

Serco Vocational Training

Employer

Inspection dates		28 January–1 February 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Too few learners make good or better progress on their apprenticeship. Assessments do not always link on- and off-the-job training closely enough to the learners' programmes.
- Learning reviews for too many learners do not take place frequently enough. Some of the targets set are not sufficiently demanding, and they are not always understood or recalled by learners or their managers.
- The thorough initial assessment does not include all apprentices. The English and mathematics skills of existing employees are assessed when they join Serco, however their support needs are not always fully identified at the start of the programme.
- The apprentices' line managers are not involved enough in planning and coordinating learning activities.
- Too many learners do not have a full understanding of their apprenticeship programme, the progress they are making or what they need to do to improve their performance.
- Quality improvement actions, including the self-assessment process and the use of management information, are not yet sufficiently well developed.
- Learners' understanding and use of equality and diversity are not fully promoted or reinforced.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The completion of apprenticeships in engineering is good.
- Learners develop good technical skills through working in good-quality, well-equipped working environments.
- Learners benefit from experienced and supportive assessors who are flexible and show a high level of commitment.
- Good leadership and strategic management give the company clear vision and direction.
- The range of programmes offered is good and meets the diverse and developing needs of the company well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the coordination of on-the-job training with the apprenticeship programme by regularly involving learners' line managers more at all stages of the qualification.
- Assess all learners' current key and functional skill levels by using appropriate assessments to identify fully any individual skill development needs.
- Improve the quality of apprentice reviews by recording the detail of discussions and setting clear, measurable targets to drive progress towards completion of the programme. Make sure copies of reviews are routinely supplied to apprentices and employers, and all targets are discussed at subsequent reviews.
- Fully implement plans to eradicate poor assessment practice and improve the target setting on assessment. Standardise assessment across the provision to ensure it is of consistently high quality for all apprentices.
- Develop formal quality assurance arrangements with further education colleges to ensure that Serco Vocational Training (SVT) managers are kept fully informed of any matters affecting apprentices and have a clear understanding of their attendance, timekeeping and progress.
- Increase the effectiveness of discussions on equality and diversity in teaching, learning and reviews by making them more relevant to learners and linking them more closely to possible progression opportunities.
- Use the management information and data collected more effectively to review performance and learners' progress, and to inform management decisions.
- Fully implement quality improvement arrangements, and further develop the self-assessment process to ensure quality improvement actions are effective and clearly linked to the apprenticeship programme.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall success rates for engineering apprentices are good. In 2011/12, three of the five apprentices successfully completed their qualification. SVT data indicate that all six apprentices successfully achieved their apprenticeship in 2012/13. However, the vast majority of apprentices are based in other subject areas and have only been recruited onto programmes within the past nine months. At the time of the inspection no other learners had completed their apprenticeships. ▪ The majority of learners are now making at least the progress expected, but for a small minority the late appointment of an assessor resulted in slow progress considering the amount of time spent on the programme so far. Some learners are not fully aware of the progress they are making or what is required to ensure they do not fall behind. ▪ SVT does not currently evaluate the extent to which individual learners or specific groups of learners benefit from the learning programmes. Management information regarding the progress and achievement of different groups of learners across the business is not analysed, although inspectors found that in some locations apprentices receive a better quality learning experience than in other settings. SVT is aware of the inconsistency in standards and is recruiting new staff and providing additional staff development to improve the situation. ▪ Many apprentices demonstrate and apply the good technical skills they develop through working in good, well-resourced working environments. In the best cases, highly skilled co-workers are sharing their knowledge and experience, motivating and encouraging apprentices. Some engineering apprentices develop additional personal and social skills by becoming apprentice 	

ambassadors, by working with children in a local primary school through the Imagineering Foundation and by taking part in national forums for young people. Progression opportunities for engineering apprentices are good, with one apprentice moving on to a university course later this year fully sponsored by SVT.

- The development of skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory for most learners. Established employees received literacy and numeracy screening when recruited and, in most cases, this provides sufficient information for assessors to plan learning. However, where the employee has been in post for many years the screening may be out of date and, for older learners, areas requiring support may not be identified. The initial assessment of recently recruited learners identifies their level of literacy and numeracy, but this information is not always effectively linked to individual learning plans.
- Most learners have an appropriate understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Learners working in situations where they are exposed to high risks have a high awareness of the importance of safe working practices and the routine use of personal protective equipment. Other learners' understanding is developed through using risk assessments and good questioning from assessors.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. This reflects the judgements in outcomes for learners, where learners develop skills and knowledge well but are only making satisfactory or, in some cases, slow progress in their qualification.
- Support for learners is generally good, with learners working in high-quality workplaces with good opportunities for skills development. The employer has high expectations for learners, both in terms of the standard of work and the opportunities provided for further training and development via the apprenticeship programme. However, a small minority of learners is making slow progress and a few lack sufficient time at work to complete their assignments.
- Teaching and learning are mostly effective. Trainers and assessors have good occupational experience and provide effective training and coaching, using resources well to support learning. Many learners demonstrate good independent learning skills, take initiative to research for knowledge and think more about their working practices and how they can be improved. However, in engineering, some workplace learning is poorly planned, and in administration the coordination of employers' training with the apprenticeship is ineffective.
- Assessment is generally thorough, with good short-term action planning, a suitable range of assessment methods and effective use of the e-portfolio. Assessors demonstrate good flexibility in planning visits to meet learners' needs.
- Learners have a good understanding of the assessment process and the majority of learners know what they need to do to progress. They receive good-quality verbal feedback from assessors, which is detailed and specific. Assessors are now working well with learners, after a delay at the start of some apprenticeships. In engineering, there is some poor practice at one site, including poor target setting for assessment.
- Where initial assessment takes place, it is generally effective. Learners' jobs are carefully matched to the appropriate qualification units and levels. New employees' skills in mathematics and English are assessed at the start of programme, but in administration the diagnostic assessment does not fully identify individual skill development needs.
- The reviews of learners' progress in their qualification require improvement. The reviews generally focus well on assessment, with good discussions around evidence collection and action planning. However, reviews for many learners have not been frequent enough and targets are sometimes unspecific, lack challenge and are poorly recorded. Reviews for the small number of engineers are weak. Line manager involvement is often good, but insufficient for some learners.
- The development of key skills is effective where learners have commenced them. They work on appropriate work-related projects and access suitable resources to support learning and prepare

for assessment. However, the introduction of key skills has been delayed for many learners and a small minority does not have a sufficient understanding of key skills.

- The provision of information, advice and guidance requires improvement. At the start of programme, learners receive full information about appropriate qualifications and levels to meet their job roles. However, although learners' job-related training needs are effectively reviewed by line managers, the results do not inform apprenticeship reviews to plan and record possible additional training and learning during the course of the programme.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in learning requires improvement. A minority of learners have an effective discussion with their assessor to check their understanding of aspects such as discrimination, but the understanding of most learners is not sufficiently checked. Leaders rely too much on learners getting their own information about employers' policies and procedures.

Engineering Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Six apprentices have completed their apprenticeship and all were successful; they have since all gained employment with another international aerospace company. All current apprentices are making suitable progress and are on track to complete on time. Apprentices benefit from particularly good resources in the workplace, enabling them to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills. They work on complex aeronautical, electronics and maintenance tasks, many of which are safety critical.
- Teaching, training and assessment require improvement. Planning and delivery of training vary significantly between sites. On the better sites highly committed managers and trainers deliver high-quality theoretical and practical training, but on other sites training and assessment are poorly planned. On a major site with a significant number of apprentices, no manager has clear responsibility or ownership of the apprentice programme and some apprentices struggle to find suitable tasks that will help them to progress towards their qualification.
- SVT managers and staff are highly committed to the programme and have high expectations of apprentices. Apprentices develop very high levels of practical skills and technical knowledge. They demonstrate very good personal, communication and customer care skills. Some learners communicate with military officers, government officials and senior managers on a regular basis; others work with overseas military personnel from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Some National Vocational Qualification assessment and tracking of the apprentice programme is poor. Targets set on assessment are weak, unspecific and not routinely followed up on the following visit. There are examples of poor assessment practice on one site. Assessors have very good occupational skills and knowledge, and a good rapport with learners and employers. Detailed plans are in place to improve both poor practice and target setting, but these are recently introduced and have not yet been fully implemented. Following the appointment of an experienced internal quality assurer, the new internal verification process appears good. However, it is in the early stages of implementation.
- Apprentice reviews are weak. Most reviews are superficial, lack detail and fail to record the discussions that take place between the apprentice and the reviewer. Employers are present and actively involved in most reviews. Until very recently neither apprentices nor employers received copies of reviews, and had to rely on verbal feedback. Targets on reviews are too vague, do not inform apprentices and employers what is required to progress the learning programme, and are not revisited at the next review. Equality and diversity and safeguarding are not sufficiently reinforced through reviews, and some make no reference to these areas.
- Support for apprentices is good. Recruitment and selection processes are thorough and any learning or personal support is provided promptly and effectively. Information, advice and guidance are good.

- Communication between further education colleges and SVT is insufficient. Colleges do not routinely report absence, timekeeping or progress information, and managers on several sites receive little or no feedback on college activities or the progress of apprentices.

Business administration Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- There are 669 learners following a business administration apprenticeship programme. Over 100 learners are following a level 2 programme and 562 learners are following a level 3 programme. The majority of learners started their apprenticeship within the last six months. Most learners make at least satisfactory progress and develop a wide range of work-related and personal skills. Some learners make slower progress. The learners' current key and functional skills are not identified sufficiently well, and too few employers are involved in the review process to plan on-the-job training.
- Some aspects of teaching, learning and assessment are effective, but there are also weaknesses, particularly in the review process and the coordination of off-the-job and on-the-job training. Many assessors make insufficient links between on-the-job training and the learner's programme. The planning by assessors is not good enough to enable the learner to develop new and higher-level skills in the workplace that contribute to their qualification. Learners' workplace environments are of high quality. The majority of learners receive good quality on-the-job training at the workplace.
- Support for learners is good. Assessors visit their learners frequently and are accessible by email or telephone between visits. Assessors are appropriately experienced with good knowledge of the sector. Employers are genuinely keen to help learners succeed in their qualification. Many allocate time for the learners at work to complete their programme tasks.
- Assessment practice is thorough. Most assessors make effective use of coaching skills to encourage the learner to identify and reflect on the development of their skills and knowledge. Assessors use an appropriate range of assessment methods to check and confirm learning. Verbal feedback to learners about completed work is, in most cases, detailed and helpful. Target setting is generally adequate, although some targets set by a few assessors are not sufficiently challenging or clear for some learners. Not all assessors routinely develop learners' English skills as part of their programme.
- The initial assessment process is adequate overall. All learners undertake an appropriate induction at the start of their programme. This includes an occupational skill scan, which is used to match closely the level and content of the qualification to the learner's job role. This aspect meets the needs of the learner and the employer well. Not all learners undertake a literacy and numeracy assessment at the start of their programme to identify accurately their current levels of attainment and where they might require support. Some learners have an insufficient understanding of their learning programme and, in particular, are unclear about the components of the framework and what is required of them to achieve an apprenticeship qualification.
- Promotion of equality and diversity requires some improvement. Learners receive information about equality and diversity during their programme induction. However, many learners have little recall of this. Some assessors conduct effective discussions about equality and diversity issues with learners during assessment and review sessions to test their knowledge. However, these discussions are often superficial. Some assessors rely too much on learners undertaking equality and diversity training as part of their on-the-job training, and do not reinforce aspects of equality and diversity enough to challenge perceptions and deepen learners' knowledge and understanding.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and strategic management are good. Senior managers have researched the existing apprenticeships in detail and have a very clear vision of the future, which is articulated well in the strategic planning framework. Senior staff have a good understanding of the future direction of the provision and what needs to be completed to achieve the strategic aims.
- The rationalisation of all the apprenticeship provision to be coordinated centrally is under way and well managed. Recruitment of new apprentices is well planned and over 700 new apprentices have been signed up, including new members of staff as well as existing employees.
- Some observations of reviews are complete, and observations of teaching and learning are planned but had not taken place at the time of the inspection. Contact has been made with the four subcontractors to quality assure their work, but this has not yet started.
- Quality assurance requires improvement. The quality standards manager has put into place a framework which identifies the roles, responsibilities and timescale for the quality assurance process. Although new documentation is being introduced, initial results indicate that this documentation is not sufficient to report learners' progress or to identify what remains to be completed. Existing individual learning plans are incomplete and the quality assurance process did not identify this.
- The resources to meet the needs of the rapid expansion of the apprenticeship programme are not fully in place, with vacancies for assessors yet to be filled and several assessors only recently appointed. A functional skills quality assurer has been appointed but was not in post at the time of the inspection. These issues were correctly identified in the provision risk assessments, which show that six weeks prior to inspection the majority of the provision was at medium to high risk.
- The use of the management information system is underdeveloped and fails to meet the current needs of the provision. Some staff have a good understanding of the e-portfolio system, but this is not sufficiently well established to provide all staff with the information they require.
- The self-assessment process is not sufficiently inclusive, with some staff not contributing to it or even being aware of its existence, and processes to collect learners' views are underdeveloped. The self-assessment report is insufficiently judgemental and does not identify some of the key areas of concern.
- The range of programmes offered by SVT is good, and expanding to meet the needs of learners and the company better. The information, advice and guidance offered are generally adequate to meet the needs of learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. It is good in some parts of the provision, with learners and staff having a good understanding of issues. In other parts it is limited to employees' rights and responsibilities, with little understanding of broader issues.
- While data relating to the recruitment of employees with respect to diversity are monitored centrally, data relating to the recruitment and performance of different groups of learners are not routinely collated or analysed within the provision for apprenticeships. Performance gaps between groups of learners are not identified.
- SVT meets all the statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. The designated safeguarding officer is suitably trained, and all staff have received appropriate training to raise their awareness. Criminal Records Bureau checks are complete and maintained on a central list. However, the focus for safeguarding is based at the Taunton office to which all issues are ultimately referred. Regions do not have their own safeguarding officers, and contact with local safeguarding boards is restricted to the Taunton office.
- Learners have a contact telephone number through an agency that provides extensive support contacts for staff. However, learners are not provided with contact numbers for local agencies dealing with alcohol, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and other social problems. Staff at SVT have gone out of their way to assist some learners with particular personal issues that impeded their progress towards achieving their qualifications.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Serco Vocational Training**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Engineering	3
Administration	3

[illegible]

Additional information

Serco is a large national company providing government services in a wide range of industries including health, education, transport, immigration services, science, leisure, defence and custodial care. Serco Vocational Training manages and delivers the apprenticeship programme across the country from its sites in Taunton, Farnborough and Leicester.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Nigel Evans HMI
-----------------------	-----------------

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Internal Quality Assurer for Contact Centres (South) as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



Learner View is a new website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk or if you have any questions about Learner View please email Ofsted at:

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and provider inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013