Learning Skills Partnership Ltd
Independent learning provider

Inspection dates	22–25 September 2015
Overall effectiveness	**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers do not critically evaluate their provision through self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements.
- Assessors do not monitor the progress of apprentices sufficiently, resulting in the skills development for some being too slow.
- Learning is not always planned to meet apprentices' individual needs or broaden their wider skills and knowledge, including the development of English, mathematics and ICT skills.
- Feedback on assessment does not always contain sufficient detail for apprentices to know how to improve their work.

- Leaders and managers insufficiently promote equality and diversity and apprentices' understanding lacks depth.
- Directors do not challenge managers to ensure that all apprentices develop high standards in all parts of their apprenticeship.
- Managers do not focus on the progress apprentices' make in lessons or give sufficient attention to the professional development of trainers and assessors to help them to improve their practice.
- Assessors do not provide clear expectations of what apprentices should complete for each part of their apprenticeship to ensure apprentices reach their full potential.

The provider has the following strengths

- Directors have developed a strong and ambitious strategic vision which is highly responsive to the needs of employers within the automotive and construction sectors.
- Most apprentices exhibit the professional standards and behaviours that their employers rightly expect.

- Most apprentices progress into sustained employment once they have completed their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices benefit from good support from their assessors.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Learning Skills Partnership is a large national independent learning provider with headquarters based in Hessle near Hull. All apprenticeships are delivered by the provider's staff. Unemployment rates in the Yorkshire and Humber region, where the large majority of the provision is delivered, stands at 6.6% compared to a national rate of 5.5%.
- There are currently 265 apprentices enrolled; three quarters of all apprentices are aged 16–18, with the remainder being adults. Approximately three quarters of all apprentices are undertaking administration and management apprenticeships, with almost all of the remainder of apprentices being equally distributed between vehicle sales and construction.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and sharing of information across the organisation, so that staff at all levels have a more informed and accurate understanding of the progress of different groups of apprentices.
- Improve the rigour of self-assessment and internal quality improvement arrangements so that reported judgements are more self-critical, take into account the views of apprentices and employers, and result in a more accurate view of the organisation's performance.
- Rapidly improve the development of apprentices' skills in English, mathematics and ICT, so that they are well equipped with these essential skills for both their personal and working lives.
- Improve assessment practice by:
  – developing assessors' abilities to plan for learning so that all parts of the apprenticeships meet individual apprentices' needs and provide the challenge and motivation that they need to achieve their potential and broaden their skills and knowledge
  – providing more-detailed written feedback so that apprentices know exactly what they need to do to improve the standard of their work in all aspects of their framework.
- Ensure that the feedback tutors receive following lesson observations focuses on enabling them to meet apprentices' needs more effectively, ensuring that apprentices of all abilities make rapid progress in their learning and reach their full potential.
- Ensure that tutors set challenging and aspirational targets that result in apprentices being supported to develop high standards of English, mathematics and ICT skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management   requires improvement

■ Leaders and managers do not use their self-assessment process fully to accurately evaluate performance across the organisation. Managers do not consider all of the available evidence to inform their views of the strengths and areas for improvement within the business. Some key weaknesses identified by inspectors are not fully reflected in the self-assessment report.

■ Leaders and managers have acted swiftly to address the low achievement in 2013/14. However, the quality improvement plan does not cover all of the key performance areas that require improvement. For example, the plan does not detail the precise steps needed to bring about the necessary improvements in the development of English, mathematics and ICT. Improvement milestones are not specific enough to confirm progress or provide evidence of impact on apprentices' programmes.

■ The process for observing teaching, learning and assessment requires further development. Insufficient emphasis is given in observations to the progress that apprentices make over time, aligned with the absence of any standardisation or moderation arrangements, which results in the majority of observers' judgements being overgenerous.

■ Performance management is not yet sufficiently rigorous to bring about rapid and widespread improvement to standards and performance across the organisation. All staff have individual development plans aligned to the organisation's key performance indicators. The impact of training that staff receive is not routinely checked to ensure development plans have been completed.

■ The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Although apprentices have the opportunities to explore their understanding of the fundamental components that underpin British values, including tolerance, respect and rule of law, not all tutors are confident to discuss these aspects with apprentices and, as a result, some apprentices still have gaps in their knowledge.

■ Leaders and managers have set a clear strategic direction for the organisation; they successfully use their extensive knowledge of the automotive and construction sectors to successfully engage with high-profile employers who support apprentices' career goals.

■ Leaders and managers respond exceptionally well to meet the needs of employers. They work very closely with a range of regional and national employers to develop tailored apprenticeship programmes that meet their individual organisational needs. This leads to apprentices being placed in high-calibre organisations where they have many opportunities to progress.

■ **The governance of the provider**

  – The board of directors routinely receive and scrutinise information on the performance of the business across a number of key performance indicators, but they do not have sufficient breadth of information in relation to both quality and standards across the organisation to provide effective challenge and to hold managers and staff to account. For example, gaps between the performance of different groups of apprentices are not identified at an early enough stage to ensure that these are quickly narrowed.

  – The board has not reacted quickly enough to the setting and monitoring of high standards for the development of apprentices' skills in English, mathematics and ICT. As a result, few apprentices are encouraged to develop their skills in these areas above the minimal expectations required of their apprenticeship.

  – Leaders have an overoptimistic view of performance, quality and standards across the organisation, including the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Although the board has some awareness of the key areas that need to improve, they do not have sufficiently detailed insight of the scope and range of challenges that need to be urgently addressed.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding**

  – The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Managers have implemented robust policies covering staff recruitment, including thorough vetting for all tutors and support staff who may have contact with apprentices. The central register that records the status of Disclosure and Barring Service checks for staff is detailed and up to date. Tutors are confident in raising alerts and making referrals regarding potential safeguarding concerns that affect apprentices. Safeguarding incidents, including those of bullying and harassment, are rare and such matters are appropriately investigated by the designated safeguarding officer.

  – Apprentices say they feel safe because of the clear instruction and guidance that they receive in the workplace and that there is always someone to talk to if they have problems. They have a good understanding of what constitutes an unsafe situation and how to keep themselves safe personally and online. However, arrangements to develop and extend apprentices' understanding of e-safety,

including cyberbullying, require improvement.

- Leaders and managers have very recently introduced a detailed 'Prevent strategy' and accompanying action plan to tackle potential threats to apprentices from radicalisation and extremism. The designated safeguarding officer has received 'Prevent training'. This training has been cascaded to all staff to improve their understanding and insight of the 'vulnerability indicators' that may indicate an apprentice may be at risk of radicalisation. Conversely, plans to extend this training to apprentices have yet to be implemented, which puts them at risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment   requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Assessors' planning requires improvement. As a result, it does not always meet apprentices' needs or adequately broaden their skills and knowledge. Information gathered about apprentices' starting points is not used well enough to plan learning and ensure that apprentices are challenged and motivated to realise their full potential. Assessors do not always identify how they can support apprentices in a structured way to achieve their goals. Assessors do not always work sufficiently well with all employers to plan the training of apprentices.

- Assessors do not develop apprentices' theoretical understanding sufficiently beyond the minimum standard needed to achieve their apprenticeships; for example, apprentices on management programmes are not able to talk about well-known management theories and techniques which they can apply at work as a result of their learning. Too much emphasis is placed on apprentices writing about their day-to-day activities at work to meet assessment requirements as opposed to them being challenged to broaden their knowledge and skills. Assessment practice meets the standards specified by the awarding organisations.

- Apprentices' skills in English, mathematics and ICT are not furthered beyond what is needed to meet their frameworks. Assessors do not routinely encourage more-able apprentices to develop these skills; as a consequence, some apprentices fail to retain or consolidate skills which are fundamental to their effectiveness in the workplace. Assessors do not routinely correct spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' work.

- Assessors too often set targets which lack detail, direction and challenge, focusing instead on meeting minimum requirements. Many progress reviews do not set clear targets for apprentices to achieve and progress is not always recorded, leading to apprentices being unsure as to how well they are progressing.

- Written feedback on apprentices' work often lacks detail and fails to focus sufficiently on personal development or improvement in the workplace. Comments are often brief and do not give apprentices the information they need to improve, or stretch them to achieve higher standards.

- Apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity lacks depth and they are not able to apply any real understanding to the workplace. Despite recent training for assessors, a few still lack the confidence and knowledge to be able to develop and support the apprentices effectively.

- Apprentices benefit from good practical support from their assessors who, for example, provide helpful guidance on interpreting qualification requirements and explaining terminology in the context of the apprentices' workplace. They rearrange meetings at short notice to meet employers' business needs and answer queries both inside and outside of normal working hours. This helps to ensure that apprentices remain engaged with their programmes and fosters productive relationships with employers, who generally value the vocational knowledge and skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare   requires improvement

- Skills development in English, mathematics and ICT skills is weak. Leaders have insufficiently ambitious plans for the improving of these skills, which have resulted in a low priority being placed on their development by delivery staff, with few apprentices valuing the improvement of these skills.

- Apprentices state that they feel safe but they are unaware of wider aspects such as cyberbullying and the Prevent agenda, which leads to them being potentially vulnerable. Apprentices have not received any e-safety training from the provider or their employer, but when questioned demonstrated confidence about how to be safe as a result of guidance and support received from school.

- Poor behaviour in a few lessons, aligned with the tutor's acceptance of some low-level disruption, such as eating in class and mobile phone texting whilst the lesson is in progress, fails to promote positive personal, social and employability skills. A few apprentices make inappropriate comments to others in sessions; this is not always addressed by the tutor or other apprentices.

- Most apprentices improve their self-confidence and become more self-assured in their work and personal lives. They speak with enthusiasm about their programmes leading to a career within their chosen sectors and the opportunities that subsequently become available to them to enhance their career.
- Apprentices benefit from high-quality work placements. Most employers provide apprentices with good training and progression opportunities. For example, in an insurance company, one apprentice quickly progressed from being an administrator to a broker within six months of completing their apprenticeship. A few apprentices have successfully progressed from intermediate to advanced level in construction and business administration and new apprentices in these organisations aspire to follow in their footsteps.
- Most apprentices act as good role models for their organisations and mirror well the organisation and professional values that their employers rightly expect. For example, apprentices arrive to work smartly dressed, act with respect and are courteous to visitors, peers and others.
- The majority of apprentices say that they feel safe and have access to comprehensive health and safety/welfare and counselling services via internal human resource operations at their employers. Conversely, a very small group of construction apprentices display poor adherence to site-specific health and safety requirements, which is not challenged by tutors.

Outcomes for learners   require improvement

- Managers' identification of apprentices' starting points, and the monitoring and management of their apprentices' progress, requires improvement. Managers do not accurately identify the progress that apprentices or groups of apprentices are making. This negatively affects the support that they receive to make rapid progress in their apprenticeship and to achieve within the planned timescales.
- Too few apprentices are challenged to develop their skills in English, mathematics and ICT further. Assessors place too much attention on the requirements of the apprenticeship framework as opposed to the individual needs of the apprentice; this has led to only a very small minority of apprentices taking qualifications at a higher level.
- The proportion of apprentices progressing to higher-level programmes although improving is low. Only a third of recently qualified intermediate apprentices progressed to the advanced level. Managers are currently implementing plans to improve this but the impact of this has not yet been fully realised.
- Managers' collection and analysis of destination data requires improvement. Leaders have not fully implemented a systematic collection of data to inform managers on the impact that the apprenticeship has on an apprentice's future life.
- Managers' collection of performance data to monitor the gaps in progress and achievement of different groups of apprentices is limited and fails to inform managers on the performance of apprentices. This leads to managers not being able to fully identify where different groups of apprentices are underperforming and consequently not implementing swift actions to improve the situation.
- Apprentices' achievement has improved significantly in the previous 12 months. Currently, almost three quarters of apprentices have achieved their framework, which is above the low national rate. Two thirds of apprentices finish within their planned timescales, which is better than similar providers nationally.
- The large majority of recently qualified apprentices are successful in securing employment. A third of these apprentices received an increase in salary, which has a positive impact on their personal circumstances and social mobility within their community. A few apprentices gain promotion and are seen as role models by new apprentices entering the business.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	261
Managing director	Mrs Kay Locker
Website address	www.learningskillspartnership.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+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	185	41	13	26	N/A	N/A

	16–19	19+	Total
Number of traineeships	N/A	N/A	N/A

Number of learners aged 14–16	N/A
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Paul Cocker, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Victor Reid	Her Majesty's Inspector
Judith Hamer	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Hartman	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Sharpe	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the commercial director, 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. 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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