

Skills and Development Alliance Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		27–31 January 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
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 vast majority of learners gain their qualifications with some pockets of outstanding success rates.
- A high proportion of learners make good progress and are successful in gaining employment or moving on to further training.
- Most learners are successful on programmes that develop their employability, vocational and social skills well.
- The strong, well-managed collaborative partnership of training providers has a clear strategic vision to provide good learning and training.
- Good teaching and learning support learners' aspirations to become confident, well-motivated learners and employees.
- Assessments are well planned; tutors provide learners with detailed written feedback that helps them improve the standard of their work.
- The strong operational management ensures that problems across the partnership are sorted quickly and that lessons learnt are shared with partners.
- The partnership members, across the Skills and Development Alliance Ltd (the Alliance), respond well to the community by developing and delivering programmes that meet the needs of local people and employers and are highly respected by the agencies supporting the unemployed.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Not all learners with all partners improve their English and mathematics and achieve qualifications supported by appropriately qualified tutors.
- Not enough use is made of information about learners to identify the particular needs, barriers and problems for learners in specific non-generic groups, such as single parent learners or learners from particular geographical districts.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all training opportunities are used to develop purposefully learners' understanding and application of work-related English and mathematics by:
 - building on existing good practice when correcting written and verbal errors in English, and incorporate aspects of mathematics into sessions to improve learners' confidence and capability
 - developing tutors' capability and confidence through training and the gaining of higher levels of English and mathematics qualifications.
- Make better use of the existing data on learners to identify and target the specific groups of learners who have significant barriers to learning. Develop strategies to ensure appropriate actions are put in place across the Alliance to enable them to succeed in their learning. Make use of non-generic codes to extend the analysis beyond determined socio-economic groups.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners are good, and for some programmes outstanding, with success rates for most courses well above the national averages. Outcomes are excellent on non-accredited courses, with systems to monitor progress and achievement being reliable and well organised. In most subjects, success rates and outcomes have improved considerably since the previous inspection. Learners on workplace learning programmes have been particularly successful in gaining qualifications, and employability learners in progressing into employment. However, success rates for learners in business, administration and law and some learners on functional skills English programmes were poor in 2012/13.
- In 2012/13, the Alliance successfully altered its provision to increase the classroom-based activities to provide training for the unemployed on programmes enabling learners to develop the skills needed to gain general and vocationally specific employment. Learners following these programmes make good progress. The vast majority of classroom-based learners progress into employment or further study and over half of apprentices progress to higher apprenticeships.
- Learners complete discrete qualifications as part of their employment programmes, with an increasing proportion of learners successfully improving their English and mathematics. Learners who take functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics at intermediate level are usually successful. However, too few learners on employability courses recognise improvements to their skills or gain qualifications.
- The vast majority of apprenticeship learners successfully completed their qualifications in 2012/13. However, a small number of apprentices in business administration were unsuccessful. Retention and progress in-year are good, with the vast majority of learners on schedule to complete before their planned end dates. Learners from all identifiable groups achieve at similar rates and make comparable progress. Learners returning to training or needing extra support go on to achieve particularly well.
- Training courses for the unemployed are well regarded by community support groups, local councils and employment agencies. As a result, the numbers of unemployed learners attending courses have considerably increased. These learners develop very positive attitudes to learning that help them to find work. Learners develop their self-confidence and respond well to activities to raise their self-esteem, which significantly enhance their prospects for employment. Managers collate and make good use information from learners, employers and other agencies to record learners' employment and training destinations.

- Standards of learners' theory and practical work are very good, with some excellent work with employers in the computing sector. Learners' portfolios are well maintained, with a good range of evidence and realistic reflections of progress and learning. Employers recognise significant improvements in learners' working practices and in the skills they bring to the workplace, and many learners eulogised about the skills they have gained and developed.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and have made a major contribution to the improvement in learners' achievements. Training is well planned, involving and engaging learners with varied teaching and learning activities. Learners on all courses benefit from effective academic and pastoral support from committed staff. Learners are well motivated and enjoy their learning; many develop independent learning and employment-related skills.
- Tutors have high expectations of learners and motivate them well to complete qualifications and develop their skills. Tutors put considerable emphasis on improving learners' chances of employment, with frequent references to how skills can be applied in the workplace. Learners on early years and computing courses articulate and talk confidently about applying their skills in the workplace.
- Some tutors are inspirational in their delivery, and most classroom sessions are at least good. The good skills of tutors leads to good, well-informed learning. In many sessions, learners participate enthusiastically in a wide range of well-conceived, and often creative, activities. Sessions capture learners' imagination and enable learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of their chosen vocation. For example, in one ICT functional skills session, learners dealt with complex formulae and 'IF' functions to manage and manipulate data with aplomb.
- In most sessions, tutors effectively use probing questions that check and further learners' knowledge. Tutors use secondary questions very effectively to test learners' detailed understanding. Learners frequently work productively in small groups to discuss how to best deal with problems. Tutors make the most of discussions and group work to enliven and extend learning. The Alliance recognises the importance of sharing and developing teaching and learning skills across the partnership and holds regular good practice events to disseminate different ways of working.
- Learning resources are good and to industry standards, providing good learning environments. Computers and other technology-based resources are readily available and used effectively, for example for learners to carry out research, write curriculum vitae and construct websites.
- Initial advice and guidance are comprehensive, with effective initial assessment. A relevant range of initial assessment measures determines learners' starting points and suitability for their training, with an appropriate initial and diagnostic assessment of their English and mathematical skills. At the start of learning, individual obstacles to employment are systematically identified and recorded and staff then work with individuals to overcome these barriers to ensure they are successful in learning. However, the selection of learners for the railway courses needs to be more rigorous to ensure learners understand what is required of them to meet the employer's expectations.
- Assessments are well managed and planned with timely feedback to learners on their practical and written work. Assessment in work and vocational training is good and effectively demonstrates how learners have met the qualification requirements. The detail provided by tutors enables learners to make improvements to individual pieces of work. However, tutors do not always identify spelling and grammatical errors, and some tutors teaching functional skills do not have the appropriate skills or qualifications.
- Arrangements for providing learners with initial advice and guidance are good. Learners referred from Jobcentre Plus receive useful guidance on making appropriate choices about training when starting their programme, and on subsequent decisions about progression into work or further

learning. However, some learners who have specific barriers to employment do not always receive subsequent advice and guidance to enable them to progress.

- Strong partnerships with local employers ensure workplace and apprenticeship learners gain confidence, boosted by the good support from employers and tutors. Employers find that the skills learners bring to the workplace often enhance their business, which in turn increases the belief of learners that they have something to offer in the workplace.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics is not consistently good across all programmes. Learners in the workplace and on longer classroom-based courses do advance their written and mathematical skills and successfully complete functional skills assessments. However, tutors on the employability programme do not sufficiently capitalise on opportunities to extend learners' understanding of the importance of English and mathematics in the workplace.
- Equality and diversity are effectively introduced at induction and regularly reinforced during taught sessions and in progress reviews. Tutors and assessors actively improve learners' cultural awareness and understanding of diversity. Learners demonstrate good respect for each other and behave well.

ICT for users

19+ Learning programmes Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, enabling the vast majority of learners to achieve their qualifications. Learners develop very good computing skills, particularly in the use of spreadsheets and word processing, enabling many to progress in their employment. Learners on short courses develop expertise, which raises their aspirations and allows them to create professional CVs and to search online for suitable employment.
- Work in learners' portfolios is of a very high standard. Well-qualified tutors set high expectations for learners and provide purposeful support during training. Learners' initial skill levels are identified at induction and, where necessary, support arrangements quickly established. For example, separate provision is made for learners who use older versions of software in the workplace. One tutor has developed short explanatory videos, which learners frequently access should they miss a session or need to recap.
- In the best sessions, tutors use questioning effectively to explore a range of concepts to confirm and extend learning and knowledge. Learners make very good progress. Tutors use learning resources well. Resources are excellent and learners have access to industry-standard hardware and software. Well-produced manuals allow learners to practise independently. The Alliance emphasises safety, and learners are knowledgeable about e-safety, data protection and the need to take appropriate breaks from screen work.
- Tutors ensure that learners link theory with practical tasks. Classroom assignments centre on the individual learners' workplaces and job roles. For example, some learners produced information flyers, newsletters and magazines specifically for their own workplace. Learners tackle new tasks and manage information confidently. One learner has written detailed instruction sheets for dummy code correction in bespoke software.
- The provision is responsive to local training and employment needs. Purposeful partnerships have enabled one partner to facilitate a pre-apprenticeship programme for the selection and training of apprentices. These close links with industry have resulted in some excellent and detailed learning materials for the pre-apprenticeship course, with useful additional support for mentors. Collaboration with internet design companies has led to a new apprenticeship programme to provide the skills needed in this new industry in the East End of London. Learners attended a useful 'web design camp' at a local university, where they developed additional skills in web development. This has enabled some to gain promotion at work or to take on more challenging project management tasks.

- Learners' work is carefully assessed, with detailed, clear and constructive feedback. Learners understand what they need to do to improve. Learners are challenged to review and reflect on their performance by tutors. However, too many assessments take place in the classroom. Supervisor witness testimony is not used and too few professional discussions take place. Considering the applied nature of what is being learned, excessive emphasis is placed on written questions and answers to assess levels of ability.
- Functional English and mathematics are integrated well throughout training. Learners are encouraged to check and review their work and tutors correct spelling and grammar. Language and numeracy skills are reinforced and learners understand the importance of 'getting it right' at work.
- Learners receive appropriate and timely guidance and support. Tutors use learners' previous achievements and initial assessments to ensure the learners are on the correct course. The two-week pre-apprenticeship provides learners with the necessary academic background and the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to tackle higher-level courses.
- Tutors promote and discuss equality and diversity effectively in many taught sessions. Learners confidently discuss strategies to remove barriers to travel and learning. An appropriate learner handbook promotes individual awareness of safeguarding, equality and diversity matters.

Employability training

Employability

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the high, and improving, success rates for learners, especially those on vocational foundation programmes. A high proportion of learners progress to further training or obtain employment. Learners on early years vocational courses gain confidence as they understand, through purposeful practical sessions, how children develop, and practise interview skills to support their employment aims in pre-school establishments.
- Learners make good progress, developing personal skills including self-confidence, personal responsibility, and communication. Less confident learners are stimulated to overcome an initial reluctance to participate, or present their ideas, with positive reinforcement from other learners and tutors. For example, learners were encouraged to work with peers to carry out a role-play interviewing for a job in a nursery and provide feedback to each other on how each performed. Planning for learner progression into employment is good, with very effective use made of short work placements.
- Taught sessions satisfy learners' needs and interests well. Tutors use their experience and expertise well to plan stimulating activities. For example, learners learnt how children develop their reading skills through a phonetics game they devised to help their children spell words. Learners then reflected and discussed the differences between the ways adults and children learn.
- Tutors work with learners to set and record purposeful academic and personal targets that are specific, challenging and relevant. Learners know what is expected of them and standards are high. However, in a minority of sessions, learners are not always sufficiently challenged to cultivate their skills to the highest levels.
- Learners benefit from well-qualified and experienced staff who design resources and training very well to meet their learners' needs, especially on vocational courses. However, too few tutors hold appropriate qualifications to teach and extend learners' English and mathematics.
- Initial assessment is good and accurately identifies personal concerns, disabilities, and potential barriers to learning. Tutors assess the academic needs of individual learners at the start of their course and use this information well to adapt training sessions to cater for individuals' needs.
- Tutors confidently conduct continuous assessments of learners, who benefit from constructive verbal and written feedback. Tutors use questioning techniques well with individual coaching;

they challenge learners, in most sessions, to make further progress. Most written feedback on assessed work is detailed and precise and helps learners improve. Learners have a clear understanding of the progress they have made through accurate tracking of learning. However, learners' English and mathematics are not consistently extended and only a small number of learners gain a higher-level qualification in these key subjects.

- Tutors provide good initial advice and guidance that ensure learners are assessed and allocated according to their level and personal needs. A comprehensive induction programme helps learners settle in, stay on course and make good progress. Tutors provide learners with information to gain voluntary positions in the workplace. However, advice on courses available outside of the organisation is not always adequate.
- Tutors plan well to promote equality. For example, they devise resources and teaching strategies differentiated to meet individual needs, and encourage learners to take equality and diversity into account when preparing their teaching resources for children. Learners and staff demonstrated a resounding atmosphere of mutual respect.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Leadership and management are good. Partners in the Alliance share a well-established vision of providing good community-based training and education. Since the previous inspection, in May 2012, significant progress has been made in establishing a strong culture of mutual support and trust between the nine partners of the Alliance. Clear, purposeful, well-articulated strategies have enabled the development of community and locally-focused training programmes that ensure learners are successful. Each partner resolutely contributes to the knowledge and skills base of the Alliance, fostered on collaborative working, making the whole partnership more effective as a result. Partners, employers' agencies and learners speak very highly of the advantages and improvements to the learning environment because of the resolute partnership working.
- Operational management is particularly thorough. An executive director, supported by three managers and a small administrative team, performs the collective central functions, with oversight from the executive committee. Partner performance is systematically monitored each month, by programme and by learner, with challenging targets set and robustly monitored. For example, when one partner's success rates declined below the target levels, robust action was swiftly taken to restrict recruitment and provide interventions delivered by other partners within the group.
- The Alliance has rigorous and effective processes to monitor and improve the delivery and assessment of all training sessions. Partners operate their own performance and observation management systems, but the Alliance conducts separate observations, provides support and shares good practice across the partnership with frequent professional development for tutors. All tutors are observed at least twice a year and the results inform performance management and the shared professional development to ensure consistency across the Alliance. However, not all partners have sufficiently qualified or experienced staff to teach English and mathematics effectively to all learners.
- Since the previous inspection, significant improvements have been made to all aspects of the self-assessment and quality improvement process. The self-assessment report is evaluative and forms an important part of the overall analysis of all the provision across the partnership. It provides a good analysis of the strengths and areas for improvement for each partner and programme area. Data are used well to monitor the performance of learners within each of the partners and these are scrutinised by the executive board. Moreover, the annual self-assessment process provides an excellent vehicle that encourages partners to make comparisons of their performance against the Alliance's and national data. It effectively incorporates learners' and employers' views, providing a good and comprehensive analysis of the provision.

- Curriculum design meets the needs of learners and employers particularly well in the local communities in which the individual partners operate. The Alliance has managed the transition from workplace learning to classroom-based learning well. It has established focused programmes that match the training needs in the community with employment and vocationally-specific training to compensate for skill shortages, specifically in care and railway engineering. Strong partnerships, with Jobcentres, the Probation Service and community groups, resolutely inform programme development. Learners benefit from the skills they acquire and employers are particularly positive about the skills the learners take into the workplace. Some learners approach their return to learning with trepidation, but for many the reward of early achievement boosts confidence and self-esteem, with significant numbers of learners progressing to further training. Many examples, particularly in care, demonstrate where learners have progressed from foundation level through to higher management positions.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is resolute and robust. Equality and diversity expectations are covered in detail during learners' induction and reinforced in many learning sessions. An atmosphere of mutual respect between staff and learners is particularly evident. Inclusivity is a core value of the Alliance, and it is particularly effective at engaging learners who might otherwise not engage in training. Data are effectively used to analysis performance of the generic diversity groupings, but are less well used to monitor the performance of specific groups more relevant for the individual partners or the localities in which they operate.
- The Alliance has appropriate safeguarding practices and meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. All frontline staff complete awareness-raising programmes. Potential risks are appropriately assessed and managed, and training in e-safety is comprehensive and regularly reinforced through posters and reminders from tutors.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Skills and Development Alliance Ltd

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:									
1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-
Outcomes for learners	2	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
ICT for users	2
Employability training	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: N/A							
	Part-time: 2267							
Principal/CEO	Ms Virginie Ramond							
Date of previous inspection	April 2012							
Website address	www.s-d-alliance.org.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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Part-time	-	102	-	144	-	145	-	-
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	2	125	12	10	-	-	-	-
Number of learners aged 14-16								
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"> ■ Skills and Development Agency Ltd ■ Dynamic People Ltd ■ Happy Child Ltd ■ Renaissance Skills Centre Ltd ■ Upskill Training Ltd ■ Happy Computers Ltd ■ Wise Owls Employment Agency Ltd ■ Maximal Learning Ltd ■ Broaden Ltd 							

Contextual information

The Skills and Development Alliance (the Alliance) is a consortium of community-based education and skills providers delivering training across London and the surrounding areas. The Alliance, comprising nine members, was formed in 2011. Partners within the Alliance provide training in health and social care and early years; engineering and manufacturing technologies; information and communication technology for users; education and training; foundations for life and work; and business administration. The Alliance is managed by an executive director, supported by three operational managers who report to an executive committee board made up of representatives from each of the partners.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Martin Hughes, HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Executive 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 two 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. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant 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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