

Skills Team Ltd

Independent learning provider

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|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Inspection dates | | 17–21 June 2013 |
| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Requires improvement-3 |
| | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory-3 |
| 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:

- Overall apprenticeship success rates are not consistently high and too many apprentices on management and early years programmes take longer than expected to complete all their qualifications.
- Programmes are not sufficiently individualised or challenging. All learners have the same timeframe to complete the standard level of qualifications in an apprenticeship framework regardless of their previous experience and achievements.
- Apprentices' supervisors and line managers are not sufficiently involved in agreeing what vocational and/or personal skills and competencies learners have, or need to develop, as they progress through the programmes.
- Learners who need to improve their English and mathematics are not always given enough training to help them pass functional skills tests or to develop their skills to a higher level.
- Managers do not use the system of observing teaching and assessments sufficiently well to ensure the quality of learning is of a consistently high standard.
- Managers and team leaders do not track closely enough the progress each learner makes while on programme.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The vast majority of apprentices on information and communication technology (ICT) programmes successfully complete a range of industry-standard qualifications.
- The quality of training in the workshop sessions for all subjects is good. Learners enjoy developing new skills and learning concepts that they can use in their workplaces.
- Trainers and assessors have high levels of knowledge and expertise in their vocational subject areas and provide learners and employers with relevant and insightful information.
- Skills Team Ltd (Skills Team) has made a positive start to changing the training programmes offered from workplace qualifications to apprenticeships through improved methods of working for staff.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Train and update all observers so that the evaluations of training, learning and assessment focus more on the impact on learners and learning rather than the training or assessment process.
- Ensure that tracking and monitoring systems enable team leaders, managers and employers to understand the overall progress apprentices are making throughout their programme, so they complete within the timeframes expected.
- Change the current method of assessing learners at the start of their programmes in order to find out more accurately their levels of skills and understanding; ensure apprentices are on the right level of qualifications and make better use of the information to plan and set targets for learning activities which will provide apprentices with appropriate support and/or challenge.
- Teach assessors and trainers how to stretch and stimulate more capable learners through differentiated and extension activities that enable them to work more productively at their own pace.
- Ensure the apprentice review process takes a more holistic view of apprentices' progress so that they, their employers, trainers and assessors are clear what has been achieved, what skills they still need to develop and that suitably challenging targets are agreed.
- Review the teaching of functional skills and ensure the content of English and mathematics when taught relates more closely to the topics and subject matter of the relevant apprenticeship programmes.
- Develop more formal and systematic arrangements for self-assessment and improvement planning by training staff on how to use and interpret data, and involve them more closely in assessing the performance of their own areas.
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of trainers and assessors to promote equality and diversity more naturally and sensitively when training, assessing and reviewing apprentices.

Inspection judgements

| Outcomes for learners | Requires improvement |
|--|----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for learners require improvement and although Skills Team made a successful start in delivering apprenticeship programmes in 2010/11, changes in apprenticeship frameworks and the design of the pilot programme for management learners resulted in lower than expected success rates. Managers have taken appropriate action and success rates for ICT for users and team leading are improving. Skills Team's data indicate these success rates are now well above national averages. ▪ Success rates for early years apprentices are not consistently high. The vast majority of advanced apprentices in the last two years successfully complete their qualifications, but fewer intermediate apprentices have been successful in the current year compared to last year. The first groups of apprentices on ICT for practitioners and customer services have not yet completed their programmes so it is too early to judge how successful these programmes are. ▪ Too many apprentices make slow progress, taking longer than expected to complete their programmes. The first group of management apprentices has taken twice as long as expected. A significant number of early years apprentices will not complete within their planned end dates as they have failed to pass some of their functional skills tests. ▪ Unemployed learners on short courses on team leading, preparing to work in care and preparing to work in business nearly always achieve their qualifications. Following the courses, learners | |

make reasonable progress and just under a fifth gain employment and a slightly smaller number continue to other training or education.

- Variations exist between the outcomes for different groups of apprentices, although Skills Team's data indicate these gaps are reducing. In 2011/12 older apprentices were not as successful as younger apprentices and male apprentices took longer to complete their qualifications than female apprentices. Apprentices from minority ethnic groups have higher success rates than White British learners.
- All learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. Early years apprentices understand the importance of working with children's parents or carers.; ICT apprentices feel confident in making presentations about processes and systems they develop; team leading apprentices communicate more effectively with their teams; customers service apprentices are now more conscious of the tone of their voice and body language when dealing with customers in difficult situations; unemployed learners are aware of the need for good time keeping and appearance when applying for jobs.
- Many ICT apprentices progress within their companies and take on enhanced or additional responsibilities as their technical knowledge and skills develop. Several early years intermediate apprentices progressed to an advanced apprenticeship programme and one is now independently researching practice about children with special educational needs. Team leading and management apprentices in a large London-based transportation organisation are gaining confidence and are starting to feel empowered to make changes and improvements.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement and this contributes to variations in success rates across the subject areas, levels of qualifications and age groups. The apprentices and unemployed learners enjoy their learning, especially the good vocational workshops, but specific aspects of assessment, progress reviews and the teaching of functional skills are not sufficiently robust.
- Well-structured workshops provide learners with opportunities to develop a good understanding of the theoretical aspects of their subject area and allow them to practise new skills in a supportive environment. Attendance rates at workshops are high. Apprentices gain from being able meet their peers from different departments and other employers, to share issues and exchange experiences. Planning of additional activities for more able learners in workshops is underdeveloped.
- Trainers, assessors and support staff have responded positively to the changes and challenges of delivering apprenticeship programmes. They make good use of their own occupational and vocational knowledge and skills to enhance the learning experience for learners. All staff encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and assessments. Many apprentices improve their study skills with suitable access to computers, textbooks and hand outs provided by the trainers.
- Initial assessments provide a basic screening of apprentices' starting points and previous qualifications and experience. However, trainers and assessors do not use this information to plan individualised programmes. Too many intermediate apprentices undertake functional skills at level 1, as specified in their frameworks, when they are more than capable of undertaking a level 2.
- Assessment of apprentices' work is generally rigorous and meets the expected standards. However, written feedback is not always clear on how apprentices can further develop their skills and knowledge. Workplace assessments are not always frequent or challenging enough to ensure the management, early years and computer systems apprentices make appropriate progress.
- Skills Team has good and productive working relationships with employers and is a preferred training provider for many. However, apprentices' supervisors and line managers are not

sufficiently involved in discussing apprentices' progress in terms of what they are achieving and what competencies they still need to develop.

- Skills Team's management information system provides very detailed and useful reports, but it does not provide team leaders, managers and employers with a simple and clear view of the progress apprentices are making. Trainers and assessors do not always have information presented in accessible formats that ensure they provide appropriate and timely support when it is necessary.
- The training and preparation for apprentices who need additional help with functional skills are not sufficient, particularly for childcare apprentices. Assessors and trainers do not routinely promote high standards of English and mathematics or reinforce the need for functional skills within their subject areas. Trainers do not routinely correct errors in spelling or grammar in unemployed learners' workbooks.
- Apprentices and unemployed learners have a basic, and sometimes good, understanding of equality and diversity. However, trainers and assessors do not naturally discuss the topic when opportunities arise. Diversity themes are not incorporated into workshops, sessions or progress reviews.

Early years and playwork

Apprenticeships Employability

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment in childcare require improvement and this is reflected in the variations in overall success rates during the last two years. Skills Team's data indicate that advanced apprentices are currently achieving at a rate above national averages, whilst intermediate apprentices are not performing as well.
- Apprentices thoroughly enjoy their learning and progress well within the workshop sessions, gaining a good understanding of the professional language and skills required to work with children and their parents/carers in the wide range of settings found in childcare. Attendance at training sessions is good. Unemployed learners gain an excellent insight into working in care and are highly motivated by the course.
- Trainers plan workshops well and with good attention to matching the level of work to the individual needs of learners. Group profiles contain pertinent information about apprentices' and unemployed learners' abilities and personal support needs. Trainers make good use of questioning techniques to stretch and challenge all learners.
- Apprentices receive good personal support and encouragement from the childcare team. The delivery team supports apprentices well outside lessons through timely meetings, telephone calls and emails. Apprentices appreciate this support, particularly those who have English as a second or third language. Skills Team is able to offer appropriate voluntary placements to unemployed learners if they are interested in working in the childcare sector.
- Feedback on assessments of apprentices' practice in the workplace and of all learners' theory-based assignments does not always encourage apprentices and learners to produce work to the highest standard of which they are capable. Assessors focus too much on just achieving the standards specified rather than further developing apprentices' skills and knowledge. Workplace assessments are not consistently timely and some apprentices remain on the programme for too long.
- Reviews of progress are not always effective. Not all apprentices are aware of whether they are ahead or behind where they should be and what they need to do to complete their qualifications. Employers are also unclear of what progress apprentices are making.
- The teaching of functional skills, English and mathematics is unsatisfactory. Initial assessments do not provide enough information about apprentices' training needs. Insufficient training takes place before apprentices attempt the functional skills tests and too many failed their

mathematics test at the first attempt. Skills Team has introduced additional lessons on Saturdays, but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. Assessors and trainers do not routinely promote the need for good English and mathematics in childcare.

- Information, advice and guidance are insufficient for many apprentices. Although several apprentices receive appropriate information about progression opportunities, too many apprentices who appear uncertain about their future in the childcare sector receive little support and sometimes inappropriate guidance on their options.
- Trainers promote equality and diversity well in lessons and apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of discrimination and inclusion. One learner explained that to her equality meant welcoming all parents and children into the nursery regardless of their backgrounds and personal beliefs and diversity as using what each parent and child brought to extend the knowledge of all and to develop respect for others.

ICT for practitioners and ICT for users

Apprenticeships

Good

- Training, learning and assessment are good, and the high success rate for intermediate apprenticeships in ICT for users reflects this. All apprentices are making good progress towards completion of their qualifications, although few ICT practitioners have completed so far. The training matches each individual's work role well and employers identify the benefits to their business of industry-standard training providing up-skilling and re-skilling for their employees.
- Training sessions are well planned, interesting and motivate apprentices; trainers have very good industry knowledge and experience, promoting good standards of skills development. Trainers routinely make effective use of technology in sessions to stimulate and enhance apprentices' understanding; they demonstrate spreadsheet formulae interactively in 'what if' situations. In computer system sessions, trainers demonstrate advanced features interactively, enabling apprentices to see the effects of component interchange.
- Apprentices participate fully and with interest in sessions, demonstrating confidence when using software applications and computer systems. In better sessions, trainers regularly check apprentices' progress. However, in a small number of sessions the use of non-directed questioning does not involve all apprentices, restricting the trainers' abilities to check understanding.
- Training resources for computing are good, with portable computer networks installed on employers' premises to provide workplace training. In a practical training session, apprentices created live computer networks using binary addressing to embed sub-networks, demonstrating high level technical skills with confidence. Apprentices receive appropriate instruction on relevant aspects of health and safety, conducting risk assessments to identify potential risks and hazards.
- Support for apprentices is good, with trainers and assessors giving freely of their time to provide additional support. Apprentices receive good advice and guidance on their programme of study. Apprentices' starting points are effectively assessed on entry to identify where additional support is required, and monitored closely to assess progress. However, employers do not routinely receive on-programme information about apprentices' progress or agree their developmental needs.
- Assessments are well organised and rigorous, with helpful follow-up sessions giving suitable feedback. Assessors adopt a flexible approach to workplace assessment, allowing apprentices to demonstrate their skills to the best of their ability. At reviews, clear measurable targets are set to provide continuity of development between visits. However, on computer systems programmes, insufficient workplace assessments take place for apprentices, with too many

assessments carried out in the training centre. This limits the opportunities to contextualise assessment to the work environment.

- Appropriate assessment and successful completion of functional skills to a good standard increase apprentices' employability. Apprentices' written work is generally of a good standard, with mathematics embedded in the subject training. However, the promotion of English is insufficient to support the further development of employability skills or help apprentices achieve their full potential.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Apprentices work well and respectfully with colleagues, sharing ideas and helping each other. However, Skills Team does not actively promote equality and diversity in training and review sessions to help apprentices to understand the wider and diverse needs of the different customers they will encounter at work.

Business management

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement to ensure the low success rates for management programmes improve and the increases made to the team leading success rates continue.
- Good and well-structured workshops enable apprentices to reflect on specific workplace issues with a fresh perspective. Apprentices develop increased confidence in their managerial styles and implement techniques such as project management and setting and monitoring of individual targets. One learner describes the learning of management theory as leading to 'epiphany moments' which have resulted in increased personal and team efficiencies.
- Well-qualified trainers with relevant occupational experience, with many having held senior management positions, use their skills to enhance apprentices' knowledge and illustrate learning points in the context of apprentices' job roles. Apprentices develop a broader understanding of the application of management theories in workplaces, such as dealing with difficult situations and delegating tasks and responsibilities.
- Appropriately qualified assessors use relevant occupational experience effectively. Apprentices generally find it easy to contact their assessors for guidance if necessary. Skills Team meets the employers' business needs and apprentices' shift patterns well with dedicated assessors working unsocial hours to assess night shift workers. However, these assessment visits are not frequent enough and Skills Team relies on learners being suitably self-motivated to make good progress on their own without regular visits.
- Trainers and assessors do not use initial assessments adequately to plan and set target dates and ensure that the optional units and programme duration meet apprentices' needs and aspirations. Targets in apprentices' learning plans and reviews are not sufficiently personalised or time bound to help apprentices make good progress.
- The majority of apprentices receive relevant and clear feedback on how to progress and what actions they need to take to improve. Discussions with apprentices' line managers at reviews of progress are insufficient to ensure realistic targets are set, to identify opportunities for further development of workplace skills or to agree suitable assessment opportunities.
- The development of apprentices' functional skills, including English, mathematics and ICT, is insufficient. Apprentices complete practice tests papers, but this process does not ensure that they have the skills necessary to pass first time. Assessors and trainers do not reinforce the development of English and mathematics as a core and vital managerial skill.
- Too many apprentices do not receive appropriate advice and guidance. One large employer decided that all team leaders must undertake a team leading apprenticeship. It is unclear whether these apprentices value the opportunity to develop their managerial skills. The lack of

personalised advice and guidance affects their motivation and desire to complete their qualifications.

- The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, assessments and reviews requires improvement. The main focus is on apprentices understanding their employers' policies. Trainers do not encourage apprentices to consider how policies impact on the workplace or broaden apprentices' wider understanding so they can challenge unacceptable behaviours.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement as the recent developments have not yet led to raising outcomes for all learners or eliminating the inconsistency between good and less effective practice in training, learning and assessment. Leaders and managers have concentrated on improving learners' experiences while in training, with much commitment, and made several changes to the structure of the programmes. Management learners starting in the current year are on an improved programme.
- The positive change in culture and work practices arising from delivering more apprenticeships has raised expectations among trainers and assessors who now have higher aspirations for their learners. However, not all trainers and assessors have the confidence or competencies yet to accommodate the full range of requirements of apprenticeship programmes.
- Actions to improve the quality of apprenticeships have been appropriate, but Skills Team does not always set specific measures for success in order to judge how effective their actions are. The introduction of additional training sessions for childcare learners is addressing a current problem, but managers have not fully analysed all the problems. There are still too many areas for improvement in functional skills.
- The observation system used to assess the quality of training, learning and assessment requires improvement. Observations are starting to move away from assessing the processes; trainers and assessors now focus more on learners' experiences and the learning taking place. This provides trainers and assessors with clearer measures of performance and areas for development. However, insufficient training for observers and updating of skills for the core observation team have limited the effectiveness and consistency of the observation processes.
- Continuous professional development, arising from observations, is timely and linked closely to performance management and agreeing suitable improvement goals. Performance management arrangements are sound and help staff to improve their work in a supportive manner.
- The self-assessment report accurately identifies the overall strengths and areas for development. The process involves staff appropriately in reviewing their achievements and areas for improvement. The self-assessment report does not identify clearly enough the priorities for improving training, learning and assessment, and it does not have definite targets and measures to evaluate effectiveness. Staff do not use data and management information sufficiently well to monitor trends in performance, to understand variations in achievements of different groups and to evaluate the impact on learners of improvements made.
- Partnership working to meet the needs and interests of the local community and employers is good. The commercial team responds enthusiastically to working with employers and other partners such as local colleges and the borough. Skills Team has developed strong working relationships with employers and provides suitable apprenticeships and bespoke courses; these meet employers' priorities and circumstances, providing good support at highly unsociable hours.
- At programme level, not all trainers and assessors promote equality and an appreciation of diversity effectively. In childcare, promotion is good and goes beyond specific requirements of the qualifications, but in the programme areas of ICT and management there is not enough attention to ensuring learners understand equality and diversity beyond rights and responsibilities. There has not been suitable training and updating of trainers and assessors;

they do not have the confidence to capitalise on opportunities to integrate equality aspects when assessing or training.

- Skills Team meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of learners and attention to health and safety is good. There are suitable arrangements for staff on lone and unsociable working. Basic training for staff is appropriate, but managers do not check rigorously enough that staff achieve the deadlines set for update training. Levels of understanding of trainers and assessors in different areas are too varied. The ethos of respect and mutual support is highly positive and instances of harassment are very rare and promptly dealt with.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Skills Team Ltd

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

| Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Grade |
|---|----------|
| Early years and playwork | 3 |
| ICT for practitioners | 2 |
| ICT for users | 2 |
| Business management | 3 |

Provider details

| Skills Team Ltd | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Type of provider | Independent learning provider |
| Age range of learners | 16+ |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | Full-time: 768 |
| | Part-time: 160 |
| Managing Director | Sally Tate |
| Date of previous inspection | February 2009 |
| Website address | www.skillsteam.com |

| Provider information at the time of the inspection | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-----|----------|-----|---------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| Main course or learning programme level | Level 1 or below | | Level 2 | | Level 3 | | Level 4 and above | |
| | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships) | | | | | | | | |
| Full-time | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| Part-time | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | | |
| | 7 | 170 | 0 | 59 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Number of employability learners | 46 | | | | | | | |
| Funding received from | Skills Funding Agency (SFA) | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ none | | | | | | | |

Additional socio-economic information

Skills Team is a privately-owned training company, formed in 2006 and operating from offices in Hammersmith, London. Skills Team has gone through a significant number of changes in the last few years, shifting from Train to Gain provision to apprenticeships and employability programmes. In December 2010, Skills Team acquired a training company that specialises in early years and playwork. In 2012, Skills Team stopped offering qualifications in health and social care but continues to deliver programmes in childcare, ICT, management, business administration and customer services. Provision funded by the Skills Funding Agency accounts for just under half of Skills Team's business. The rest of the business consists of training programmes delivered on behalf of further education colleges including the College of North West London.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Joy Montgomery HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Managing Director 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>

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