

# Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		11–15 November 2013
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

## Summary of key findings for learners

### This provider is good because:

- The large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications with most of them succeeding within the planned time.
- Apprentices develop good vocational and employability skills that help them to do their jobs well and make good progress.
- Good coaching and training challenge and engage learners, enabling them to achieve their potential.
- Learners are motivated to succeed by committed training advisers who have high expectations of them.
- Learners develop good independent learning skills through a wide range of well-planned assessment methods.
- Very effective performance management arrangements ensure that Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited's (Sysco's) staff maintain high standards in their work.
- Rigorous quality monitoring procedures quickly identify issues and inform timely actions that lead to improvements in the provision.

### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Employers and workplace mentors are not sufficiently involved in reviewing learners' progress and in planning training and assessment.
- Apprentices in health and social care, and information and communication technology (ICT) who are not confident in using English and mathematics do not receive enough training and support to improve these skills.
- Not all training advisers are sufficiently skilled at reinforcing or promoting equality and diversity or safeguarding themes during training, assessment and reviews.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that employers and workplace mentors are fully involved in planning and reviewing apprentices' training and progress to create clearer links for learners between the workplace training they receive from employers and the qualification outcomes they are working towards. By improving the synergy between workplace training and assessment, provide learners with the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of their roles and future development possibilities in the sectors they work in.
- Share the very effective practices that are already in place in business management, administration, customer services and warehousing for teaching and integrating English and mathematics skills to all other subject areas so that this becomes at least good for all learners.
- Ensure that all training advisers have the confidence and skill to promote effectively learners' awareness and understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding in training, assessment and reviews by:
  - clarifying policies relating to safeguarding, and equality and diversity, especially as they relate to younger learners in the workplace
  - providing training for staff that will give them the confidence and ability to reinforce and promote equality, diversity and safeguarding themes fully.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- Almost all of the learners are apprentices and the large majority achieve their qualifications, most of them succeeding within the planned time. Apprentices enjoy taking their qualifications and develop good vocational and employability skills that help them to do their jobs well and make good progress.
- Managers have successfully secured improvement in the proportion of health and social care apprentices who achieve their qualification and this is now high and well above the national average. They have also successfully addressed the dip in performance on programmes in business management and customer service. Although remaining above national averages, pass rates in these areas declined in 2011/12. They have since improved and a very high proportion of apprentices following programmes in these subjects now successfully achieve their qualifications, most in the planned time.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualification and who do so within the planned time is high in public services, and warehousing and distribution. However, although still relatively high and remaining above national averages, the proportion of apprentices who achieved their qualification in administration and ICT declined in 2012/13.
- Most learners develop and improve their English and mathematics skills through their apprenticeships. However, for a minority who have less confidence in these skills, particularly in health and social care and ICT, the training and guidance they receive do not always sufficiently support them to improve.
- Attendance at learning and assessment appointments is good. Training advisers quickly reschedule appointments when learners cancel them.
- The large majority of learners taking short employability courses achieve qualifications designed to help them apply for and obtain employment. They gain useful skills that enable them to learn about roles in occupational areas that they are interested in working in. This improves their confidence and better prepares them to apply for jobs. Around a third of learners undertaking these courses over the last year have been successful in gaining sustained employment.

- Few differences exist between the achievement rates of learners from different ethnic groups, or between females and males. Although they remain above national averages, achievement rates for the small number of 16- to 18-year-old apprentices are lower than for adults. Apprentices with additional learning needs did not achieve as well as learners without additional needs in 2012/13, which was a reversal from the previous year when they achieved slightly better.
- Almost all apprentices remain in employment that meets local need when they complete their qualifications. Where appropriate, learners make suitable progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships and a few obtain promotion at work or salary increases during, or when they complete, their apprenticeship.

### **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, reflecting the development of good work skills for the large majority of learners and the high proportion that achieve qualifications. Learners enjoy their learning. They receive good training and assessment and they quickly gain in confidence. Employability learners improve significantly their self-esteem and team-working skills.
- Training advisers are appropriately qualified and well experienced in their occupational sectors. They use good practical examples to illustrate theory. They use their good vocational expertise to motivate and inspire learners, contributing very effectively to their high standards of work.
- Learners benefit from good, well-planned individual coaching sessions. Training advisers use good questioning skills to stretch, challenge and engage the learners. Most health and social care, housing and employability learners attend good group training sessions that include appropriately varied activities to sustain learners' interest and concentration. Learners develop their ideas and contribute very effectively to the group discussions that are stimulated by focused questioning.
- Assessment is particularly good, thorough and well planned. Learners develop good independent learning skills through access to a flexible and varied range of assessment methods. Training advisers and the majority of learners make good use of the computer-based portfolios to ensure that units are completed and assessed promptly and to identify any areas of concern.
- Initial assessment is particularly effective and correctly identifies learners' potential as well as their training and support needs. Training advisers agree good individual learning plans with learners that effectively record qualification aims and targets, and accurately reflect information and results from initial assessment. Most training advisers skilfully use the information to plan programmes that meets learners' individual circumstances. Learners identified as requiring additional support to achieve their learning goals receive focused help from the qualified specialist training advisers.
- Training advisers provide good verbal feedback, giving clear guidance to learners on how they could improve. This helps them to reflect on their learning and complete further independent study. The quality of written feedback is not so good, however, often lacking in detail for learners on how they could improve. Although the standard of learners' written work is mostly good, not enough training advisers routinely correct grammatical or spelling errors.
- Training advisers conduct regular, thorough and detailed progress reviews. These result in actions that learners find useful, clarifying what they need to do to progress. Learners benefit from good workplace training and good levels of employer support. However, employers and workplace mentors are not sufficiently involved in learners' reviews. Employers are not sufficiently aware about how the workplace training they provide contributes to learners' progress. Training advisers and employers miss opportunities to enable learners to develop both a deeper understanding of their roles within the sectors they work in, and future development possibilities.
- The teaching of English, mathematics and ICT skills is particularly good in business management, administration, customer service and warehousing. Training advisers relate this

well to learners' work situations. For example, one training adviser skilfully used a discussion and recorded interview with an advanced apprentice warehousing manager about a recent stocktake he has led to reinforce the importance of functional skills, particularly mathematics, in his work. However, support for learners who do not already have good English and mathematics skills to improve these requires improvement in health and social care and ICT for users.

- Information, advice and guidance are good. Training advisers are knowledgeable about the options open to learners and provide a good range of advice and guidance on their next steps in learning. Although adequate in introducing learners to their programmes, induction is sometimes too brief and unmemorable.
- Learners treat each other and staff with respect. However, the quality of the promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity varies. Some training advisers do this well. For example, a challenging discussion introduced into a training session for housing and welfare learners extended their understanding of the potential for abuse in a home for vulnerable adults. However, not all training advisers have the confidence or skill to plan for or introduce equality and diversity themes into training, assessment or reviews or to extend discussions that do occur sufficiently.

### Information and communication technology for users

Good

### Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the high proportion of learners who pass their qualification and the good ICT skills they develop. Training advisers support learners well, developing good relationships that they use effectively to motivate and encourage learners. They have high expectations of them and learners value this. Learners enjoy the challenge that their apprenticeship provides and a good proportion progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships.
- Individual coaching is good. Training advisers support and encourage learners well. As a result, learners quickly gain in confidence. Training advisers plan training well, recognising and catering for learners' individual needs and preferred ways of learning. They use humour appropriately to make learning enjoyable.
- Assessment is good. Training advisers and learners use electronic portfolios well to record evidence and assessment outcomes, and to keep track of progress. Evidence in portfolios is wide-ranging. For example, one learner was observed using specialist software during which the training adviser tested and recorded her understanding well. The training adviser then recorded a well-managed discussion about the use of spreadsheets in the workplace.
- Assessments are thorough and fair, giving learners good opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Verbal feedback to learners is clear and detailed. However, written feedback is often brief, giving insufficient guidance to learners on how they could further develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Employers support learners well and provide good training in the workplace. Some employers provide learners with additional training to improve their prospects of remaining in employment. For example, games testers at an employer that produces computer games are taking an additional intermediate level qualification so that if they leave the company they will have a qualification to help them gain employment in the broader ICT sector.
- Training advisers undertake regular progress reviews that cover all parts of the apprenticeship framework. However, targets set during reviews too often focus on completing tasks or units, rather than clarifying to learners the knowledge they could acquire or skills they will develop in achieving these. Employers are seldom involved in reviews or agreeing targets. As a result, they are not always clear about how they can assist learners to develop their skills and knowledge.

- Sysco appropriately checks learners' prior ICT knowledge to ensure they are on the right programme. Initial assessment effectively establishes learners' skills levels in English and mathematics and identifies any particular support that learners need. However, the quality of training and support that learners receive to improve these skills varies. In mathematics, training and guidance rarely go beyond making learners aware of mathematical processes rather than extending this to improve their understanding.
- Induction is often too brief. Although learners receive good information about the programme, information regarding equality and diversity and safeguarding is often rushed.
- For advanced apprentices, appropriate promotion of equality and diversity takes place through a detailed workbook and a linked qualification. For intermediate apprentices, training advisers use 'hot topic' scenarios to prompt discussion with learners. However, discussions are too often restricted to legislation rather than building on this to consider the wider issues that the legislation seeks to address.

## Administration and customer service

Good

### Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, matching the good outcomes for learners. The good coaching learners receive from training advisers and the good support from employers enable them to achieve well and to develop a wide range of skills relevant to their jobs and learning programmes. Training advisers show a genuine enthusiasm to ensure learners succeed in their programme. Learners respond well to this attitude.
- Teaching and learning are good in the large majority of sessions. Training advisers use interesting learning activities that motivate and engage learners. Good coaching develops learners' reflective and independent thinking skills and increases their confidence and levels of independence. However, a small number of less successful sessions provide too few opportunities for learners to practise and consolidate their learning.
- Learners benefit from good support from training advisers through frequent assessment visits, emails and telephone conversations. Learners receive prompt responses when help is requested, which aids their progression. Learners enjoy meeting with their training advisers who use their administration and customer service knowledge well. A good range of learning resources effectively enhances learners' understanding of relevant sector topics. Information on learners' progress is well documented in an electronic portfolio and electronic learning plans are widely used by learners and training advisers to plan learning and record achievement.
- Initial assessment is effective in matching learners' suitability to the most appropriate qualification and in establishing learners' skills levels and support requirements in English and mathematics. Training advisers use the results well to plan and provide appropriate support and to deliver training that improves learners' English, mathematics and other essential work skills. Learners receive regular feedback on how to improve spelling, grammar and comprehension.
- Training advisers undertake thorough reviews that provide learners with a good understanding of their progress. However, not all employers are involved in reviews, missing the opportunity to coordinate the training they deliver in the workplace with training delivered by Sysco.
- Training advisers arrange flexible assessment sessions to accommodate the work patterns of learners and employers. Learners receive good verbal feedback that focuses well on their job role enabling them to understand how their learning programme is helping them become more effective as employees. However, written feedback is often too brief, leaving nothing for learners to reflect on.
- High quality workplaces provide learners with good opportunities to practise and improve their administration and customer service skills. Employers take a keen interest in their employees' progress and provide good employer-led training sessions. For example, learners receive regular

training in the use of sector-specific software packages, sales techniques and in handling sensitive information.

- Learners receive good advice and guidance prior to starting their apprenticeship. Good induction arrangements ensure learners are clear about how they will benefit from their learning programme. Training advisers engage in regular discussions with them about their future careers and further training opportunities.
- There are clear plans for embedding equality and diversity topics within sessions. Training advisers make good use of current news items to interest and engage their learners in discussions. Learners enjoy these. However, these discussions are often too short and do not allow learners sufficient time to fully explore and debate the wider issues of the topic.

## Business management

Good

### Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the consistently high pass rates. The vast majority of learners are progressing in line with, or ahead of, their agreed goals. Training advisers set very high expectations of learners. They provide good teaching, learning resources and professional support, enabling learners to meet these expectations and improve their skills and knowledge quickly. The vast majority of learners are very well motivated, enjoy their courses and engage well in all aspects of their learning.
- Learners' progress in improving their English, mathematics and ICT skills is particularly good. Learners quickly acquire technical knowledge and self-confidence, for example in topics such as mathematics and spreadsheets, and make good use of these skills to improve their performance at work. For example, one learner's improved confidence and technical skills in auditing and writing reports has greatly impressed her employer.
- Well-planned coaching sessions, usually of short duration, take place in appropriate surroundings that suit learners' needs. Mathematics, English and use of ICT are the subject for many of these sessions as learners are experienced adults returning to learning. Training advisers deliver these subjects particularly well through appropriate combinations of resources and methods that meet individual learners' needs.
- Training advisers engage with learners well and are skilful at matching the pace and level of teaching to meet learners' circumstances and preferred ways of learning. Learners quickly overcome low confidence in their potential abilities and master essential business management and other essential work skills quickly. For example, when learning mathematical functions such as fractions and division, training advisers very effectively support learners through progressively more demanding tasks to build their knowledge and assist them to become proficient.
- Training advisers provide frequent and encouraging feedback to learners on their completed work through an online computer-based assessment facility. Learners have a very clear picture of their progress at all times and know precisely where they need to improve. Training advisers use the online portfolio well to set and encourage independent work and to provide learners with good access to continuous assessment.
- Training advisers use technology well to promote learning and assessment. Learning resources are available online and clearly organised which enables learners to pinpoint quickly those of most value to their learning. Sysco plans to improve this further. A range of enhancements to the electronic and online training and assessment facilities are at an advanced stage of planning.
- Initial assessment of learners' starting points is very effective and comprehensive. Learners acquire a good level of awareness of the demands and structure of their qualifications and courses through good initial information, guidance and advice.
- Learners' participate in regular reviews of their progress during which training advisers invite them to reflect carefully on their progress and achievements. However, too few employers



participate in learners' reviews. As a result, they do not have a clear idea of how they could better assist learners to develop their knowledge and skills.

- Inductions to apprenticeships are rushed and uninspiring. They do not cover themes about equality and diversity and safeguarding sufficiently well. During training, assessment and reviews, training advisers do not revisit or extend learners' understanding of these topics in enough detail.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

**Good**

- Leadership and management are good. Sysco's mission and vision focus clearly on the provision of high quality training. The Chair and Board provide appropriate strategic oversight. Leaders, managers and staff are highly committed to the company and there is a strong sense of teamwork and collective responsibility that effectively promotes a drive for continuous improvement. Leaders and managers model the behaviours they expect of their staff. In turn, training advisers act as effective role models for apprentices, setting high standards and expectations that contribute well to the good success rates.
- A range of strategies introduced since the last inspection has successfully led to improvements in the quality of provision. Monitoring and quality assurance arrangements are thorough and comprehensive. For example, regular audits take place to check the frequency and quality of progress reviews. Data from such exercises effectively feed into individual performance management records and to management reports.
- The quality of observations of teaching, learning and assessment has improved and this is now good. Observations of all training advisers take place at least three times a year. For sessions judged to require improvement, suitable steps follow to improve the skills and performance of the training adviser, for example through coaching. Staff training has included sessions on improving teaching and learning. Subcontractor management involves a good range of monitoring and checks which include observations of training and assessment.
- Sysco uses data well to manage performance. Various analyses effectively identify strengths and areas for development. Regular reports highlight concerns such as slow progress at an early stage to managers who as a result, identify and set actions to improve. Self-assessment makes good use of available data and feedback, which are largely positive, from employers and learners. Self-assessment grades are realistic.
- Relationships between company staff and employers and other partners are good. For example, in one effective partnership, Sysco links well with a housing association to promote employability courses to unemployed tenants. Within the company, there is a strong emphasis on meeting employers' needs, but Sysco also manages employers' expectations well in planning apprentice placements. Sometimes, however, the links between the training provided by the employer and that provided by Sysco are not explicit enough. As a result, employers' training and Sysco's own training happen alongside each other rather than forming a coherent package for apprentices. Employers' involvement in reviews is variable and too often minimal.
- Performance management arrangements are good. Managers clearly communicate their high expectations to all staff, setting them challenging individual performance targets. The company actively encourages staff to undertake training and development to improve their own skills and performance. Regular one-to-one meetings with managers as part of the performance management process review and monitor the impact of this regularly. Where performance falls short of the company's high standards, training and support plans with short-term improvement targets are agreed. On the rare occasions when these arrangements are not successful in producing significant improvement, decisive action follows, including termination of employment, to ensure that all learners receive high quality training.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory; Sysco meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Induction for learners covers an appropriate range of topics including safeguarding, equality and diversity, and health and safety. The depth to which these are

covered varies, however, with ICT and business management learners often receiving rushed and unmemorable inductions. Safeguarding incidents are recorded and followed up appropriately and where necessary, advice is sought from external agencies. The use of regular 'hot topics' helps to ensure that safeguarding themes are revisited regularly.

- Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Although there has been an increase in the proportion of apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds, this remains below the local and national average. The company works to improve policies, processes and practices continuously. However, these have sometimes evolved in a rather piecemeal fashion. Some policies are brief and lack clarity, especially where there are other associated supplementary documents or where they relate both to the company and its employees and also to learners. Very occasionally, particularly difficult situations that arise with learners in the workplace are not effectively resolved because training advisers lack the skills or confidence to support learners in dealing with them.



**Record of Main Findings (RMF)****Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited**

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>ICT for users</b>	2
<b>Administration</b>	2
<b>Business management</b>	2
<b>Customer service</b>	2

## Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1759								
	Part-time: 363								
Principal/CEO	Mr Ian Smith								
Date of previous inspection	July 2008								
Website address	www.sysco.co.uk								
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		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	
Number of traineeships	16-19			19+		Total			
	N/A			N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	39	513	7	485	N/A		7		
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	13								
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"><li>Active Synergy Development Services Limited</li><li>Training Futures (UK) Limited</li></ul>								

## Contextual information

Based in Liverpool, Sysco Business Skills Academy delivers the majority of its programmes in Merseyside and the north west of England, although it also delivers training across the country. The majority of learners undertake apprenticeships in business, administration, customer service, and health and social care occupations. Unemployment in the North West is higher than the country as a whole with Merseyside having among the highest unemployment rates in the region. The number of people receiving job seekers allowance is higher than the national figure. In the region, 11% of the adult population have no qualifications, this figure rising to 13% for Merseyside. The proportion of pupils leaving school with five or more GCSEs at A\* to C including English and mathematics is below the national average.

## Information about this inspection

<b>Lead inspector</b>	Malcolm Fraser HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Operations 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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