

Skills Team Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		13–17 October 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- the majority of learners make slow progress and do not complete their programmes within the planned timescales
- assessment at the start of learners' programmes does not identify learners' skills fully enough before they begin their training
- learners do not have sufficient opportunity to improve their work-related English and mathematics skills beyond the level required by their apprenticeship
- arrangements to improve the quality of teaching learning and assessment are not yet fully effective
- staff do not promote equality and diversity strongly enough.

This provider has the following strengths:

- learners' skills and performance in the workplace improve significantly during their programmes. As a result they become more effective employees.
- achievement on business management programmes is good. A high and increasing proportion of business management learners complete their apprenticeships successfully
- learners' develop their knowledge and understanding well in training sessions through the interesting and varied activities and resources their trainers provide.
- the good personal support that learners receive from trainers is effective in keeping them on their programmes.
- programmes meet the needs of learners and employers well. Employers are very satisfied with the service they receive.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Set appropriate completion dates for individual learners' programmes, taking into account personal and work factors such as shift or night working and the impact this will have on their progress.
- Develop the initial assessment and advice and guidance processes to make sure learners and their managers understand what is expected of them. Set detailed and relevant targets for learners to achieve, and monitor them closely, taking appropriate and timely action with learners who slip behind.
- Teach all learners relevant English and mathematics, in the context of their apprenticeship programmes, so that they can develop their professional skills and credibility further.
- Make sure that the new observation system focuses effectively on learning and that the resulting action plans are used to improve trainers' performance.
- Train staff further in equality and diversity, and in safeguarding, so that they can confidently develop learners' understanding of the matters that are relevant to their individual workplaces.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Skills Team provides apprenticeship training in business management, its largest area, information and communication technology (ICT) and for a small number of learners in early years and play work. It also has a small number of workplace learning trainees in ICT and a small classroom-based employability programme.
- Apprenticeship framework achievement has improved, but is not yet good. Provisional data for 2013/14 suggest the proportion of learners who complete their apprenticeship frameworks successfully has improved significantly. It is now at or approaching national rates, and reverses a period of decline during the three previous years. Achievement is particularly good for business management learners, where framework completion rates are high, and for learners following advanced-level apprenticeships in early years and play work who all completed successfully. However the proportion of learners following apprenticeships in ICT for users who achieve their framework remains too low.
- Learners' progress is too slow. The proportion of learners who complete their frameworks within the time expected is not high enough, despite an improvement in 2013/14 for advanced apprentices. Managers have implemented appropriate measures to increase the speed at which learners complete their frameworks, but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness.
- Learners gain highly relevant and useful workplace skills, which lead to improved performance at work. Learners on business management programmes improve their abilities to manage their time, delegate tasks and motivate their team members. Learners on employability programmes quickly gain knowledge and understanding despite the significant barriers to learning many face when they join their programmes.
- Learners are well equipped to sustain employment and progress further. They frequently obtain promotion or more responsibility in their job roles following their training programmes. Over a third of intermediate-level early years apprentices go on to an advanced-level apprenticeship.
- Most learners needing qualifications in English and mathematics to complete their apprenticeships are successful. However few systematically improve their skills in these subjects beyond the minimum level needed for their framework.
- Gaps in performance which saw learners from minority ethnic groups succeeding less well than their white British counterparts have reduced and are now modest. This follows successful

action by Skills Team to ensure that those from minority ethnic groups are adequately prepared before starting an apprenticeship. The rate and speed at which women achieve apprenticeship frameworks exceeds that of men.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet good enough. Although it has led to significant improvement in the proportion of learners who complete their programmes successfully it has yet to ensure sufficient learners complete their programmes within the timescales planned.
- Staff do not assess learners' skills at the start of their programmes thoroughly enough. They do not identify accurately specific skills' development needs in English, mathematics or personal skills. They do not effectively plan learners' whole programme and support arrangements to reflect learners' personal and work commitments. Learner's targets are not designed well enough to drive progress, and staff do not sufficiently challenge learners when they fall behind.
- Much teaching is good. Trainers explain topics very clearly, maintain a good pace, and frequently recap to check learners' understanding. On management programmes, trainers provide interesting sessions on management styles and how to respond to different behaviours. These effectively help learners to deal with interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. On ICT programmes, trainers make expert use of technology to add interest and enhance learners' understanding of software. As a result, learners improve their skills and knowledge significantly and apply them well in their job roles. Resources, including classrooms, are good. Teachers encourage learners to undertake further self-study and refer them to relevant websites and reading material.
- A small minority of the teaching and learning workshops are not good enough. In these sessions trainers do not vary the learning activities enough to keep learners interested, or check that they have understood the topics. Trainers do not offer suitable activities to stretch faster learners or sufficient support for the less able. As a result, learners make slow progress.
- Assessment is effective. In most visits, assessors provide accurate and constructive feedback, both verbal and written, with clear guidance as to how learners can improve. Assessors use their coaching skills very effectively to contextualise learning, making it relevant to the learners' individual job roles and their workplaces. In a small minority of instances, assessment visits are unproductive as a result of ineffective planning, and infrequent assessment visits in the early stages of the programme have delayed learners' progress.
- Learners do not develop their English and mathematics skills sufficiently well. The focus is too much on preparation for functional skills tests, rather than developing skills to support their careers. The small number of learners who might achieve at higher levels do not receive sufficient challenge. However, sessions to improve learners' functional skills in ICT are successful. They result in learners developing important skills which they value and use in the workplace.
- Information, advice and guidance for learners before they join their programmes is not consistently clear. Recent changes have not been in place long enough to have much impact. As a result some learners do not understand the commitment involved in following an apprenticeship and have difficulty with the high volume of assignment work that they have to complete.
- Personal support for learners is good. Staff motivate and encourage learners effectively. They provide good pastoral support which ensures learners remain on their programmes, even where their progress is slow.
- Trainers and assessors do not promote equality and diversity sufficiently well. While learners are happy on their programme and have no concerns over their fair treatment, trainers and assessors do not check their wider understanding of diversity and related workplace matters. In

a few instances, staff lead effective discussions in workshops and at reviews. However, this does not happen enough.

ICT for users	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	

- The quality of training, learning and assessment is not good enough, and has resulted in outcomes for learners which require improvement. A consistently higher proportion of learners complete their qualifications than in other providers nationally, but the proportion who succeed has declined overall, and too few complete in the time expected.
- In many sessions learners benefit from well-planned training sessions in which highly relevant practical topics provide interest and motivation. Trainers draw well on their extensive and current expertise in ICT which ensures skills that learners develop meet high industry standards and reflect best practice. Learners participate fully and make good progress in using software applications and computer systems with confidence. However, in a small minority of sessions, trainers do not sufficiently take into account learners’ existing skills and experience or check their understanding enough, slowing the progress they make.
- Trainers’ effective use of technology in training sessions enhances learners’ understanding of systems and software well. In a session on presentation software, a trainer made good use of a data projector to provide an interactive step-by-step introduction to how the software had developed. In a session on computer security, learners saw a simulation that clearly depicted system registers and settings responding to viral attacks.
- Assessments are well organised and rigorous. Assessors adopt a flexible approach to workplace assessment, allowing apprentices to demonstrate their skills to the best of their ability. However assessment at the start of learners’ programmes is not used sufficiently well to set learners targets for learners to work towards in the medium and long term.
- Learners do not always receive sufficiently clear and detailed advice and guidance before starting their programmes. As a result some learners do not understand the commitment involved in following an apprenticeship and struggle to complete their assignments on time.
- Teaching and learning in English and mathematics is not good enough. Trainers ensure learners written English and mathematics is at the standard needed to complete their framework. However they put too much emphasis on testing learners’ existing skills and do not sufficiently plan sessions to develop their skills further. As a result, learners’ progress in English and mathematics is too limited.
- The promotion of equality or diversity requires improvement. Some sessions focus well on helping learners cater for diverse needs, such as ensuring when making presentations they use text colours and font size appropriate for those with dyslexia or sight impairment. However in training sessions and workplace visits trainers do not sufficiently prioritise consideration of diversity and cultural difference.
- Support in the workplace for learners is good. Trainers and assessors provide good practical advice on combining work and study. They respond swiftly and constructively to emails from learners who experience difficulties applying their new skills to their working environment.

Business management	Good
Apprenticeships	

- The good teaching, learning and assessment that learners receive is reflected in the high and improving rates at which learners complete their apprenticeships. As a result of the good teaching they receive, learners increase their knowledge of management theory rapidly and understand clearly how this relates to their own practical experience. Learners enjoy applying

the new techniques they learn. They become significantly more valuable as employees through their increased productivity and improved communication skills in areas such as producing management reports.

- Vocational training workshop sessions are very good. Trainers use imaginative scenarios to illustrate theoretical concepts such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs in ways that are highly accessible to learners. Engaging examples from their extensive sector experience, together with pertinent contributions from learners ensure learners are clear how they apply in the context of their work. During lively collaborative discussions, learners cover topics which support them very well in dealing with the practical management challenges they face in the workplace.
- Learners feel well supported by their assessors. They greatly value the pastoral care they receive during individual sessions in the workplace and through additional contact between visits. Employers and learners appreciate the flexible approach of assessors in accommodating variable shift patterns and business needs. In most cases, employers participate well in the review process to set and monitor individual workplace development targets.
- Most learners make at least the progress expected of them. However, in a minority of cases, visits to carry out assessments in the workplace at the start of learners' programmes are not sufficiently frequent, resulting in learners making slow progress initially.
- Assessors do not use assessments made of learners' skills when they start their programmes well enough. Medium and long-term targets they set for learners rarely reflect information gained from the assessments and consequently are not sufficiently specific or helpful. A revised process for assessing learners at the outset of their studies is resulting in more realistic targets, but is too recent for its impact to be widespread.
- Learners benefit from the constructive feedback from their assessors and the high expectations they set. Assessors' feedback often encourages learners to produce work that significantly exceeds the quality required to comply with assessment requirements. As a result learners' work improves over time and they attain high standards.
- Learners receive effective support to achieve the English, mathematics and ICT qualifications they need for their apprenticeship framework. They improve their spoken communication and ICT skills well. However, the focus for mathematics and written English is too often on preparing learners to pass tests and does not sufficiently prioritise developing their ability to use these skills in the context of their work.
- Staff provide adequate information, advice and guidance before the start of the apprenticeship to most learners and employers. They clearly explain the structure and content of the programme. However a few learners do not receive sufficient information leaving them ill-prepared and struggling.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is not sufficiently good. Learners' awareness significantly improves in sessions where staff provide examples which highlight the value and benefit of diversity in the workplace. However too many staff lack confidence in their own understanding to reinforce these values.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Skills Team senior managers have an obvious passion for quality and enhancing the lives of their learners. Despite a period of major disruption they have put in place clear and appropriate measures to address areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Many of these are new and or not yet fully implemented.
- The provision is generally good at meeting the requirements of learners and local employers, who are very satisfied with the service and its value. The high proportion of repeat business and the high satisfaction rating in surveys demonstrate this. Employers are now more involved in programmes. Assessors design programmes well, as a result, most learners are placed on programmes that meet their needs well.
- Directors carefully select staff to ensure they have good industry knowledge and experience. They encourage them to gain appropriate teaching qualifications. Directors have made significant investment in learning materials, staff training, resources and documentation to improve provision. This has led to tangible improvement for example, in management programmes, where learners' achievement has risen.
- The senior team makes effective use of improved management information to manage performance. Individual staff have suitable targets which team leaders review closely at monthly performance meetings. Managers and staff monitor learners' progress effectively through a comprehensive database.
- Managers recognise clearly the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently they have put in place an innovative system of observations involving a wide range of staff. Observations are frequent and cover all aspects of training. While they are starting to lead to improvement, observers do not place sufficient emphasis on evaluating the learning that takes place in sessions.
- Safeguarding requires improvement. Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and Skills Team meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of learners. Managers and staff pay good attention to health and safety and manage risk appropriately. However, information for learners on safeguarding and, safeguarding training for staff requires updating.
- Self-assessment is suitably inclusive of the views of staff, learners and employers. Although managers have a good understanding of the improvements the provision requires, the self-assessment process does not currently lead to sufficiently detailed quality improvement plans for staff teams to use effectively. The quality audit system, although improving, is not yet sufficiently comprehensive.
- Arrangements to develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity are not good enough at the start of their programmes and subsequently during training. Senior managers have a good understanding of the performance of specific groups of learners, but they do not set targets to enhance the performance of under-achieving groups. Staff are caring and supportive, which learners value, and do not tolerate inappropriate language or behaviour.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Skills Team Ltd

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
ICT for users	3
Business management	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	Apprenticeship – 573 Classroom - 433							
CEO	Mrs Sally Tate							
Date of previous inspection	June 2013							
Website address	www.skillsteam.com							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	-	107	-	64	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	5	233	-	136	-	-	-	-
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	n/a							
Part-time	n/a							
Number of community learners	n/a							
Number of employability learners	107							
Funding received from	SFA							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Contextual information

Skills Team Ltd has recently moved from Hammersmith to Ealing. It works with large national and smaller local employers. Nearly half of its provision is funded by the Skills Funding Agency, and it has another contract of equal value with the College of North West London, to whom it subcontracts similar provision to that which was subject to inspection.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jane Shaw HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the managing director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all 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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