

# SERCO Vocational Services

Employer

**Inspection dates****20–23 October 2015****Overall effectiveness****Good**

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | Good                 |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good                 |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | Good                 |
| Outcomes for learners                        | Good                 |
| Apprenticeships                              | Good                 |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Clear and decisive leadership and management have led to significant improvements in quality and standards since the previous inspection.
- SERCO managers provide clear and firm support to the remaining subcontractors, which has improved their performance.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement systems are well developed, widely understood and used well to improve apprentices' experiences and the quality of teaching and assessment.
- The proportion of apprentices successfully completing their qualification has improved significantly and is now good.
- As a result of good teaching, learning and assessment a very large majority of current apprentices make good or better progress through their learning programmes and develop their English and mathematics skills well.
- Apprentices develop good skills, which help them to enjoy their work and contribute more effectively to the business.
- Managers have made good progress to implement the 'Prevent' duty.

### It is not yet an outstanding provider because

- In a small minority of subjects, the proportion of apprentices completing their programmes within the agreed timescale is too low.
- Consistent advice and guidance regarding possible career progression is not always in place.
- In a minority of cases, target setting and written feedback to apprentices remain insufficiently thorough to help them to improve their work.

# Full report

## Information about the provider

- SERCO is a service and outsourcing company that employs 100,000 people across 30 countries. SERCO Vocational Services (SVS) is an arm of SERCO that recruits and trains apprentices across the business in England. Most apprentices are on programmes in engineering, custodial care, leisure, travel and tourism, business administration and law.
- SVS has around 1,400 apprentices, of whom 140 are aged 16 to 19. Since the previous inspection, SVS has greatly reduced its reliance on subcontractors to deliver training and no longer offers training in health and care. SVS now works with seven subcontractors, most of whom have fewer than 50 apprentices. Most of the members of the senior management team are new in post since the previous inspection.

## What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Provide effective and speedy support to ensure that those apprentices who have not completed their apprenticeship programme within the stipulated timeframe, or who are at risk of not completing, are helped to succeed.
- Ensure that managers consistently implement the SERCO apprenticeship progression programme across the whole provision, to provide guidance and advice on careers within SERCO and other possible employment opportunities.
- Consistently improve the quality of target setting and written feedback to apprentices through staff development.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders have been very effective in changing the culture of the organisation, which has resulted in better communication, improved quality management and improved staff motivation. Staff understand the overall strategy of the company and are aware of what managers require of them to meet strategic targets. The focus of the provision now relates clearly to the apprentice and their support throughout the business.
- Managers use apprenticeships well to develop their employees, in line with government priorities. They have reduced their subcontracted provision substantially and now focus largely on apprenticeships in custodial care, engineering, leisure and business administration. They have managed the significant problems in the subcontracted provision very effectively and ensured that apprentices' needs have been met during this often difficult time.
- Assessors and teams are set challenging targets by their managers. Managers monitor progress towards these effectively using an efficient and accessible management information system. The progress of individual apprentices is tracked well by both managers and assessors. Observations of teaching and learning sessions are thorough and focus on learning. The overall evaluation of quality in a few of these sessions is too generous.
- Self-assessment is thorough and involves contributions from staff, employers, subcontractors and apprentices. The self-assessment report is very comprehensive, with sound judgements based on evidence. It is largely accurate in identifying key strengths and areas for improvements. The quality improvement plan links well to the self-assessment report and managers use it effectively to plan and monitor progress. The views of apprentices in the self-assessment report regarding the high standard of provision matched those views of apprentices gathered during the inspection.
- Many apprentices successfully progress into promoted posts or on to higher-level employment with other employers. Managers collect case studies of this progression, but do not monitor apprentices' career progression sufficiently closely.
- Staff at all levels have a good understanding of equality and diversity, which managers promote well to nearly all learners through the very good SERCO code of conduct that applies across the provision. Assessors use a wide range of materials, which are topical and vocationally relevant, to explore matters within equality and diversity. The monthly newsletter always contains a feature on equality and diversity. As a result staff can develop better materials. All staff complete regular update training, which they value and see as supporting their work.

### Governance

- Governance is good. Accountability and reporting lines are clearly set out in a range of documents. SVS managers have a monthly performance review with the managing director and finance director of the Citizens' Services board, the group that oversees SERCO's Citizens work in the public sector. The business plan, achievement of targets and future developments of the provision are discussed and decided. This process is very robust and has contributed to a more focused and better-managed provision.

### Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are trained appropriately and are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding policy is up to date and very comprehensive. Senior managers review it frequently and ensure that it takes account of any new legislation.
- The lead safeguarding team monitors any potential safeguarding incidents carefully and take swift, appropriate action where necessary. Apprentices have a good awareness of safeguarding and health and safety matters. SERCO has responded well to the government's requirements to raise understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and nearly all apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of these important issues.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Trainers and assessors are highly knowledgeable and experienced and use their skills well to motivate apprentices and offer them highly effective support. The majority of assessors encourage apprentices to work independently and to take on additional responsibilities in the workplace. Apprentices begin training early in their programme and develop their knowledge and skills rapidly.

- Apprentices make a valued contribution to their employers' business. Advanced apprentices are aware of agreed service agreements and the need for high standards, especially in some highly regulated work settings such as prisons. Assessors and workplace supervisors work together well to ensure that apprentices are set constructive targets to help them to succeed. A minority of these targets are too superficial or too imprecise and provide insufficient challenge to apprentices to ensure they make good progress in developing their skills.
- Training and individual coaching sessions are good. Assessors carefully match apprentices to opportunities and work closely with both apprentices and their workplace supervisors to tailor programmes to apprentices' work roles. For example, aeronautical engineering apprentices have a programme that ensures they sample all areas of work in the maintenance hangars and gain experience of the full range of aircraft systems.
- Trainers and assessors provide apprentices with good learning materials and online resources to encourage independent learning. These are particularly well developed in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Engineering apprentices undertake additional mathematics units, which prepare them well for higher education. However, a few business administration apprentices have not accessed additional resources, which has slowed progress in a minority of cases.
- Most apprentices benefit from developing skills in high-quality work placements and their managers offer them valuable additional work and encouragement to ensure they complete. For example, in hospital settings, apprentices gain additional skills including manual handling and fire marshalling. In engineering, learners attend helicopter manufacturers' courses alongside their Royal Navy peers.
- Assessors check learning well during sessions and through assessment and progress reviews. Apprentices receive good on-the-job training, which assessors and managers integrate well into the programme. Engineering apprentices share their learning and skills development with assessors and supervisors using an online 'blog'.
- Assessment practice is fair and reliable, building on previous work, and planning future developments well. Verbal feedback is generally very effective, detailed and constructive. However, not all apprentices have always received sufficiently detailed written feedback and are sometimes not sufficiently aware of the key improvement points.
- Apprentices develop good understanding of diversity through effective training, reviews and induction. The large majority of them have a good understanding of their own rights and responsibilities and of wider diversity themes in their own workplaces. Engineering apprentices are set homework on themes beyond their everyday experiences, including, for example, radicalisation. Apprentices work safely and staff care for them well. A helpful pocketbook and key fob provide essential safeguarding reporting procedures.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good**

- Apprentices enjoy their learning and are highly motivated and ambitious to succeed. Many apprentices who have been out of learning for many years quickly grow in confidence and make good progress, developing a deeper understanding of business processes and acquiring skills to help them to work more effectively.
- Apprentices are highly regarded in the workplace and contribute well to meeting business objectives. Management apprentices learn how to lead their teams effectively and prioritise tasks to ensure that their teams meet targets on time. Learners in banks are developing a broader perspective of financial services in order to deal with clients more effectively. Engineering apprentices develop skills working on complex aeronautical, electronic, and machining and maintenance tasks, many of which are safety-critical and highly regulated.
- Assessors ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Many apprentices are clear about progression routes from level two to level three programmes but they do not always benefit from impartial advice and guidance on the wider options that may be available.
- Assessors support apprentices to develop their mathematics skills well. The development of English oral skills contributes to apprentices being able to meet the needs of customers effectively; however, staff do not always identify weaknesses in apprentices' written work. Engineering apprentices develop strong mathematics skills, enabling them to work to high tolerances.
- Apprentices benefit from undertaking additional qualifications and training to widen their skills and knowledge in their job role and increase their employability. For example, engineers undertake additional mathematics units to prepare them better for higher education. Administration apprentices benefit from a range of certificated training on topics such as data protection and business processes.
- Assessors place a strong emphasis on apprentices' understanding and management of health and safety.

Apprentices have a good understanding of the need for risk assessments, and are clear how to safeguard themselves and others. Apprentices handling clients' telephone calls learn how to deal with abusive calls effectively. One employer confirmed that the increased awareness of health and safety has visibly improved the working environment, as apprentices have become more proactive in putting things right.

- Assessors develop apprentices' understanding of British values and living within a diverse culture well. Staff actively encourage apprentices to reflect on, and identify, the potential risks and indicators of radicalisation.

## **Outcomes for learners**

**are good**

- SVS recruits a large number of apprentices with a wide range of qualifications on entry. The overwhelming majority of them make good progress through their qualifications.
- The proportion of apprentices successfully completing their qualifications, including those in English and mathematics, has risen substantially since the previous inspection and is now good in most subject areas and in subcontracted provision. There is little variation in the progress of apprentices from different ethnic backgrounds, genders or with stated learning difficulties.
- The published data for SVS includes the work of a very large subcontractor, where the proportion of apprentices completing their programmes was very low. Leaders and managers terminated this contract in August 2014 and have taken clear and decisive action to support those apprentices who wanted to continue.
- Not all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been resolved. The proportion of apprentices who complete in their agreed timescale remains low in leisure, travel and tourism, where the number of apprentices is low. A small minority of current apprentices will not complete on time. A very small number of apprentices are less well motivated or committed to their programme.
- Apprentices' work is of a high standard in many subjects. They willingly take advantage of a wide range of opportunities to extend their workplace skills. Their workplace learning links well with off-the-job training and supports the development of skills.
- Most assessors set challenging targets and expect high standards for their apprentices, both in teaching sessions and in reviews. Assessors closely monitor apprentices' progress towards achieving their targets and provide suitable support where progress is slower than planned. Most apprentices understand what they need to do to improve their work or understanding, and meet their targets. They develop a good range of skills that help them to work more effectively. For example, customer services apprentices have good people skills, make customers feel at ease and communicate well with them.
- Apprentices work in many areas of SERCO's business and the feedback from their managers shows that their contribution to improving the business is both clear and highly valued. Apprentices value the challenging work they are set and many take opportunities to gain promotion within SERCO, to move on to promotions in other employers, or in some cases, to enter higher education.

## **Types of provision**

### **Apprenticeships**

**are good**

## Provider details

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Type of provider</b>  | Employer  |
| <b>Age range of learners</b>   | 16+   |
| <b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b> | 2,516   |
| <b>Principal/CEO</b>   | Melanie Nicholson, Partnership Director for Skills, Serco Vocational Services |
| <b>Website address</b>   | www.sercovocational.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 |     |
|--|---|-----|----------|-----|---------|-----|-------------------|-----|
|  | 16–18   | 19+ | 16–18    | 19+ | 16–18   | 19+ | 16–18             | 19+ |
|  | 0   | 0   | 0        | 0   | 0       | 0   | 0                 | 0   |
|  | Intermediate  |     | Advanced |     | Higher  |     |                   |     |
|  | 16–18   | 19+ | 16–18    | 19+ | 16–18   | 19+ |                   |     |
|  | 78  | 741 | 62       | 565 | 0       | 15  |                   |     |
|  | 16–19   |     | 19+      |     | Total   |     |                   |     |
|  | 0   |     | 0        |     | 0       |     |                   |     |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships) | 0   |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | Skills Funding Agency (SFA)   |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | ■ Crime Scene Resources Ltd   |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | ■ Eden College of Human Resource Development and Management Studies Ltd |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | ■ JT Development Solutions Ltd  |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | ■ Liral Veget Training and Recruitment Ltd                              |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | ■ Morgan Daniels Training Ltd   |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
|  | ■ Tempus  |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |
| ■ Urban Skills                                       |   |     |          |     |         |     |                   |     |

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

|                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Wilf Hudson, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Charles Clark               | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Martin Bennett              | Ofsted inspector        |
| Roger Pilgrim               | Ofsted inspector        |
| Lynda Bourne                | Ofsted inspector        |
| Richard Deane               | Ofsted inspector        |

The above team was assisted by the director of skills, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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