

Steps to Work (Walsall) Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		22–24 April 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for apprentices		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for apprentices

This provider requires improvement because:

- too few apprentices complete their qualifications in the expected timescale
- tutors do not make good use of the findings of initial assessment to plan individualised learning and to challenge more able and highly motivated apprentices to achieve their potential
- apprentices do not develop higher level communication and mathematical skills despite many opportunities for them to do so
- apprentices do not develop sufficiently high levels of self-evaluation and skills to improve their prospects for employment at higher levels
- assessors do not make sufficient use of evidence from on-and-off-the-job-training to link theory with practice effectively, in order to develop apprentices' skills and help them achieve
- assessors do not provide sufficiently clear feedback and guidance to apprentices on how to improve further
- progress reviews lack rigour, and staff do not set precise targets to measure and accelerate apprentices' progress
- assessors do not provide sufficient guidance to apprentices to promote the understanding of diversity in their daily work with customers
- managers do not have a sufficiently clear focus on measuring apprentices' learning and progress in their observations of staff practice.

This provider has the following strengths:

- learners develop good business administration skills and secure employment with prospects
- the board of trustees provides invaluable support and robust challenge to managers
- managers and staff use their strong local knowledge to design programmes that meet the needs of employers, communities and learners well
- staff provide highly effective information, advice and guidance for apprentices
- excellent safeguarding arrangements protect apprentices from harm.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Plan the learning programme for all apprentices more precisely, taking full account of the findings from initial assessment as well as considering the aptitude of apprentices, to challenge the more able and highly motivated apprentices so that they excel in their work and complete their qualifications in the planned timescale.
- Ensure that assessors work closely with the apprentices to make full use of the evidence from on-the-job-training and match it carefully with off-the-job-training in apprentices' portfolios, so that apprentices develop a deeper understanding of how theory links with practice and raise their aspirations.
- Provide training to staff in identifying opportunities to embed English and mathematics in all aspects of on-the-job-training so that they can support apprentices to develop higher-level communication and mathematical skills to improve their future employment prospects.
- Develop assessors' skills in providing detailed, evaluative and developmental feedback to apprentices so that they know precisely what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work further.
- Ensure that staff are fully aware of the purpose of mid-point and other reviews and are skilled in conducting progress reviews by gathering the full range of available evidence, and setting precise targets to keep apprentices on track and progressing rapidly.
- Empower apprentices by developing their personal learning and thinking skills so that they can fully understand the assessment criteria, evaluate their own progress accurately, demonstrate their competence to excel at their job, boost their self-confidence and progress to higher levels.
- Enhance assessors' confidence and skills in promoting awareness and understanding of diversity to help apprentices deal with customers from diverse backgrounds in their daily work, and thus provide an excellent service.
- Clearly define the purpose of observations, ensuring that they focus on the impact of teaching on apprentices' learning and development; provide well-considered action plans with targets to ensure that all staff improve their practice.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for apprentices	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Steps to Work (STW) provides intermediate and advanced apprenticeships for learners aged 16 to 18. Most current apprentices are in the administration sector. In the first year of its contract, in 2013/14, the majority of STW's eight apprentices were following programmes in administration, with small numbers in health and social care and customer service. STW provides a range of learning programmes to over 2,000 learners under subcontracting arrangements from several other providers. These were outside the scope of the inspection. ▪ Success rates for apprentices are near the national averages. In 2013/14, a minority of apprentices completed their qualifications in time. Two apprentices left the programmes due to changes in their personal circumstances, one secured a job and one changed career. Most of the seven apprentices currently in learning are making expected progress and are on track to achieve their qualifications in the planned period. ▪ More able and motivated apprentices do not receive sufficient challenge. Staff focus apprentices on completing their qualifications to the minimum level required. Skills development at higher levels is not the top priority. Almost all apprentices have the required English and mathematics qualifications for the framework. Apprentices have the opportunities to develop and apply 	

higher-level communication and mathematical skills for gaining promotion or using these skills with other employers or employment sectors. However, they do not receive adequate guidance to do so.

- A few apprentices do not fully appreciate the essential skills and behaviours that employers expect from them, such as following company rules, behaving appropriately and meeting the required standard of work. Two apprentices left the programme due to these reasons.
- Apprentices do not fully understand the structure of the qualifications. They do not develop critical thinking and self-evaluation skills sufficiently well to understand how to submit the right evidence and claim competence. In addition, insufficient assessment took place, following the resignation of one assessor. As a result, apprentices have made slow progress towards completing their qualifications.
- A few of the apprentices have limited aspirations, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Staff do not motivate them sufficiently to do better or aim higher. Apprentices mostly gain permanent employment, secure better pay and grow into their job roles rapidly. Six leavers in the previous year progressed into permanent jobs with good prospects.
- Apprentices develop good levels of administration skills, such as using emails, using spreadsheets, measuring picture frames and costing these accurately, typing up minutes of board meetings, organising diaries and customer service skills. As their confidence levels grow, they enjoy their work, learning from their more experienced colleagues. Other skills include front-of-house reception duties, preparing newsletters and bulletins for community groups and supporting colleagues with VAT returns.
- Apprentices make a good contribution to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of businesses. Employers speak highly of the professionalism and quality of the work produced by their apprentices. However, employers believe that their apprentices are not meeting their potential.
- Apprentices have excellent awareness of dangers to personal safety, and know how to protect themselves and their family members from cyber bullying, identity theft, grooming, child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and domestic abuse. Apprentices feel safe.
- Apprentices of both genders achieve their qualifications and outcomes equally well. The numbers of apprentices from minority ethnic groups are too small for any meaningful comparison.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Links between on-the-job and off-the-job-training are not strong enough. Assessors do not take sufficient account of both elements of training to inform the apprentices of their skills development and to enable them to progress rapidly. Therefore, apprentices do not develop a deeper understanding of the importance of both these elements to consolidate their skills for future promotion or progression to higher levels.
- Assessors do not make good use of the findings of initial assessment to plan individualised learning. In particular, they do not provide sufficient challenge for the more able and highly motivated apprentices. They only encourage apprentices to complete the qualification to the minimum standard required. Consequently, more ambitious apprentices do not excel by producing the high-quality work that they are capable of.
- Assessors do not provide sufficiently evaluative and detailed feedback on a regular basis to apprentices, so they do not know what precisely they have done well, what they need to do to improve or to what standard.
- The development of higher-level skills in English and mathematics requires improvement. Assessors do not routinely correct spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes in apprentices' work; as a result, apprentices are not enabled to produce work of a standard beyond the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship framework. Tutors do not encourage apprentices

to demonstrate their skills in mathematics by undertaking assignments such as the use of energy, stationery or space in their workplaces.

- Tutors do not help apprentices develop sufficiently the skills needed for obtaining jobs and progressing to higher levels in the workplace. Tutors have plans to develop their practice in teaching employability skills, drawing on resources in other parts of STW.
- Assessors do not explain sufficiently the structure of qualifications and the assessment criteria to the apprentices. Therefore, apprentices' understanding of the assessment criteria is limited, which restricts their progress and achievement. Although they present sufficient evidence, assessors do not help apprentices to map it across the various units. For example, one apprentice was judged not to have completed any work towards 'working with others', despite plenty of evidence being present in the electronic portfolio.
- Apprentices' critical-thinking and self-evaluation skills are also underdeveloped. Assessors' discussions with apprentices do not extend their skills and enhance their knowledge sufficiently. Progress reviews include the completion of a particular unit rather than specific learning targets with challenging timescales that ensure apprentices' rapid progress. Managers have recently introduced independent mid-point reviews, but these are too pastoral in nature as the staff do not gather fully evidence of progress from employers and assessors. They measure only overall progress and not progress against individual learning plans.
- Learning resources are good. All apprentices feel safe in their work environments. All apprentices use the virtual learning environment competently to build a wide range of portfolio evidence, including work products such as schedules, diary entries, agendas and minutes.
- Well-qualified, experienced, multi-talented and highly committed staff provide excellent support to apprentices in good time to help them gain confidence and skills to gain employment. They take their roles seriously, always striving to do well for their apprentices. Assessors have extensive industry experience, which they use to motivate apprentices by developing relationships based on care and trust.
- Staff provide high-quality information, advice and guidance to all apprentices at various stages of their learning to check their progress and motivate them. Managers continue to invest in improving the skill levels of staff and deploy them well to seek apprentices' views of the provision to improve its quality.
- The promotion of diversity through teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Staff do not develop apprentices' understanding and confidence sufficiently to enable apprentices to understand diversity in their workplace. Apprentices have a good awareness of equality issues. They respect and value each other.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The charity's leaders, managers and trustees have a clear strategic vision, mission and values to promote learning and employment services to benefit Walsall residents and businesses. STW enables businesses and apprentices to contribute to improving the environment in their neighbourhood through infrastructure projects such as Street Scene.
- The new chief operating officer has inspired the staff with his high aspirations for apprentices and a strong focus on quality improvement. He has implemented strong performance measures, particularly to manage freelance employees. He has taken swift action to improve staffing, for example by appointing well-qualified and experienced tutors to carry out assessment and deliver functional skills. He has revised the roles and responsibilities of staff who work closely with apprentices to ensure they support all learners and share best practice from other parts of STW. This has improved the learning experiences of apprentices in the last five months. STW staff have good capacity to provide a service to apprentices with a greater focus on individual progress and achievement. Support for the newly appointed assessor is very good.

- Although various aspects, such as the quality of assessment and the skill levels of all staff in identifying opportunities to embed English and mathematics, have improved, it is too soon to see the full impact of other changes in improving the quality of learning and outcomes to consistently good levels.
- The trustees of the board are highly effective. They know their community's needs very well and challenge STW to provide programmes that meet the needs of that community and of employers. The trustees represent diverse interests of Walsall residents, employers, and the voluntary sector, such as Walsall Housing Group and faith groups. They hold senior managers to account by seeking regular reports on the quality of teaching and learning, and by providing robust challenge and valuable support promptly.
- The curriculum meets the needs of the apprentices and employers very well. Most of the apprentices who have all faced difficulties in life and education attend their training at STW, and gain skills and employment. Employers value the personal service they receive from the staff.
- Staff benefit from good training in topics such as safeguarding, project management, information, advice and guidance and functional skills. This has substantially improved staff knowledge and skills. However, despite some improvements in practice, managers have not yet provided sufficient training to achieve consistently high standards in giving accurate and detailed feedback to learners; the interpretation of assessment criteria; linking of on-and-off-the-job training; and reinforcing apprentices' skills in mathematics and English.
- STW leaders and managers know their provision well. The process of self-evaluation is well established, and includes the views of staff, employers and learners as well as performance data. Staff focus clearly on quality improvement and have improved safeguarding and information, advice and guidance to excellent levels. The focus and mind set of staff have changed from a 'tick-box' approach of contract compliance to a culture of continuous improvement. This is leading to rapid improvements.
- Records of observations of teaching, learning and assessment lack a clear focus. Observers concentrate on measuring the staff input and do not clearly evaluate the impact of this on apprentices' learning. Not all of the observations of learning have action plans to improve the staff's skills.
- Programme management is not yet good. In the recent past, the sudden loss of an assessor impacted negatively on apprentices, delaying their assessment and progress. A recently appointed assessor has made substantial progress to provide more frequent assessment for the apprentices. Recently introduced, mid-point reviews are not effective at accelerating the pace of apprentices' progress.
- Senior managers and board members have worked strategically to raise the awareness of senior managers in the Local Enterprise Partnerships in the West Midlands on the potential benefits of working with local housing associations. This has far-reaching implications to improve the prospect of unemployed residents and their families by offering them 'a home, a job and a future'.
- Safeguarding arrangements at STW are outstanding and cover a comprehensive range of topics. Staff are highly knowledgeable about radicalisation and child sexual abuse, and take highly appropriate action to protect apprentices from harm. Learners have contributed to the production of a very thoughtful and user-friendly booklet on safeguarding for other apprentices entitled *Not all Wounds are Visible*, by using examples from the lives of celebrities. All staff are thoroughly checked for their suitability to work with young people. STW promotes equality of opportunity well with apprentices, but does not yet fully promote the implications of diversity with learners in relation to their daily employment.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Steps to Work (Walsall) 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 apprentices	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Administration	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of apprentices	16–18							
Approximate number of all apprentices over the previous full contract year	8							
Principal/CEO	Mr James Walsh							
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected							
Website address	www.Stepstowork.co.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 apprentices (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+	
	5	-	2	-	-		-	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	-							
Part-time	-							
Number of community learners	-							
Number of employability learners	-							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Contextual information

Steps to Work (Walsall) Ltd (STW) is a charity and a not for profit organisation. It was established in 1999 and employs 70 staff who provide a range of programmes to Walsall residents. Currently, 2,043 learners are on various employability programmes. These include the Work programme; mandated work placements; supervised job search; a one-stop-shop offering free information, advice and guidance; City Deal; Street Scene (an environmental neighbourhood improvement programme); traineeships; and apprenticeships under subcontracting arrangements from a range of providers. STW also runs Starting Point Recruitment, the profits from which are ploughed back into STW. Some 16% of under 25-year-old adults in Walsall claim out-of-work benefits. In March 2015, in Walsall 6% of all Jobseeker's Allowance claimants were aged 18 to 24, compared to 4% in the West Midlands as a whole.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Harmesh Manghra HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the business continuity and information compliance manager 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 apprentices' achievements over the last year to help them make judgements. Inspectors used individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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