

Skills for Security

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 50192

Name of lead inspector: Jai Sharda HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Security House
Barbourne Road
Worcester
WR1 1RS

Telephone number: 08450 750 111

Information about the provider

1. Skills for Security is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, based in Worcester. Founded in January 2006, it is the skills and standards setting organisation for the private security sector. It has a contract with the Skills Funding Agency for the delivery of apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. At the time of the inspection, 239 learners were following programmes in security systems installation. Of these, 94 were following an intermediate level apprenticeship, 103 an advanced apprenticeship and 42 a Train to Gain programme. Inspectors sampled Skills for Security’s provision in health, public services and care, which consists mostly of learners following programmes in security guarding, but did not grade this provision separately. Inspectors did not inspect the small business administration provision.
2. Most learners work for small and medium-sized enterprises throughout England. The proportion of female learners and learners from a minority ethnic group is very small. Apprentices attend off-the-job training at the provider’s training centre in Birmingham or at a local college of further education. Assessors carry out assessment in the workplace every ten weeks.
3. The company employs 27 staff, 16 of whom have a direct responsibility for publicly funded training programmes. The Chief Executive Officer has overall management responsibility for all aspects of the company’s training. He reports to a board of directors. The operations manager has day-to-day responsibility for the apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. A team of seven assessors and internal verifiers supports her. Staff responsible for finance, personnel, business development and marketing support the training team.
4. The following organisations provide training for the technical certificate on behalf of the provider:
 - Basingstoke College
 - Bradford College
 - Preston College
 - Waltham Forest College
 - Uxbridge College
 - Dynamis Enterprises Ltd
 - SCL Training.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	120 learners 222 apprentices

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	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	
Construction, planning and the built environment	3

Overall effectiveness

5. Skills for Security is a satisfactory provider of work-based learning. Success rates for advanced apprentices are good, but intermediate level apprentices perform poorly, especially those aged 16 to 18. The company has worked hard to improve success rates. The data for 2010/11 show that success rates for all apprentices have improved to well above national rates.
6. Learners develop good occupational skills. Employers comment favourably on how well learners perform their work tasks. Many learners acquire increased responsibilities at work. They enjoy their course and develop good analytical and time-management skills.
7. On-the-job training is good. Learners receive good training from highly qualified company engineers in the workplace. However, learners do not receive sufficient opportunities during off-the-job sessions to apply the theory they have learned to practical work.
8. The coordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor. Assessors do not always know what learners have been studying at college. They do not link off-the-job training sufficiently with what learners are doing in the workplace. Learners rely too heavily on their assessor for guidance about the type of workplace evidence they should be gathering. Employers are insufficiently involved in planning training.

9. Assessors do not always set sufficiently detailed or challenging targets for learners. Learners do not receive sufficient guidance about what they have to do to achieve the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units. Too many learners do not make their planned progress.
10. Learners and employers benefit from the specialist subjects offered. The company has an effective online vacancy-matching service to support apprentice recruitment. The company designs its learning programmes in consultation with security industry employers.
11. Skills for Security's managers and board members work hard to maintain satisfactory standards. However, the company's data on apprenticeship success rates are inaccurate. Managers have not focused sufficiently on producing accurate data so that they can gain a better understanding of how well learners achieve.

Main findings

- Overall success rates for advanced apprentices are good. However, overall success rates for intermediate level apprentices are low and well below national rates. The proportion of intermediate learners who complete within the planned timescales is also low. Performance of learners aged 16 to 18 is particularly poor. Provisional data for 2010/11 indicate that success rates are now improving to above national rates for all apprentices.
- Learners make satisfactory progress. Advanced apprentices make good progress and reach appropriate industrial standards in their work. However, too few learners on intermediate apprenticeships make the progress necessary to complete their programme by the planned end date.
- Learners develop a range of good practical skills, which benefits their employer. Apprentices develop good skills in the workplace and demonstrate competence through a range of portfolio evidence. Many acquire increased responsibilities in the workplace. Learners enjoy their learning and develop good analytical and time-management skills that improve their employability prospects. At the end of their programme, learners are able to meet the standards required by the relevant industrial and awarding bodies.
- On-the-job training is good. Highly trained and experienced company engineers and technicians provide good quality workplace training. Learners are soon able to install a wide range of specialist security-related equipment. Experienced learners develop valuable specialist skills. However, the colleges delivering off-the-job training do not provide learners with sufficient opportunities to apply theoretical studies to practical work.
- The coordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor. Assessors do not have sufficient information about learners' progress in their off-the-job training. Learners rely too heavily on their assessor for guidance about the kind of workplace evidence that they should be gathering for their portfolio. Employers are insufficiently involved in planning training for individual learners.

- Target setting following progress reviews is often weak. Assessors do not set sufficiently clear or challenging targets. Learners often do not understand what they have to do to achieve particular units of their NVQ. Assessors do not always ensure that employers are fully involved in the target-setting process. Learners do not always receive sufficiently detailed and specific feedback from their assessor. Too many learners fail to make their planned progress.
- The range of provision is satisfactory in meeting the needs of users. Learners and employers benefit from the specialist pathways offered. The company has an effective online vacancy-matching service to support employers to recruit the most able candidates. Assessors develop good working relationships with employers. The provider considers the views of employers in the security sector when designing its training programmes.
- Skills for Security has a clear and well-structured strategic and operational planning process. Staff and board members contribute well to this process. Senior managers set challenging targets for the company's performance. The Chief Executive Officer recently implemented a significant restructuring of the company in order to allow a much sharper focus on enhancing the quality of the company's training provision.
- The company has comprehensive procedures for safeguarding learners. It has established an effective safeguarding committee and carried out an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check for all staff that require one. The company has three well-trained safeguarding officers. All staff have received appropriate training. Staff take swift action to resolve issues affecting learners' safety and well-being.
- The company has appropriate policies for equality and diversity, including a detailed and challenging equalities action plan. The equal opportunities committee regularly monitors the company's progress against this plan. Managers monitor the performance of different groups of learners well. Staff receive regular training. However, assessors do not use sufficiently contextualised resources to promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equalities during reviews.
- Skills for Security has well-established systems for collecting information from learners and employers. Feedback is carefully analysed to identify any trends or patterns. However, the provider does not tell users of the improvement actions it has taken following the analysis of their feedback.
- Self-assessment is generally inclusive and rigorous. Although the quality improvement plan is detailed, it does not cover all of the issues identified at the previous inspection. The self-assessment report correctly identified many of the strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors. However, the company failed to identify a significant area for improvement related to the poor success rates for learners on intermediate programmes.

What does Skills for Security need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates on intermediate apprenticeship programmes, particularly for learners aged 16 to 18, by identifying the reasons for poor performance and taking corrective actions.
- Make accurate evaluations about learners' performance by ensuring that success rate data are robust and capable of supporting judgements in the self-assessment report.
- Introduce an effective structure for planning assessments, including the coordination of on- and off-the-job training, and take steps to ensure that learners, employers and assessors are fully involved in this process.
- Provide training on target setting for assessors so that they are better able to set realistic and challenging targets in reviews to ensure that learners achieve within the planned period of study.
- Develop a range of approaches, including those based on the use of contextualised resources, to promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity throughout their programme.
- Provide clear and prompt feedback to learners and employers on the actions taken arising from the analysis of user views.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- making new friends at college
- working for an employer that treats them well
- gaining recognition for their skills and knowledge
- developing a good understanding of the industry
- learning on the job
- gaining practical knowledge
- the opportunity to gain qualifications that are valued in the industry
- small classes at the Birmingham Training Centre.

What learners would like to see improved:

- explanations of the evidence requirements for the NVQ units
- the slow pace of learning at college
- the standard of materials for college practical work
- the amount of practical work at college, so that learners have more opportunities to apply theory to practice
- the quality of practical facilities at the Birmingham Training Centre.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- learners growing in confidence and dealing well with customers
- learners making valuable contributions to the company
- learners quickly developing specialist knowledge that other staff respect.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the quality and frequency of feedback on learner progress
- the extent of their involvement in planning on-the-job training
- their involvement in assessing learners' work.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

12. Skills for Security has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Inspection grades are similar to those at the previous inspection. The overall provision remains satisfactory. Success rates are generally satisfactory. In-year success rates indicate that performance has improved significantly. Senior leaders provide clear strategic direction. A recent restructuring has helped to focus staff time and resources on improving the quality of training. Staff remain focused on meeting learners' needs. Learner feedback on the quality of provision is very positive.
13. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. The company makes good use of stakeholder feedback to improve provision. The quality improvement plan is realistic and monitored regularly. The self-assessment report contains appropriately evaluative language and uses robust evidence to support key judgements. However, the provider relied on inaccurate data on apprenticeship success rates for 2008/09 and 2009/10 and its generous self-assessment judgements about success rates receive little support from the available evidence. The self-assessment report correctly identified many of the strengths and areas for improvement. Inspectors gave similar grades to those in the self-assessment report for many aspects of provision, but they gave a lower grade for outcomes for learners and for capacity to improve.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

14. Overall success rates for advanced apprentices are good and well above national rates. The proportion of learners who complete within the planned period of study is also good. In-year data indicate that the provider is maintaining these good success rates in 2010/11. Overall success rates for intermediate level apprentices are low and well below national rates in 2008/09 and 2009/10 at around 60%, compared with a national rate of 80.5%. The proportion of intermediate learners who complete within the planned timescales is also low. The performance of learners aged 16 to 18 is particularly poor. The number of female learners and of those from a minority ethnic group is too small for meaningful analysis. In-year data indicate that success rates for intermediate level apprentices are improving to well above national rates. It is too soon, however, to judge whether this trend will continue. Learners' attendance at off-the-job training sessions is good.
15. Learners on advanced apprenticeships make good progress in meeting the relevant industrial standards during their programme. However, too few learners on intermediate apprenticeships make the progress necessary to complete their programme within the planned period of study. Learners are able to demonstrate work to the expected industrial and awarding body standards. All advanced apprentices currently on programme have previously completed an intermediate level apprenticeship with Skills for Security.

16. Learners develop good practical skills, which employers value. Those on the advanced apprenticeship in security installations are confident, able to deal with complex systems, rectify faults and communicate professionally with clients. Intermediate level apprentices develop good skills in the workplace and demonstrate competence through their portfolio evidence. Many acquire increased responsibilities in the workplace. Learners report that they enjoy their course and develop critical analysis and time-management skills that improve their employability prospects.
17. Learners report that they feel safe. They know whom to contact if they need to report a health and safety concern or if they were to feel unsafe. Learners are aware of their employment rights and responsibilities. Skills for Security staff make effective use of progress reviews to reinforce learners' understanding and awareness of workplace health and safety.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

18. On-the-job training is good. Very experienced company engineers and technicians deliver most of the workplace training. They tailor this training well to meet the specific needs of learners working in the specialist security systems sector. Learners are quickly able to take responsibility for installing cables, fire and intruder sensors and alarms. More experienced learners are encouraged to specialise and experienced colleagues will often consult them. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Many learners benefit from attendance at specialist courses delivered by manufacturers of security installation products. However, learners do not receive sufficient opportunities during off-the-job sessions to apply their theoretical studies to practical work.
19. The coordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor. Assessors are not in possession of information about learners' current progress in their off-the-job training. They rely heavily on gathering information from the learners themselves. Employers are insufficiently involved in the planning process and too many are unaware of the practical requirements necessary to meet apprenticeship competence criteria. Learners are over reliant on their assessor for guidance about evidence collection in the workplace. They are unable to identify easily the extent of their progress on their programme or to guide their employer effectively on the types of work they need to carry out to satisfy the qualification requirements.
20. Progress reviews are generally satisfactory. However, target setting resulting from reviews is often weak. Assessors do not always set sufficiently detailed or time-constrained targets. Learners do not receive sufficient guidance about what they have to do to achieve particular units. Employers are not always involved in the target-setting process. Assessors do not always provide sufficient constructive feedback to help learners progress.
21. Skills for Security's provision is satisfactory in meeting the needs and interests of learners. The range of provision is appropriate and meets the needs of the sector. Learners and employers benefit from the specialist pathways offered as

part of the qualification, such as intruder and fire detection systems. Many learners receive training and qualifications directly from the suppliers and manufacturers of specialist security equipment and techniques. The provider considers the views of employers in the security sector when designing or revising its range of training programmes.

22. Skills for Security has satisfactory partnerships with employers in the security industry. Assessors develop good working relationships with employers. The company has worked successfully with employers on an initiative to increase the number of young people joining an apprenticeship programme. The company's online vacancy-matching service is effective in aligning employers' needs with appropriately qualified and suitable apprentices. Skills for Security provides good support to employers who wish to develop and train their staff in specialist security industry skills and qualifications.
23. Learners receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. Skills for Security provides clear advice on careers, course content, unit criteria and modes of attendance at college. Assessors provide flexible assessment opportunities within a very supportive framework which includes out-of-hours contact with learners and personal advice and guidance. Initial assessment is effective in placing learners on a programme which matches their needs and abilities. Learners receive satisfactory additional support. However, Skills for Security does not always update assessors promptly enough when it identifies or amends learners' specific support needs.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

24. Skills for Security has a very clear and well-structured strategic and operational planning process which sets out detailed and comprehensive objectives. Staff and board members are fully involved in the strategic planning process. Company objectives and targets are challenging, realistic and time constrained. Targets clearly identify the actions that managers need to take to achieve the required objectives. A recent organisational restructure has helped the company to focus its provision more clearly on improving the quality of its training provision.
25. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The company has comprehensive and effective policies and procedures to ensure that learners remain safe. It has established a safeguarding committee which meets regularly to consider all aspects of safeguarding. All staff who require one have received an enhanced CRB check. The company's three safeguarding officers have received comprehensive training to help them carry out their role effectively. The company regularly reviews and updates its safeguarding policies. Managers, assessors and board members have a good understanding of safeguarding. All staff have received appropriate training in how to identify the signs of abuse and how to deal with a safeguarding disclosure. The provider has an effective logging and response system to record issues relating to safeguarding, safety and equality for learners. Staff take swift action to resolve issues affecting learners' safety and well-being. Learners have a well-developed understanding

of safeguarding issues. The company issues all learners with a card containing contact details for the company's designated safeguarding officers.

26. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The company has appropriate policies and procedures that cover the statutory requirements. However, learners receive insufficient information about some aspects of the company's equalities policies, particularly on disability. The equal opportunities committee meets regularly to monitor the detailed action plan. It effectively ensures that the company meets its obligations under equalities legislation. Staff receive regular training in equality and diversity. The company's initiatives to increase the number of females and those from minority ethnic groups have been only partially successful. Managers receive regular reports on the performance of different groups of learners, which they monitor effectively. Assessors do not use a sufficiently wide range of resources to promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equalities. Assessors use a standard bank of questions to test learners' knowledge, but they do not contextualise these questions sufficiently to help learners apply their understanding to the workplace.
27. Skills for Security has well-established systems for collecting information from learners during their programme. Feedback from learners is carefully analysed to identify any concerns. However, the provider does not inform learners of what actions it has taken to make improvements as a result of their feedback. An effective logging system is in place for learners to express individual concerns. The company also regularly gains the views of employers and takes appropriate actions when they raise concerns.
28. Self-assessment is a generally inclusive and rigorous process. The quality improvement plan is detailed and clearly identifies a range of improvement actions and appropriate timescales for their completion. However, the plan does not cover all of the issues identified at the previous inspection, which still require attention. Though many self-assessment judgements are accurate, the company failed to identify the poor performance of apprentices as a significant area for improvement. Some aspects of provision, such as teaching, learning and assessment, do not receive sufficient attention in the self-assessment report.
29. Skills for Security is committed to managing its available resources effectively, and provides satisfactory value for money. The company has focused well on reducing the number of learners who have exceeded their planned completion date. Specialist resources for learners are good. Staff are well qualified and have an appropriate teaching or assessor qualification or are working towards one.

Information about the inspection

30. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's operations supervisor, 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 funding body, 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.
31. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls 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 assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in two of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Skills for Security

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	342	342
Part-time learners		
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?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>		
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?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>		
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?	3	
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?	3	
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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Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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