback to learners is provided with a minimum of delay. It is accurate and accompanied by informative comments. Monitoring of learner progress is comprehensive and used by tutors as a basis for effective target-setting. Weekly contact and feedback reviews cover progress to date and result in an action plan for learning. Many employers are actively involved in supporting learners in achieving the tasks identified in action plans. Tutors provide good individual support and learners enjoy their training sessions. They are enthusiastic about the opportunities available to improve and accredit their IT skills. However, there is insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity within some reviews.
20. The arrangements to identify and provide for additional learning needs are insufficient. No formal systematic mechanism exists to screen learners for basic skills needs at entry or on course. Any identification of additional learning needs is accidental and is rarely followed through by on-the-job training. Currently there are no opportunities for learners to obtain literacy, numeracy and English language qualifications. However, plans are at an advanced stage to introduce a discrete literacy and numeracy programme.
21. The well designed Train to Gain programme meets employer and learner needs. Employers are provided with effective training that assists them in finding skills solutions to business problems. The links between employers and the provider are particularly effective. The delivery and style of the training is appropriate to employer and learner needs and is organised to respond to business needs.
22. Support for learners and support provided by employers is good. All learners take an initial assessment to assess their ICT skills and some learners are identified as requiring programmes at level 1. SLH provide additional tutor support for these learners to ensure successful completion at level 2, and to meet employer needs. Many learners raise their aspirations and plan to achieve higher level skills. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. SLH staff interview all potential learners before their programme starts and appropriately guide the learners' during and at the end of their programmes. Employers provide good support to

ensure that programmes meet business needs and, in many instances, provide for additional learning and time off-the-job for further study.

### Leadership and management

23. Leadership and management are good. Communication between staff is good with monthly team meetings to discuss learner progress and share good practice. The management style is collaborative and constructive. Managers set a clear direction that leads to improvements in education and training. Management have a clear focus on raising standards and management information is well used to monitor and improve learner success. Assessment and internal verification arrangements are good and meet the needs of the awarding bodies. Managers respond effectively to resolve issues identified in external verifier reports. The observation of the teaching and learning process is satisfactory.
24. The self-assessment process and report are good. All tutors are involved in its preparation. Employer contributions are actively sought and welcomed. The self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of inspection findings.
25. The promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity and diversity are satisfactory. Awareness raising of harassment and bullying are particularly well discussed during induction and progress reviews. However, awareness raising of ICT specific related diversity issues is not well covered.

## Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

### Context

26. SLH extended its range of Train to Gain provision in August 2008 to include business, administration and law, team leading and customer service. Of the 33 current learners, 22 are following programmes in customer service, 10 in business, administration and law, and one learner is working towards a qualification in team leading. Sixteen of these learners have been recruited since 1 January 2009. They have received an induction but have not yet fully started their NVQ. Most learners are working towards an NVQ at level 2. Learners are employed in a range of SMEs. All learning and assessment is conducted in the work place either on an individual or small group basis.

### Strengths

- Good progress of learners
- Good development of workplace skills
- Highly effective on-the-job training
- Well managed programmes to meet employer and learner needs

### Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently detailed individual learning plans
- Insufficient reviews of learner progress

### Achievement and standards

27. Achievement and standards are good overall. Learners are making good progress. Of the learners recruited since June 2008 one has already completed a customer service qualification at level 2 and the remainder are on target to complete before their expected end date. Monitoring of progress towards completion of the NVQ is thorough and well recorded. The standard of work in portfolios is good with well referenced and explained evidence from the workplace.

28. Learners develop good workplace skills. Team building, communication, problem-solving, planning, organising and presenting work are all improved as a result of the training which takes place in the work place. Learners are highly motivated and most are keen to progress to higher levels of their chosen qualification. Learners gain in confidence and have a better knowledge and understanding of their role in the work place. In business, administration and law programmes learners also develop improved computing skills, particularly in the use of spreadsheets and text processing.

## Quality of provision

29. The quality of provision is good overall. Teaching and learning are good. Training needs are identified at induction, either by a formal analysis of existing skills to identify gaps in learner knowledge or by an informal discussion. Subsequent training is tailored to the needs of individual learners, all of whom are keen to demonstrate their newly acquired skills. In many cases learners identify new skills they would like to acquire to improve their job prospects. Employers are fully involved in the learning plan, and in some cases offer additional training to meet learner needs. Trainers are well qualified and have a good rapport with learners.
30. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessors have good working relationships with learners. Assessment is flexible and regular. For example one assessor has increased the number of work-place visits to encourage faster progress. Assessors use appropriate methods to suit the individual needs of the learner. In the best instances the assessor encourages learners to take ownership of their evidence by identifying its relevance to the standards. In some instances independent learning skills are developed as a result of challenging written questioning. Assessment is well planned with clear short term targets.
31. Initial assessment is satisfactory. All learners have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills and where a need is identified, additional support is given. Plans are at an advanced stage for SLH to offer accredited training and assessment for adult literacy and numeracy qualifications.
32. Individual learning plans lack detail. The choice of NVQ units is listed at induction but details of planned training and existing skills are omitted. The individual learning plan is not regularly up dated.
33. The programmes meet the needs of employers and learners well. Programmes are planned with employers to meet corporate development needs. Trainer/assessors visit employer premises on a very regular basis and minimise disruption to work by carefully chosen assessment methods. Employers receive regular feedback from assessors and are fully involved in the learning process. The learners enjoy their learning, are highly motivated and appreciate the opportunity to gain accreditation for skills already acquired in the workplace. For most learners this is their first opportunity to gain a qualification.
34. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners receive a satisfactory induction which covers all aspects of their NVQ and information to prepare them for the learning experience. Initial advice and guidance forms part of the induction and learners negotiate and agree appropriate NVQ units to meet their occupational needs. Employers are often involved in unit choice and one employer offers one hour a week for independent learning to encourage learners to achieve. Where reviews do take place, the learner is encouraged to reflect on his or her learning but there is often little or no formal review of progress. Target setting is satisfactory. Assessors set long term targets but do not always agree milestones to allow learners to measure their own progress.

## Leadership and management

35. The provision in business, administration and law is particularly well managed. The programme has a small, cohesive team of appropriately qualified staff who meet on a monthly basis to share information and good practice. The team are very supportive of each other and a recently developed mentoring system has increased this support. Assessment and training are effectively monitored with constructive feedback and time constrained actions. Continued professional development is encouraged and recorded as part of the internal verification process. Occupational competence is monitored and one internal verifier is planning a work placement to maintain occupational competence.
36. Internal verification is thorough and sufficient to underpin the quality of the assessment process. Verification is planned to minimise risk and identify assessor support needs. Internal verifiers are experienced and use standardisation exercises to share good practice.
37. Equality of opportunity and diversity are satisfactory and well explained during the induction. Learners understand their rights and responsibilities. Learners are confident to undertake their NVO with enthusiasm, especially when they are new to this style of learning and assessment. The programme is satisfactorily inclusive of under represented groups reflecting the demographics of the local community.

## Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by Southern Learning Hub Limited 2006 to 2009

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006/07	overall	2	29%
		timely		
	2007/08	overall	5	63%
		timely		
	2008/09 (6 months)	overall	12	92%
		timely	4	33%

Note: 2008//09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first six months of the LSC contract year

- \* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
- \*\* College/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'
- \*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'

Timely success rate data is not available for the LSC 2006/08 contract years