

SSP (Select Service Partner)

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the third 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 when managers agreed the themes and priorities for improvement. At the second monitoring visit, in November 2014, SSP had made significant improvement for learners against one theme, reasonable improvement for learners against two other themes and insufficient improvement against the fourth theme.

The themes and findings of this visit are outlined below:

Themes

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

Recruitment processes for the advanced apprentices on to the Discovery programme continue to be thorough, with learners clearly demonstrating their commitment to the programme. Careful selection ensures SSP is retaining and developing managers to meet the future needs of the businesses. The processes for recruiting intermediate learners, after they have completed their probationary period, have improved but are not yet consistently good. Support assessors agreed a more robust approach in January, which has yet to impact on learners' experiences.

Historical low retention rates and inappropriate selection of employees on to apprenticeship programmes prior to March 2014 resulted in the qualifications success rates for 2013/14 showing little improvement from the inadequate results in 2012/13. The vast majority of learners who have started in 2014/15 are still in training, indicating much improved retention. The monthly overall qualification success rates for 2014/15 have improved and are above the national rates for the hospitality sector for the last five months. The proportion of apprentices completing within planned timescales is steadily improving, but remains very low. Operational managers are now more involved in improving performance, focusing each month on improving retention and on-time completions.

Reasonable improvement for learners

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

Apprentices, who started their programmes in 2014/15, after the last inspection, have a very clear awareness of the progress they are making. The vast majority make good progress while the small minority who are behind target have a good understanding of what they need to do to catch up, although the lack of a line manager is hindering one learner. Apprentices, who started their programmes in 2013/14, or before, are now making reasonable progress. The proportion of learners who have exceeded their planned end dates have reduced significantly and more learners are likely to complete within the timescales expected.

Support assessors make good use of the computer-based portfolio system and the revised detailed tracker to monitor closely the progress of all learners and to provide learners with good additional support when needed. Support assessors carefully plan monthly visits to fit with operational schedules, minimising disruption to the business and learners varied work patterns. This ensures learners are available to make the best use of the good support and make good progress. Learners receive much improved support from managers who are now more aware of the programmes.

Significant improvement for learners

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

All learners starting in 2014/15 have a good understanding of the apprenticeship framework and the need to complete functional skills qualifications. For example, several learners joined the apprenticeship programme specifically to increase their confidence at work by improving their English, mathematics or ICT. This is also having a positive impact at home where they feel more able to support their children and others.

Inspectors observed good individual mathematics coaching sessions by support assessors, with clear links made to job-specific tasks such as calculating waste percentages and the positive impact of reducing waste on profits. English, mathematics and information communications technology support for apprentices is flexible and reassuring, but none of the staff are trained to provide specific or specialist guidance to apprentices who have, or may have, dyslexia. Support assessors have improved the structure of the programmes so that apprentices work towards functional skills qualifications earlier than previously. This has improved the proportion of apprentices completing within the timescales expected. A few of the new apprentices have already sat and passed their mathematics tests. However, results from initial assessment are often unreliable and inaccurate as some learners complete them too quickly when tired, take a long time to complete or seek help from others. As a result, support assessors are not always aware of the support needed to either provide additional help early in the programme or to stretch more capable learners to work towards level 2 qualifications. Learners make good use of the on-line functional skills learning activities but support assessors do not give sufficient guidance as to which activities they should prioritise or when they should attempt different tests.

Analysis of functional skills results show learners are now more likely to pass their tests first or second time. First time pass rates are improving but require improvement for mathematics at level 2, but remain low for English writing at level 2.

Reasonable 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 clearly reflects most of the changes the apprenticeship team is implementing in the apprenticeship programmes; the format now makes it easier to see the current areas for improvement. Not all the progress statements are clear and many do not state the actual progress managers are making towards the success measures they have defined.

Managers and support assessors are implementing key improvements that include e-learning modules for managers, improved and standardised recruitment and induction processes and a central folder to ensure all apprentices receive the same high standard of information, advice and guidance. The use of management information with senior managers and operations managers is improving and reports are useful in ensuring learners now progress and complete as planned.

The current self-assessment report provides a useful overview of the key areas for development and the improvements made by the apprenticeship team since the previous inspection in March 2014. The self-assessment process and report do not yet reflect all aspects of Common Inspection Framework. The self-assessment report does not yet contain proposed grades for the apprenticeship programmes supported by clear and concise judgements that reflect learners' experiences.

Reasonable improvement for learners

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