

Semta Apprenticeship Service

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53330

Name of lead inspector: Howard Foster HMI

Last day of inspection: 10 February 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Semta Apprenticeship Service (Semta) is a not-for-profit organisation wholly owned by Semta, the sector skills council for science, engineering and manufacturing. It was formally called Metal Industry Skills and Performance (Metskill) and has provided recruitment and training services for the metals manufacturing and engineering sector since 1980. It merged with Semta in 2005 and now offers its service to a wider range of companies.
2. Semta manages the training of 490 learners predominantly aged 16 to 18, 311 of whom are at the advanced level and 179 at intermediate level. Learners are employed by companies across the engineering and manufacturing sector. They gain skills and knowledge through on-the-job training given by their workplace supervisors. They receive off-the-job training from a network of subcontractors, mainly further education colleges, which are selected to match the specialism and geographical location of the employer.
3. Semta has two operational centres, one in Sheffield and one in West Bromwich. A total of 11 staff are directly employed as managers and as training coordinators. The apprenticeship training manager has day-to-day responsibility for the provision and reports to a director of the main board. The training coordinators have overall responsibility for the training of most of the learners and carry out regular progress reviews. Freelance staff are employed as assessors and internal verifiers. Semta subcontracts all aspects of the training of 186 of the learners to other providers in specialist engineering fields, such as Resource Group for aircraft maintenance and White Training for railway engineering. This type of subcontracting arrangements is relatively new to Semta.
4. The following organisations provide training on behalf of Semta:
 - AVA Training Ltd
 - Barnsley College
 - Blackpool and The Fylde College
 - Brinsworth Training Ltd
 - Central Sussex College
 - Chesterfield College
 - City of Wolverhampton College
 - Derby College
 - DETA 2000 Ltd
 - Dudley College
 - EEF Ltd
 - First4Skills Ltd

- Fresh Baked Business Services Group
- Resource Group
- North Warwickshire & Hinckley College
- Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
- St Helens College
- Solihull College
- Wakefield College
- Walsall College
- Warwickshire College
- West Suffolk College
- White Training and Recruitment Ltd.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	527 learners

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		Grade
Engineering and manufacturing technologies		2

Overall effectiveness

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Outcomes for the majority of learners are good and improving. Most learners are successful in their studies. The proportion of learners achieving their qualification within the planned timescale is satisfactory. Learners achieve and demonstrate good levels of occupational skills.
6. Training and learning are good in the workplace and at the subcontracted colleges. Key skills provision is particularly strong. Progress reviews are outstanding with clear and challenging targets agreed with the learners and the employers. The reviews at the most recently appointed subcontractors are only satisfactory. The provision is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and partnerships with employers are strong.
7. Leadership and management are good. Semta has a clear strategy for expansion but the new governance arrangements are not yet operational. Safeguarding arrangements are good and staff have received thorough training. Semta's arrangements to advance equality and diversity are good. Promotion of the provision to under-represented groups has been effective. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is continuously enhanced throughout their programme. Semta offers outstanding value for money.

Main findings

- Success rates have increased steadily over a four-year period. The overall rate is 88% compared with the national average of 77%. The success rate for intermediate apprentices is very high at 91%. Completion within the planned time is broadly satisfactory, although it is below the national figure for advanced apprentices. Learners from different groups broadly achieve at the same rate as the other learners.
- Learners develop very good occupational skills which are relevant to their work. Many of them progress to further learning including degree courses. Semta provides good opportunities for them to plan and take part in activities beyond their training programme. Some learners are peer mentors for other apprentices with support needs.
- Teaching and learning are good. The on-the-job training is excellent and is provided by very experienced workplace supervisors. It is well planned. Most progress reviews are outstanding. Challenging targets are set and reviewed at the next meeting. Progress reviews at some subcontractors are not of the same high quality.
- The college subcontractors provide good teaching and learning for the technical certificate component of the apprentices' qualification. Semta monitors the standard of this subcontracted provision using a detailed analysis of the Ofsted inspection reports of the colleges. The subcontracted key skills provision is outstanding and has greatly reduced the time the learners take to complete this component of their qualification.
- Semta is outstanding in the extent to which it meets the needs of employers. It has had a long partnership with employers in the metal engineering and manufacturing sector and is highly respected by them. Staff at Semta analyse the employers' needs in detail and are skilled in matching their needs to the qualifications taken by their learners.
- Learners receive good support from training coordinators and in the workplace. They are given clear advice and guidance. Providers offer good support to help learners overcome barriers to progress such as poor literacy and numeracy skills. Employers appoint mentors in the workplace to help them to develop their skills and make steady progress.
- Semta has a clear and challenging strategy for expanding its provision to a wider range of companies. Data and performance indicators are used highly effectively to manage the provision. Semta is establishing a board of directors drawn from employers but this has not yet met.
- Safeguarding is very well managed. All staff have been subject to criminal record checks. Training for staff is thorough and has been reinforced well. Semta reviews safeguarding arrangements regularly and has an improvement plan in place specifically for safeguarding.
- Semta has been successful in increasing the participation by people from under-represented groups. The number of women and people from minority ethnic

groups has increased. The proportion of enrolments by people with learning difficulties and disabilities has increased from 2% to 13%. The learners' understanding of equality and diversity is good and is developed further at each progress review meeting.

- Self-assessment is based on a process which is effective in drawing contributions from all staff. It takes into account the views of learners and employers but not subcontractors. Observation of teaching and learning is not well developed at some of the subcontractors. Internal verifiers do not always observe assessments or sample assessors' work during the course of the programme.
- Semta's value for money is outstanding. Comparatively little funding is wasted by learners failing to complete their qualification. The contribution by employers to the apprentices' training enhances the effect of the funding from government sources. The use of college subcontractors is an efficient use of specialist engineering resources throughout the country.

What does Semta need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who complete their qualification within the planned timescale by ensuring they make steady progress throughout their programme.
- Spread the good practice in the conduct of learners' progress reviews by Semta's training coordinators to raise the standard of reviews among those subcontractors where it is not as good.
- Improve internal verification practice by sampling assessors' work during the course of the assessment period and observing assessors carrying out their assessments in the workplace.
- Fully establish the new governance arrangements by taking advantage of the expertise of the proposed board of directors in expanding the work of Semta.
- Promote the provision to under-represented groups to maintain the momentum created by the increase in the number of learners from these groups.
- Work with the new subcontractors to develop further their systems for the observation of teaching and learning.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the amount of responsibility given to apprentices to perform important production jobs
- very relevant programmes for the work the learners are doing
- regular and flexible assessment opportunities
- the ability to earn at the same time as learning skills
- good opportunities to progress to higher level qualifications

- the strong emphasis on health and safety
- very helpful progress review meetings
- being treated equally and not discriminated against because they are young.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more information about the long-term structure of their programme.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the high level of skills that learners acquire
- good training for workplace mentors
- good guidance and support for the learners
- the detailed knowledge displayed by the training coordinators
- tailored programmes to meet the need of employers and learners
- high standards of recruitment, training and assessment services from Semta
- regular contact from Semta's training coordinators
- regular information on learners' progress.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the choice of funded college courses for learners to attend on day release.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. The capacity of Semta to improve is good. All of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been dealt with. Success rates have improved steadily over the previous four years to a high level. Learners gain good skills. The improvement in the provision of key skills has been substantial. Semta uses data to very good effect in the management of the training. The progress reviews are mainly of a high standard. Some of the systems at the recently subcontracted provision are not yet well developed but rapid improvements are being made.
9. Self-assessment is detailed and self-critical. The report is accurate in its judgements and soundly based on evidence. The views of users are systematically used to improve the provision and action plans are effective in bringing about improvements.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. Outcomes for learners are good as the self-assessment report recognises. The overall success rate on the apprenticeship programmes combined is 88% in 2010/11, which is substantially higher than the national rate of 77%. The overall success rate for advanced apprenticeships is slightly higher than the national average but for intermediate apprenticeships it is very high at 91%. The overall success rates have increased steadily over a period of four years. The proportion of intermediate apprentices who complete their framework by the planned date is satisfactory and at 100% is high in manufacturing technologies. It has fallen slightly for advanced apprentices and is now below the national average. Learners from different groups broadly achieve at the same rate as the other learners. All learners with learning difficulties or disabilities complete their qualifications.
11. Learners develop very good occupational skills which are relevant to their work. They enjoy their learning and have excellent opportunities to gain valuable experience in the workplace. For example, one apprentice visited the parent company in Sweden to study their production methods. Many progress to further learning including degree courses. They gain confidence and develop a range of personal and social skills through a forum for apprentices. The learners plan social events and provide a peer mentoring service for those apprentices who require support. Learners in the rail industry trained by a subcontractor have good opportunities to undertake a wide range of additional training and qualifications such as a track safety card. They make informed choices about their health and well-being and are subject to mandatory drug and alcohol testing which is a requirement in the rail industry.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

12. Teaching and learning are good. The on-the-job training is excellent and is provided by very experienced workplace supervisors. It is planned to give learners a range of opportunities to develop their skills using a variety of relevant resources and equipment. Learners are fully aware of their learning objectives and supervisors set challenging targets. Most progress reviews are outstanding. Learners' progress is accurately assessed, and targets set are checked at the next review. Employers take an active role in the reviews and discuss in detail learners' progress at college. Learning plans are updated at the review meetings. However, at some subcontractors, the reviews and documentation are not of the same high standard. Insufficient information is recorded. The learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity are not recorded in detail. This is an area for improvement identified in the self-assessment report.
13. Teaching and learning are good on the technical certificate component of the qualification. Semta collates and evaluates the teaching and learning judgements from Ofsted's inspection reports of the subcontracted colleges. The average inspection grade in engineering and manufacturing is good, with none less than satisfactory. The quality of key skills provision has improved greatly and is now outstanding. The development and assessment of learners' key skills have been subcontracted to a specialist provider. They are now completed in an average of 16 weeks compared with 40 weeks previously. On some parts of the programme, internal verification takes place at the end of the assessment process. Verifiers do not observe or give feedback during the period of assessment activities.
14. Semta is outstanding in the extent to which it meets the needs of employers. Semta carefully considers their needs and requirements while planning the training. Staff analyse the employers' needs in great detail and match these requirements with specifically tailored programmes. They provide learners with the skills that employers need to maintain the relevance and high quality of their workforce.
15. Staff are very effective in providing clear advice and guidance to learners and their employers on the suitability of a range of training programmes and how they will meet their needs. Arrangements for assessment are flexible. Learners receive very effective information, advice and guidance on employment and training. Learners benefit from the support they receive in order to achieve their potential and to overcome any barriers to learning such as underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills. Employers appoint mentors who support learners in the workplace helping them to develop appropriate skills and to make steady progress.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

16. Semta has a clear and challenging strategy for extending the provision to a wider range of companies. All staff are highly committed to this and are resolutely implementing the plans, while maintaining and improving the quality of the provision. Data are now used highly effectively to manage the provision. A range of performance indicators is used to monitor the performance of individual staff and of subcontractors. Performance data are analysed at staff meetings, problems are identified quickly and action is taken to bring about improvement.
17. The main board of Semta has oversight of the apprenticeship provision. Semta has recognised the need for a board of employers to provide governance of the apprenticeship service. Directors have now been appointed to the board and at the time of the inspection the first meeting was imminent.
18. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Up-to-date criminal record checks have been made of all staff and the freelance assessors. A central record is maintained. Semta ensures that the records of individual staff at the three main subcontractors have been checked. It also checks that safeguarding arrangements are in place at all of the college subcontractors. Employers are made aware of their responsibilities for the safeguarding of learners. Safeguarding is a standard item on the agenda of monthly training staff meetings and is discussed at the standardisation meetings of the freelance assessors. All staff and the assessors have undertaken very good training which has been reinforced by useful updates. A safeguarding improvement plan is in place, which clearly identifies actions, the person responsible for completing the action and a target date for completion. Learners are all questioned about safeguarding at each progress review meeting.
19. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Semta routinely collects and analyses equality and diversity statistics. They are regularly discussed at training team meetings. The data show a significant improvement in participation by under-represented groups. The proportion of women learners has increased from 2% to 6% over a three-year period. The proportion of new learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased from 3% to 5%. The figure for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities has increased from 2% to 13%. Targets for the current year are prominently displayed and are ambitious compared with the averages for learners in the metal industry sector. Semta staff have deliberately targeted schools with a high proportion of students from minority ethnic groups in recruitment activities. Women learners from Semta have actively promoted careers in the sector at open days. Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity which is further developed at each progress review meeting.
20. Users' views contribute effectively to the self-assessment. The views of learners are collected at three stages in their programme. An independent company conducts professional surveys of learners and employers using interviews. The

findings of all feedback are analysed and used to create an action plan for improvement. Semta staff constantly seek the views of users to improve their service. The most recent self-assessment report is based on the active involvement of all staff at each stage of the self-assessment process. Data are used effectively for self-assessment. Semta does not yet systematically seek the views of its subcontractors or involve them in the self-assessment process. Semta is not able to observe teaching and learning directly at college subcontractors, nor does it have access to their records. Instead, it carefully monitors the quality of teaching and learning from their published inspection reports. Observation of teaching and learning is underdeveloped at some subcontractors and insufficient sharing of good practice takes place.

21. The value for money of Semta's provision is outstanding. A high proportion of learners complete their qualification. Employers make substantial contributions to the total cost of their training. The value to the national economy when they are fully trained is high. The provider's model of delivery makes efficient use of existing specialist engineering resources in colleges.

Information about the inspection

22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's apprenticeship manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and data on learners and their achievement.
23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in the subject area the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Semta Apprenticeship Service

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	527	527
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	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	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
Quality of provision	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?	1	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3	
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?	1	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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