

SSP (Select Service Partner)

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 59042

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Last day of inspection: 6 November 2014

Type of provider: Employer

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second follow up re-inspection monitoring visit to SSP following publication of the inspection report on 7 May 2014, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. Outcomes for learners were inadequate, the quality of teaching learning and assessment and the effectiveness of leadership and management required improvement.

The first monitoring visit took place in June 2014. At that visit, managers agreed the themes and priorities for improvement, although the quality improvement plan did not reflect all the improvement activities taking place and the steps being taken to restructure the apprenticeships programmes.

This report sets out the impact improvement activities are having on learners.

Themes

What progress is SSP making to improve recruitment, retention and completions?

The new selection and induction process is more rigorous and a significant improvement from the previous model when operational managers focused only on increasing the number of employees starting apprenticeships. Effective succession planning provides a good focus for the new process. The business has identified appropriate core sites to pilot the revised advanced apprenticeship programme. Employees interested in apprenticeships follow a detailed and thorough screening, including a written testimony as to why they would be a good candidate, an interview and short presentation. Induction and diagnostic assessments ensure learners have a good understanding and awareness of the whole programme and their personal areas for development. Out of the 23 learners who started the pilots, the majority are making good progress and only two have left the company.

The historically low retention rates and inappropriate selection of employees for apprenticeship programmes resulted in far too few learners completing their qualifications. The qualifications success rates for 2013–14 show little improvement from the inadequate results in 2012–13. Success rates for 2014–15 will continue to reflect some of the historical problems. However, analysis of the proportion of learners leaving the programme having completed their apprenticeships, rather than leaving the business or not continuing in training, shows that this has risen steadily over the last six months and is now above minimum levels of performance.

Reasonable improvement for learners

What progress is SSP making to supporting and monitoring apprentices' progress more effectively?

The apprenticeship team recognised that not all unit managers provide sufficient training, assessments and support to learners. All learners now have a designated support assessor who takes prompt and effective action to address slow progress and provides good regular support to those who need it. Where necessary, the support assessor will assess learners' work if the unit manager does not respond promptly to work uploaded for assessment. Learners feel the level of support is much improved and help is now readily available to ensure they can progress at a suitable pace, rather than being criticised for being behind target.

Support assessors now link closely to operational managers by region and/or sector and make good use of the updated tracker to agree targets and identify learners who need additional support. Support assessors carefully plan monthly visits to fit with operational schedules and maintain good contact with operations managers. New management reports ensure managers and directors focus on leavers and completers as well as starts. The number and proportion of learners who have exceeded their planned end dates have reduced significantly.

Support assessors make good use of a redesigned tracker to monitor the progress of new advanced apprentices who have a very good understanding of the progress they are making. Apprentices understand particularly well what they need to do to achieve the activities and targets agreed with their unit managers and assessors. The vast majority are making good or satisfactory progress.

Significant improvement for learners

To what extent has SSP improved apprentices' English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills?

Too many learners have not yet completed their functional skills tests even though they are making good progress with their main qualifications. It is unclear if all learners who started an apprenticeship programme before the previous inspection have completed their functional skills diagnostic tests to identify any areas of English, mathematics and ICT that need improving. Assessors and unit managers do not always prioritise the development of apprentices' reading, writing and mathematical skills. Managers ensure apprentices develop good speaking and listening skills quickly as these are critical customer service skills.

The apprenticeship team has started to monitor the number of times learners attempt English, mathematics and ICT tests. First-time pass rates are starting to improve but, in the previous year, a significant minority of apprentices took functional skills tests more than three times, particularly level 2 ICT.

All new apprentices have a good understanding of their starting point for functional skills. However, it is too early to judge how effectively assessors are using the initial

assessment information to develop apprentices' English, mathematics and ICT skills, to monitor progress and agree when apprentices should attempt their tests.

Insufficient improvement for learners

What progress has SSP made in developing a robust quality improvement plan, quality assurance arrangements and self-assessment?

The quality improvement plan now reflects most of the changes the apprenticeship team is implementing on the apprenticeship programmes. The apprenticeship officer is reviewing the format of the plan to move completed actions so the team can concentrate on outstanding areas for improvement. Success measures are clearly stated and the apprenticeship team uses data very well to measure progress and improvements. The use of management information with senior managers and operations managers is improving and reports are more useful.

Support assessors make good use of regular standardisation meetings to plan and quality assure the new delivery model. An evaluation of the new delivery model is starting, although the support assessors are only just implementing some of the new practices and the effectiveness of these processes is not yet clear. For example, it is not clear how effectively support assessors follow up on activities and actions agreed through the summative assessment reports written at each visit.

The support assessors are developing the self-assessment report to reflect the end of SSP's financial year. They plan to discuss the findings at the next team meeting. The initial draft report is too descriptive and is insufficiently evaluative. Although many areas for improvement are appropriately identified, the strengths are often written as statements and do not explain the reason they are strengths and the positive impact they have on learners.

Reasonable improvement for learners

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