

Skillspoint

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		02–06 December 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	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:

- A very high proportion of learners achieve their qualifications on classroom-based and workplace learning programmes.
- An exceptionally high proportion of learners progress from classroom-based learning into jobs.
- Learners achieve a high standard of work and develop relevant and useful occupational and employment skills.
- Particularly effective individual training, coaching and support provides learners with good on-the-job training.
- Good collaboration between Skillspoint's staff and employers leads to flexible and well-planned training that improves learners' employability and meets future business needs.
- Good quality improvement plan and effective actions are raising the standard of provision.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Too few apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeships.
- Too many learners complete their training without improving their English and mathematics.
- Weak reviews of learners' progress fail to challenge and engage learners.
- Arrangements for observing teaching and learning are underdeveloped.
- Arrangements for producing the self-assessment report are underdeveloped.
- Promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment is insufficient.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure realistic deadlines for learners completing the advanced apprenticeship framework are set at induction. Ensure staff use initial assessment to plan support for learners throughout their programme, particularly for those below level 1 and for functional skills.
- Improve the development of learners' skills in English and mathematics through better promotion and take-up and by ensuring their successful use within vocational learning programmes.
- Improve learners' progress reviews by staff receiving training on how to involve learners effectively, better participation of employers, sharper targets that are more challenging and the development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
- Ensure that observations of teaching and learning focus more on the quality, level and amount of learning that take place. Introduce monitoring of the quality of learners' progress reviews and formal assessments.
- Widen the opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to self-assessment. Use a broader range of information from learners, staff, subcontractors and employers to establish the areas for improvement for self-assessment. Design a more reader-friendly style of report and circulate this to all staff and subcontractors.
- Set up a representative group of managers, staff, employers and subcontractors to oversee the promotion of equality and diversity. Ensure this group gives significant attention to the promotion of equality and diversity across all Skillspoint's activities.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- A very high proportion of learners across all subject areas achieve their qualifications. Learners have continued this highly successful performance over the last three years.
- A very high proportion of learners on classroom-based courses across all subject areas achieve their qualifications. Learners on NVQ programme across most subject areas have had similar sustained success over the last three years. The proportion of classroom-based learners progressing into jobs is good.
- The proportion of apprentices achieving their qualification for the recently introduced new apprenticeship programmes is low. In 2011/12 in business administration, the number of apprentices successfully completing their qualifications was below average. This success rate increased to the national average in 2012/13. In other subject areas, the number of apprentices is too low to make meaningful comparisons.
- The number of learners achieving functional skills qualifications is low. Managers have identified the reasons for this on apprenticeships and for functional skills and their actions are starting to resolve this issue.
- The standard of most learners' work is high and they develop good employment skills. For example, learners in childcare have excellent skills in identifying opportunities to develop learning, including collaborative learning between children, from play activities. Engineering learners in engineering produce different welds to meet with industry specifications and measure up to rigorous testing.
- The majority of learners in construction, business administration and customer service make at least the progress expected of them. However too many learners in teacher education progress too slowly.

- No significant gaps exist in achievement of different groups of learners, including male and female learners and those from different minority ethnic backgrounds. However, staff from Skillspoint have identified underperforming subcontractors and they have taken appropriate action to help learners succeed.
- Inspectors observed good attendance and punctuality in lessons. However, they were not able to make judgements on learners' attendance over a longer period as Skillspoint's managers do not routinely collect and analyse attendance data in all areas.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Trainers have high expectations of their learners and provide good support and encouragement to help them develop valuable employment skills and produce a high standard of work.
- In the best lessons, learners benefit from a range of activities and good individual coaching that provides good learning at the correct pace and level to meet the needs of individual learners.
- The best learning often occurs when trainers plan their lessons by relating theory to industrial practice and use examples from news and current affairs. For example in engineering, learners developed a very good understanding of the importance of inspecting and testing the quality of welding to avoid failure and potential disaster. The trainer encouraged good learning and understanding by promoting discussion between learners about recent events publicised in the media.
- In a minority of lessons, trainers restrict learning by talking too much and allowing the slowest to determine the pace of learning. In these lessons, trainers provide insufficient challenge for learners to progress at their own rate and develop their learning.
- Learners in business administration and customer service, construction and teacher education develop good independent learning skills. Trainers provide good activities and support for independent learning. Learners respond by working hard to meet the challenges the trainers set.
- Teaching and learning of functional skills requires further improvement, particularly in teacher education. Trainers do not attach sufficient importance to functional skills for classroom assistants. In a minority of instances, trainers did not correct spelling and grammatical errors in learners' work.
- Assessment is fair, accurate and reliable. Assessors provide good feedback to their learners to help them to learn and develop useful skills.
- The promotion of equality and diversity varies across subject areas. Learners in childcare develop an excellent understanding of equality and diversity, and they apply this particularly effectively in their work. For example, learners were particularly sensitive when celebrating Christmas with a group of children from different cultures and religions. The learners consulted with parents and extended the Christian festival to a celebration of Ede. Similarly, they extended father's day celebrations to grandfathers and uncles to ensure inclusion of children from one-parent families.
- In contrast, learners in engineering and construction have no more than a basic knowledge of equality and diversity. The promotion of equality and diversity by staff in these areas was minimal.
- Advice and guidance at the start of their training for most learners are good. During training for learners in construction, it is good, but adequate in direct learning support and in administration and customer service. Managers have introduced improved arrangements for advice and guidance as a pilot initiative in administration.
- Managers have recently improved the quality assurance of teaching, learning and assessment by making good use of independent observers to assess this area. However, internal observations

lack sufficient focus on learning and the evidence on observation sheets do not match the grades awarded by observers.

- The policy for observing teaching, learning and assessment within the organisation is insufficiently comprehensive and not fully established. Skillspoint's managers are aware of these problems and they are currently reviewing this area.

Construction crafts

19+ Learning programmes Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good which is reflected in the very high proportion of learners achieving their qualifications. Trainers and employers have high expectations of learners and they are committed to developing learners' skills. Trainers and employers work very effectively together to plan training and assessment to improve learners' employability and meets future business needs.
- Learners benefit from good individual training and on-site learning. For example, a construction plant learner was able to change a bucket on a 360° excavator safely and correctly. Learners have a very good understanding of health and safety on site. Trainers use their good site experience to make learning more meaningful. They make good checks on learning through summative assessment. In a few instances, trainers focus too much on instruction and do not sufficiently engage learners in their own learning.
- Trainers provide good coaching and support to help learners to learn and improve their skills to meet changing industry requirements. They set learners challenging tasks that require them to research information using information technology, company policies and procedures. Learners frequently learn through carrying out their day-to-day work, but trainers' planning of this learning is insufficient to be fully effective.
- All learners benefit from initial assessment to identify effectively their literacy, numeracy and support needs. However, staff do not use this information well in learning and support sessions. Assessment is accurate and well planned. Assessors make very good use of direct observation of naturally occurring activities on site. Most assessors use questioning effectively to check learners' understanding. Assessors do not give responsibility to learners to complete their own portfolios of evidence. They often add evidence on behalf of the learners and miss the opportunity to develop learners' use of English.
- Progress reviews take place frequently and link well to assessment. A few learners are unaware of the progress they are making. Reviewers use too many closed questions and learners do not always participate fully. The use of target is insufficient and this fails to provide challenge for learners. Workplace supervisors are not always present at reviews and miss the opportunity to contribute fully to the training.
- Most assessors provide good feedback to learners following assessment. They celebrate what is good, but do not always identify the work learners could improve. Assessors provide good verbal feedback, but do not always capture it well in the often too brief written records. The tracking of learners' progress is very thorough and Skillspoint's staff communicate this well to employers.
- A significant number of learners have low levels of skills in English and mathematics and too many of them complete their training without improving these skills. Although Skills for Life training is available, no learners have taken advantage of this opportunity. Skillspoint's staff and employers do not sufficiently promote the benefits of a more literate and numerate workforce.
- Learners benefit from good initial information, advice and guidance prior to starting their training. Skillspoint's staff and employers work well to ensure learners have a good understanding of their training and where appropriate the legislation that regulates their future

employment. Learners make informed choices about their training and most chose which units to take.

- Staff do not promote well learners' understanding of equality and diversity during progress reviews. They often ask closed questions, for example, whether learners are treated equally at work, which does not result in meaningful conversations. The recording of discussions on equality and diversity and safeguarding are cursory.

Training to provide learning support

19+ Learning programmes Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement as reflected in the low proportion of apprentices achieving their apprenticeships. A high proportion of learners following other programmes of study achieve their qualifications.
- Trainers have high expectations for learners to succeed. They encourage them to work independently and most learners develop good independent learning skills. Learners develop effective vocational skills, demonstrate high standards of support for teaching and learning in schools and are keen to progress further in their employment and higher-educational qualifications.
- Trainers are experienced and knowledgeable, particularly for the vocational diploma part of the advanced apprenticeship. They know the subject and their learners well, and are able to identify learners' needs to provide prompt support especially for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners appreciate and value highly the contribution and support from trainers. However, trainers are less confident in providing elements of the apprenticeship outside the vocational diploma such as functional skills.
- Teaching and learning of functional skills requires improvement. Most learners need to improve their English, particularly spelling and the use of grammar. Learners produce a range and variety of effective learning resources at school, but miss the opportunity to use them as evidence of achievement in functional skills. Trainers are starting to link functional skills to vocational programmes, but it too early to judge if this will speed up or improve learners' achievements. Too many learners have not been successful in examinations for functional skills.
- Trainers often miss opportunities to use functional skills in learners' reviews, professional discussions or observations. For example, at the well attended and valued monthly improvement workshops to help learners complete vocational knowledge tasks and to research aspects of the qualification, staff rarely set learners targets to improve or develop specific apprenticeship functional skills outcomes in preparation for these sessions.
- Trainers conduct frequent one to one meetings with learners and give them useful feedback following assessment or during reviews. Feedback following observed practice is detailed, comprehensive and effectively linked to qualification criteria. Employers are not usually present at feedback or review, but trainers send helpful written feedback to learners' managers following observations.
- Most discussions and dialogue between trainers and learners are focussed and productive. In a minority of instances, reviews do not always focus sufficiently on what the learners need to practise in the work place. For example, staff spent too much time on setting or negotiating dates for examinations while missing opportunities to set work related targets to develop skills or produce evidence.
- Learners benefit from the good advice and guidance they receive at the start of their learning programmes. Initial assessment identifies support needs and ensures that staff place learners at the correct level of learning. Trainers are aware of learners' job role and they prepare learners

well for vocational aspects of the programme. However, too few learners and employers realise the importance of completing the full apprenticeship framework by the programme's target completion dates.

- All learners are aware of the importance of inclusion and safeguarding and have very good skills in supporting learners from a range of backgrounds and particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teaching workbooks promote health, safety, safeguarding, equality and diversity well. Learners know the protected groups within the Equality Act 2010 well, but they are less knowledgeable about their responsibility to promote equality, protect individuals against discrimination and to challenge stereotypes. Skillspoint's managers have recognised this and are providing future training for subcontractors early in 2014.

Administration and customer service

19+ Learning programmes Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and reflect the improving outcomes for learners and the increasing focus on teaching and learning in the apprenticeship programme.
- Trainers have high expectations of learners and motivate them well. Learners develop particularly effective vocational skills and knowledge, make good progress and become more confident at work. Better learners take increasing ownership of their learning. Trainers provide good support, including additional visits when it will benefit learners. For example, a learner wanted to complete earlier than planned in order to start a university course.
- Apprentices learn well from trainers who provide good on-the-job coaching and use a good variety of techniques such as workplace role-plays and discussions to promote awareness of best practice in aspects such as customer service. Trainers use open questioning particularly effectively to check learners' understanding and learners value the off-the-job group workshops to improve their knowledge, particularly in preparing for technical certificates. Most learners' portfolios are good.
- Trainers do not always use initial assessment sufficiently to plan learning and support to meet individual learners' needs. Assessment for vocational and functional skills does not effectively identify learners' existing skills and staff are not effective in planning learning to develop these skills further. A small minority of learners struggle initially in their job roles due to lack of workplace supervision and no formal plan of learning.
- Reviews focus well on learners' progress towards their qualification, but not sufficiently on their progress at work and any additional training and support needs. Learners' contribution at reviews is variable. It is good at one subcontractor, but insufficient at another, where the trainer dominates the process. At one subcontractor, the employers do not have sufficient involvement in the reviews.
- Assessment is sound and meets awarding body requirements well. Assessors use a good variety of assessment methods to ensure learners consistency in competence and knowledge. Most action plans resulting from assessments are good. They contain sufficient, challenging and time-bound targets that learners understand well.
- Most learners have a good understanding of the qualifications they are working towards, their progress and what they need to improve. Trainers provide good verbal feedback, praising learners' good work and clearly explaining where learners need to improve. Written feedback is adequate, but variable, and a minority is too brief.
- The development of functional skills is adequate. Where learners need to prepare for tests, trainers provide effective support using practice test papers. A few learners make slow progress in improving their functional skills. Skillspoint's staff are making improvements to the provision

of functional skills, such as the introduction of a more effective diagnostic assessment and more workshops, to raise the standard of support for learners.

- Learners receive good initial information and advice that gives them a clear understanding of the benefits of the apprenticeship programme and ensures they are on the correct programme, and are following the most appropriate optional units for their NVQ. During the apprenticeship, trainers provide appropriate information and advice for additional training and support, but they do not effectively record how learners will achieve further help.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment is mostly good. Learners receive good quality information, including booklets and at workshops, which increases their understanding. They produce good work to show their good understanding of this area. Most trainers effectively check learners' understanding at progress reviews, but at one subcontractor, they do not do this sufficiently well.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Skillspoint's senior managers have high expectations for their learners and staff and ambitious business goals to increase provision. They have developed a clear strategic direction and they effectively monitor strategic and operational activities. Senior managers carefully consider strategic priorities and align these with regional and national priorities. However, they have not produced any formal documents that give a quick and easy overview of business strategies, strategic objectives or operational planning.
- Skillspoint's managers and staff collect and analyse data effectively and produce useful reports to plan and manage the provision. However, they rely too much on subcontractors to gather learners' attendance and progression data. Managers and staff do not have sufficiently clear view of performance in these areas.
- Management of staff performance and subcontractors is good. Most staff benefit from regular appraisals, which include the setting of challenging targets and clear performance objectives. Staff and managers work well within the appraisal system to identify and meet personal and organisational development needs. Managers are quick to identify and deal with underperforming subcontractors.
- Skillspoint's managers have effective arrangements to improve provision. For example, managers identified key areas for development in functional skills for apprentices on one of the larger apprenticeship programmes in customer service; they then provided functional skills workshops for staff which subsequently increased overall success rates.
- Observing and improving teaching and learning are underdeveloped. Skillspoint's managers have made good use of external observers to judge the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, they have recently implemented their own arrangements to observe teaching and learning. However, the internal process does not have sufficient emphasis on learning and issues exist around grading and the recording of individual observations.
- Arrangements for quality improvement are adequate. Managers have developed a quality calendar that specifies an appropriate annual cycle of quality improvement activities. Staff are aware of their responsibilities for actions to improve quality. Managers monitor these actions closely.
- Self-assessment is underdeveloped. The process has not been inclusive in gathering the views of all stakeholders and staff. The current self-assessment report is difficult to read. Managers recognise the issues with the process and report and they are reviewing these arrangements.
- Managers have written a particularly good quality improvement plan. It identifies clearly most strengths and areas for improvement. The plan is an effective working document, which

managers carefully monitor and update. However, managers have only recently introduced the plan and prior to this they have been slow to initiate improvement actions.

- Managers run most learning programmes in the different subject areas well and they are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of a wide range of employers, many of whom rely on shift patterns to run their business and services.
- Skillspoint offers a broad range of programmes across a number of subject areas. Many courses are in subject areas which other providers do not routinely offer. Skillspoint's staff work with over fifty subcontractors covering a wide geographical area. The subcontractors' specialist work allows Skillspoint to meet a varied range of training needs on a national basis. Learners value the opportunity to work and train and many of them progress to key positions with their employers.
- Learners benefit from Skillspoint and subcontractors' good partnerships with employers. Employers have confidence in Skillspoint and their subcontractors. Employers, particularly in the childcare sector and logistics, are most complimentary about how Skillspoint and its subcontractors meet their training needs and those of their employees.
- Most staff have a good understanding of equality and diversity. Learners and employers understand their rights and responsibilities. Skillspoint's managers monitor the performance of diverse groups of learners and no significant differences exist between groups. Staff training in equality and diversity is adequate. Managers make thorough checks of all subcontractors to ensure they have appropriate policies and procedures and learners are not at risk. Managers keep detailed records of complaints and take prompt and appropriate action to deal with them. Promotion of equality and diversity in most learning sessions and reviews requires improvement.
- Skillspoint meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Relevant staff hold the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service clearance. A designated senior manager is responsible for safeguarding and health and safety, which has a high priority at Skillspoint. No safeguarding issues were on record at the inspection. Skillspoint has appropriate systems to ensure subcontractors have arrangements for safeguarding and health and safety. Learners feel safe.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Skillspoint			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	2	2	3
Outcomes for learners	2	2	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Construction Crafts	2
Training to Provide Learning Support	3
Administration	2
Customer service	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16 to 18 and19+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: N/A								
	Part-time: 1,329								
Principal/CEO	Chris Griffiths								
Date of previous inspection	December 2010								
Website address	http://www.skillspoint.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	0	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	130	N/A	17	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+			
	21	29	23	110	N/A	N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A								
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
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">Construction Skills PeopleCity College, PeterboroughSouth Leicestershire CollegeLynne Bailey AssociatesThe TESS GroupLEAP (Leap UK)The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers Education Trust.								

Contextual information

Skillspoint works with 52 subcontractors to provide a range of training in a variety of subject areas including the recently introduced apprenticeship training. The provider recruits learners throughout England.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	John Dunn AI
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Five additional inspectors, assisted by a Skillspoint 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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