

Skills UK Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		26–28 February 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- All apprentices are making good progress towards the completion of their qualifications.
- Learners develop their confidence, self-esteem and employability skills well. They produce a high standard of work and good written English.
- Learners benefit from well planned and delivered workshops and 1-1 coaching in which good links are made between theory and practice.
- Staff, managers and directors provide good initial and ongoing advice and guidance for learners.
- Directors and managers have a clear strategic vision for Skills UK and produce good strategic and business plans and challenging targets.
- Skills UK's performance management arrangements are highly effective and together with very good support result in motivated staff who share the company's ambitious vision.
- The comprehensive and well established quality systems together with accurate self-assessment and robust action planning provide a sound basis for continuing improvements.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Initial assessment fails to identify an appropriate level of programme for a small minority of learners.
- The observation of teaching and learning process has shortcomings.
- The level of employer engagement on funded programmes is under-developed.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of initial assessment to identify more able learners and ensure that they are working at a level appropriate to their skills and ability on entry.
- Ensure that the staff conducting lesson observations appreciate the need to grade the learning rather than the teaching. Change the emphasis from teacher performance to a clearer focus on learning.
- Prepare and implement a formal strategy for employer engagement on apprenticeships and funded programmes.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates for learners aggregated across the provision are exceptionally high and significantly above the national average. Overall and timely success rates on transportation programs are high as are timely success rates on construction programmes. The overall success rate in construction is below average.
- Apprentices on business administration programmes produce a high standard of written work and demonstrate good written English. Apprentices are developing good workplace skills and are able to engage comfortably in professional discussions about their work and display good knowledge of the subject.
- Learners with identified additional learning needs progress and achieve as well as learners without such needs.
- Cohorts of learners, particularly in transportation are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds and ethnicity. There are no gaps in achievement between learners from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Male and female learners achieve at similar rates.
- Most learners respond to the encouragement from Skills UK staff to complete additional units of study and develop skills beyond those required by their main qualifications. A large proportion of these learners achieve their additional qualifications.
- Learners are confident and have developed appropriate self-esteem and social skills. They enjoy their learning. Many apprentices on business administration programmes have achieved promotion and work enhancement by developing new skills through study of their main and additional qualifications.
- Business administration apprentices currently in learning are making good progress and are on target to achieve their qualifications in a timely fashion. All learners are familiar with their individual learning plans and use them effectively to monitor and record their own progress. All current business administration apprentices are in permanent full-time jobs.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment are good which is reflected in consistently good rates of learners' progress. All learners are progressing in line with or ahead of their agreed goals. Staff have very high expectations of learners and provide good teaching and a

professional level of support to help learners meet these expectations. The large majority of learners are very well motivated, enjoy their courses and engage well in all aspects of their learning. Learners achieve a good level of knowledge in their subject areas and are able to demonstrate confidently their application of this at work.

- Learners quickly acquire technical knowledge and self-confidence through an effective blend of self-study, employer support and a rigorous assessment process. Learners are able to speak confidently and knowledgeably about important aspects of their work environment such as planning work efficiently, policies that govern them and how to work well within a team. Learners undertaking functional skills are progressing well in updating and refreshing their skills in areas such as fractions and handling data.
- The quality of learners' independent work is very high and clearly shows that they have applied themselves diligently to the tasks agreed with their assessor. Their written answers to questions in their workbooks are very detailed and often exceed the standard required.
- Induction sessions provided by trainers are welcoming, well-structured and enable adult learners, many of them returning to learning, to engage enthusiastically and productively with the subject matter. Trainers prepare learners well for the final assessments using an effective combination of independent study, group workshop presentations, and end-of-session tests.
- Teaching sessions for learners undertaking transportation qualifications are well-planned and very effectively delivered, producing good opportunities for all learners to learn at a level and pace appropriate for them. Trainers make good use of visual aids in these sessions to reinforce the theory by giving learners the opportunity to develop their understanding by experiencing different approaches to learning. For example, in one workshop, trainers set out the room with learning aids including car tyres, child seats and dolls, as well as a range of testing tools such as tread depth and pressure gauges, all of which allowed learners to visualise the theory in ways suited to individual learning styles.
- Staff and learners make good use of commercial workbooks, around which the business administration programmes are structured, to sequence learning and to promote independent skills such as research using on-line sources, and consulting experienced managers. Assessors help learners to understand how their knowledge and understanding is to be assessed, learners are well-prepared for assessment. They engage eagerly in discussions to demonstrate their application of the theory to their work roles.
- Trainers organise one-to-one sessions very efficiently, helping to promote good progress and achievement. They explain to learners very carefully how each part of the programme works, such as reviews and taped discussions, and the benefits they will get from these. Feedback on written work is useful and helpful.
- Initial assessment of learners at the start of their programme is not effective for all learners. Although many learners achieve a good level of awareness of their strengths and weaknesses through this process, for example in functional skills and learning styles the more able learners are sometimes placed on a level of course which is insufficiently demanding.
- Learners begin functional skills appropriately early on in their programmes and attend useful monthly workshops with a specialist tutor. Trainers do not promote the acquisition of higher levels of functional skills sufficiently for those learners who are exempted within their framework.
- Learners' participate in regular reviews of their progress and receive very detailed information on their progress. Trainers place a good emphasis on providing information and advice to learners relating to higher levels of qualifications they can progress towards. All learners are encouraged to reflect carefully on their career paths and to aspire to higher levels of achievement and responsibility.
- Equality and diversity are promoted effectively through a broad variety of activities which make use of good learning resources. For example, learners engage in taped discussion with their assessor about legislation that protects them and about concepts such as prejudice and discrimination. Flash cards and self-reflective exercises are used to extend their understanding

during progress reviews. Learners have a very sound grasp of the concept of safeguarding and know their own potential vulnerabilities and those of peers and others.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good. Directors have set a clear strategic direction and shared this with staff. Business, strategic and operational planning is good. Directors have set challenging organisational targets and have used them effectively to arrive at clear strategic objectives in a well-written business plan. Staff have contributed effectively to the business plan and subscribe to the targets and objectives. The implementation of the plan is monitored carefully and the organisation meets most of its targets year-on-year.
- Directors provide good support for the managers and staff to help them achieve their individual targets. Staff and learners benefit from a rigorous appraisal system that focuses clearly on aspects of staff performance that directly impact upon the learners. Staff work to demanding targets in relevant areas such as improving teaching and learning and supporting and guiding learners more effectively. Staff benefit from good opportunities for internal progression and promotion. Staff development is good. Staff turnover is low and staff appreciate the support they receive from managers and directors.
- Managers and staff have produced a self-assessment report that accurately identifies many of the strengths of the provision and the improvements required. They have graded the provision accurately. The self-assessment process is inclusive and incorporates judgements from both staff and managers. The judgements are supported well by evidence drawn from a good range of sources including learner and partner surveys.
- Arrangements for quality assurance and improvement are comprehensive and well established and the quality improvement plan is detailed, provides a good basis for improvement and used effectively to bring about improvements. Managers carry out detailed audits of key activities related to learners and learning. A quality cycle is in place and helps to ensure that Skills UK is meeting the needs of its learners and partners. Managers are particularly effective in ensuring that their quality systems can cope with the varied and differing requirements of the 28 partners for whom they undertake subcontracted work.
- Arrangements for observing and improving the quality of teaching and learning have many strengths. Managers plan observations effectively and use the results to help staff to improve their teaching, learning and other related activities. Observation records provide valuable evidence for self-assessment and are used effectively in staff appraisal. However there are shortcomings in many observation records. Observers pay too much attention to the teacher's activities and performance and in doing so lose focus on the learning that is taking place. In a minority of observations the written evidence does not support the grade awarded. This leads to some over grading, particularly of lessons graded as outstanding.
- Learners, staff and managers benefit from very good partnerships with other providers. These partnerships are highly effective in providing benchmarking, external moderation of quality assurance activities, updating and training opportunities for staff. Managers have identified and adopted much good practice when working with these partners in their capacity as subcontractors. This has made a valuable contribution to ongoing improvements in the provision of Skills UK. Partner organisations value the service provided by Skills UK.
- Links and partnerships with employers are underdeveloped. Managers recognise the need to develop and foster these links and develop good employer engagement now that they contract work directly and cannot rely on such work being carried out by partner organisations.
- Managers make very good use of data to manage their provision and monitor learners' progress, retention and success rates. Very good use is made of spreadsheets developed in-house to manage and control finances and cash flow. Financial management is good.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, particularly in the classroom. Learners and staff have a very good understanding of equality and diversity. Learners are recruited from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect arising from a good understanding of diversity. Skills UK provides a safe and welcome environment for learners.
- Skills UK meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Designated safeguarding officers provide good support to staff and learners. They maintain good links with external bodies such as safeguarding boards and local authorities. All staff know the procedures to ensure learners are supported properly in line with legislation and good practice.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Skills UK Ltd

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	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
Administration	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	19+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 9								
	Part-time: 124								
Principal/CEO	Christine Bell								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.skillsuk.org								
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	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	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+			
	0	6	N/A	N/A	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:	▪ N/A.								

Contextual information

Skills UK Ltd has been providing training for seven years. Three years ago, the organisation was awarded its first prime contract by the Skills Funding Agency. Prior to this the organisation had been working with 28 other providers and colleges on a subcontract basis. Skills UK continues to provide training as a sub contractor to 28 other organisations in locations throughout the whole of England.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	John Dunn AI
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Two additional inspectors, assisted by a director of Skills UK as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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 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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