

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 March 2016

Mr James Bishop
Chief Executive Officer
The Skills Partnership Limited
Howarth Lodge
9 Reading Road
Pangbourne
Reading
RG8 7LR

Dear Mr Bishop

Short inspection of The Skills Partnership (TSP)

Following the short inspection on 24–25 February 2016 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provision was judged to be good in March 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

The board and senior managers have maintained the good quality of provision seen at the previous inspection. You and your senior team have very successfully instilled in your staff, learners and employers an ethos of collaboration and high expectations. With the board and senior managers, you have set a strategic direction for TSP which focuses strongly on providing high-quality training to meet the business needs of employers and enables learners to raise their aspirations and achieve well.

Learners across the country make good progress with their learning. However, the proportion of learners who successfully completed their qualifications in 2014/15 declined from the very high levels found at the time of the previous inspection to around those of similar providers nationally. This is because the majority of learners worked for one very large employer who made most of their trainees redundant.

The board, senior managers and staff all have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in learners' outcomes and in teaching, learning and assessment. At all levels of the organisation, staff focus sharply on taking action to improve learners' experience, and this has ensured that the quality of provision remains good. Feedback from learners and employers is used effectively by managers and staff to improve learning and to understand any concerns learners

may have. Managers take quick and decisive action when the performance of staff or learners does not meet the high standards expected of them.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior managers have taken highly effective action to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The wallet-sized safeguarding card issued to all learners with its useful contact numbers and helpful questions is used well by learners and, on occasion, co-workers. Learners feel and are safe in the workplace and during training sessions. Managers have good information and technology systems to ensure that staff and learners stay safe when working online. Senior managers place the highest focus on ensuring that staff are safe while going about their work in remote locations and when on other providers' sites.

Senior managers have implemented their obligations under the new 'Prevent' duty well. Staff training is comprehensive and well structured; staff have a very good understanding of the duty, British values and the dangers of radicalisation. However, while learners in London have a very good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation, this is not the case for a very small minority of learners in other areas of the country.

Inspection findings

- Managers use data well to monitor the progress of all learners. Managers identify quickly any areas of underperformance, taking swift action to ensure learners make good progress. Tutors have a very good understanding of the individual progress of their learners and are well supported by managers when they identify a learner at risk of not completing their qualification in a timely manner. Managers recognise that the reporting to the board of learners' progress in developing their skills and knowledge in English, mathematics and information, communications and technology (ICT) should be further improved.
- Tutors review individual learners' progress frequently and thoroughly. Verbal feedback to learners on their progress is very good. Learners understand the progress they are making and what skills they need to develop further. A minority of employers do not review learning and progress, and as a result they do not ensure that work schedules reflect the tasks and activities for learners to practise and hone their skills further.
- Managers have put in place effective staff development to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment remain good. Managers and staff make very effective use of technology to communicate and share good practice in assessment and learning, and to ensure that all learners receive the same high standard of provision across the country.
- At the previous inspection, those learners who required additional help to complete their studies did not succeed as well as their peers. Managers have

taken appropriate action to remedy this weakness. High-quality teaching and assessment now ensure that the small minority of learners who do require extra help, and those who do not have English as a first language, make good progress.

- Tutors develop learners' skills in English and mathematics effectively and learners make good progress. The proportion of learners who now successfully achieve their English and mathematics qualification first time continues to improve and is now good. Most learners use technical language appropriately and well.

Next steps for the provider

Senior managers should ensure that:

- they further improve the reporting to the board of learners' skills and knowledge development in English, mathematics and ICT
- all employers and line managers review learners' ongoing skills development and progress
- tutors' written recording of individual learners' skills and knowledge development reflects better the very good verbal feedback tutors give to learners on their ongoing progress
- all learners have a good understanding of the potential risks of radicalisation.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jules Steele
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Ofsted Inspectors. We were assisted by the quality director as nominee. We visited five employer sites to observe teaching, learning and assessments and to look at learners' work. We met with learners, employers and line managers, senior managers and tutors. We reviewed key documents including the provider's most recent self-assessment report, development plans, data related to the performance of learners currently on programmes, and those related to safeguarding. We considered the views of learners and employers by reviewing the results of Ofsted's online questionnaires.