

# Skills Team Ltd

Independent learning provider

## Inspection dates

27–29 September 2016

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

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Senior leaders have managed the merger of Skills Team and Just IT very effectively.
- Senior leaders and managers have high aspirations for the future performance of the organisation and are building on the substantial strengths of both Skills Team and Just IT staff.
- Achievement rates have improved over the last two years and are now high.
- Apprentices achieve particularly well at all levels and in all subjects offered. The vast majority achieve within planned timescales.
- Employers value highly the improvements in confidence, and in technical and communication skills that their apprentices gain and the contribution they are able to make to their businesses.
- High-quality work placements very effectively support the development of trainees' work ethic.
- The standard of learners' work is good and employers are impressed at the rate at which learners acquire new skills.
- Learners enjoy their training and confidently apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge to their work.
- Staff assess learners' potential well at the beginning of their training, including their English and mathematics skills. They carefully match learners with jobs and work placements that suit their career aspirations.
- Good pre-employment advice and guidance and robust induction training prepare learners well for their next steps in learning and work.
- Progression to further learning and permanent employment is good.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Just IT Training, based in the City of London, acquired Skills Team Limited on 1 August 2016 and retained the Skills Team name. The newly merged organisation provides apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced and higher levels in team-leading, management and information technology (IT). It also provides traineeships for 16- to 18-year-olds; a new initiative started just after the merger. Skills Team operates across the greater London area. There are 15 trainees on programme and 62 apprentices.
- Just IT has seconded its staff to help develop Skills Team traineeships and IT trailblazer apprenticeships. For the existing apprenticeships carried over from Skills Team prior to the merger, Just IT recruited original Skills Team staff and managers as consultants and associates to provide continuity for learners.

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

- Teachers and assessors should use their thorough analysis of learners' English and mathematical skills gained from diagnostic assessment to develop identified areas for improvement and help learners to achieve their functional skills tests at the first attempt.
- Senior leaders and managers should develop the observation of teaching, learning and assessment process further to focus on learning. They should set actions for staff that help them to use their in-depth knowledge of learners' progress and ability to set work that allows learners to learn independently, gives learners specific targets which challenge them individually, and enables them to make better progress.
- Staff should continually reinforce learners' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and British values so that they retain what they have learned at induction by covering relevant topics in progress reviews, assignments, on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and in training sessions.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders and managers have worked very effectively since the previous inspection to improve the quality of provision and as a consequence the large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications and progress to full-time employment. Employers value highly the gains in employability and social skills that their apprentices make and their application to their businesses.
- The managing director and senior leaders have a very clear strategy and vision for the future direction of the company. They are ambitious for the future performance of the organisation and are using the experience of managers and staff from the recently merged organisation to establish effective systems and processes to achieve this, building on the strengths of both organisations.
- Senior leaders have worked effectively to ensure that the curriculum offer meets the needs of the IT sector closely, both locally and regionally. The offer meets the priorities of the London local enterprise partnership (LEP) as well as those of several neighbouring LEPs. Staff have been involved significantly with the development of the new trailblazer apprenticeships in IT, further enhancing their ability to meet the training and development needs of the sector.
- The managing director and senior leaders of the two organisations have handled the acquisition of Skills Team Ltd by Just IT very well. As a result they have minimised the disruption to apprentices and trainees. Good assessment practice has been maintained and senior leaders and managers have driven enhancements to this process. This has led to good apprentice and trainee progress and skills development.
- Staff receive an annual appraisal of their performance from their managers at which they set targets for improvement. Target-setting arising from appraisal is not yet fully developed and sufficiently specific to express clearly the intended impact of any targets set. For example, where actions for improvement arise following observations of teaching, learning and assessment, these do not contribute to appraisal targets. Managers review staff progress with them quarterly, provide positive feedback on their performance, and challenge them where performance has not been of a high enough standard.
- The managing director and senior leaders recognise that, despite the very high proportion of learners already achieving their qualifications in English and mathematics, the rate of progress that they make and the proportion of those who pass first time could be improved. They have developed a new strategy to achieve these aims, but it is too soon to assess the full impact of this development.
- Managers' self-assessment of the provision is broadly accurate and identifies the vast majority of actions for improvement that are required. Their '100 day plan', developed and implemented post acquisition, contains well-considered actions for improvement with associated impact statements and timescales for completion. Managers' observations of teaching, learning and assessment are not yet used well to inform actions for improvement. Observers focus too much on the actions of teachers and assessors and not the impact that their actions have on helping learners make progress.

### The governance of the provider

- The managing director and senior leaders monitor the performance of the apprenticeship and trainee provision closely and value highly the feedback they get from employers

about the quality of training and assessment. As a result they are very well informed about the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. They set senior leaders clear and challenging targets for development, which they monitor closely.

- The managing director uses external consultants to good effect to provide both support and challenge to the performance of the organisation. Consultants have provided several new initiatives since the merger and helped to harmonise the processes of the two organisations.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers work very well to ensure the safety and welfare of their learners. Staff understand well the types of challenges that learners may face in their work settings and in their family lives. They investigate the very few safeguarding incidents thoroughly and make referrals to external agencies, where appropriate.
- Learners are trained well in the relevant safety considerations in their work settings and they work safely as a result. Through a comprehensive induction programme, they develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and in their daily lives.
- Learners have received initial training on how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation and about living in modern Britain. Managers recognise that there is further work to do to improve learners' understanding of these topics and they have plans in place to achieve this.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teachers and assessors work collaboratively with learners to provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which learners do well. Learners make good progress on their apprenticeship or traineeship programmes. Staff plan training and assessment sessions well so that learners develop good skills, knowledge and confidence and produce work of a good standard.
- Apprentices apply their off-job training effectively in the workplace and the standard of their work improves as a result of their training. For example, advanced apprentices on IT programmes are able to set up servers and printers on networks, provide guest logins and reformat laptop hard drives in the first few weeks of their course.
- Apprentices develop good employability skills such as chairing meetings and working collaboratively with colleagues in workplaces consisting of a wide range of staff from a wide variety of backgrounds. Trainees learn the importance of work ethics, equality of opportunity, appropriate workplace communication and teamwork. Employers value the inputs that learners bring to their businesses.
- Staff monitor the progress of learners well and know which learners are on track to achieve their qualifications in their expected timescale and provide additional help to learners who need to improve their rate of progress. Assessors keep employers well informed about their apprentices' progress. IT apprentices use reflective diaries well to monitor their own skills and knowledge development in the workplace, which are regularly checked by assessors.
- The vast majority of teachers and assessors use an appropriate range of methods effectively to develop and evaluate learners' understanding at the right level. They

challenge learners to think more deeply about complex IT problems in their workplace settings and share how these may be resolved, or challenge trainees' 'Dragon's Den'-type presentation ideas in a safe and productive manner, which learners respond well to.

- Not all teachers allow learners to develop really effective independent learning, for example through research and problem-solving skills; a minority of staff provide answers and solutions to learners too readily. An increasing number of learners benefit from a range of good e-learning materials and activities available so that they continue their learning at a time which suits them.
- Most teachers and assessors provide effective, constructive feedback to learners and set appropriate targets for learners which help them make progress. Not all staff set learners targets which are specific to the skills and knowledge which each learner needs to develop. Assessment of apprentices in the workplace is regular and frequent.
- Assessors of management apprentices reinforce learners' use of good English well and help learners develop strategies to improve their spelling and grammar. Learners' development of mathematical skills does not have the same focus, although all learners are aware of the importance of the use of good English and mathematics skills in the workplace.
- Staff assess learners' ability and potential well at the beginning of their programmes, including their English and mathematics skills, and carefully select and match learners with training, subjects and work placements which suit their career aspirations. However, the outcome of this thorough assessment is not used to develop individual learning plans to improve learners' identified areas of weakness in English or mathematics skills.
- During the first few days of their training, staff clearly explain to learners the importance of staying safe from radicalisation and extremism and the meaning of fundamental British values. Teachers and assessors do not reinforce this sufficiently well throughout learners' training programmes; as a result, learners do not retain the information they need to know, or develop their understanding beyond a basic level.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

- Learners are interested, participative and articulate in learning sessions and enjoy their training. For example, trainees are confident in presenting their work to their peers and teachers. They behave well in lessons, treating each other and others they come into contact with with respect and courtesy. Learners present themselves very well, for example dressing smartly to meet the expectations of the business sector.
- Apprentices develop good employability skills such as structuring and chairing meetings, conflict management, creating and delivering presentations and honing self-reflection skills. Trainees develop good levels of confidence on the programme. Through group work and presentations to their peers, trainees develop their speaking skills and refine their competence in IT using a wide a variety of software applications.
- Apprentices benefit from good reinforcement from their trainers and assessors in developing their English skills. Apprentices are able to apply these skills in their work settings by, for example, formalising communication with team members through structured meetings. The promotion of mathematical skills is less well developed and although learners complete functional skills qualifications in mathematics, the continued reinforcement of these skills in the workplace is not applied as well as it is for English.
- Progression to sustainable employment and higher-level apprenticeships is good. Learners

are aware of their next steps in learning and good information, advice and guidance enables staff to closely match learners' job opportunities to their career aspirations.

- Learners feel safe and well supported, both in their training sessions and in the workplace. Learners are aware of whom to go to for help on a variety of concerns. They know how to keep themselves safe online and have access to emergency hotlines to report any issues. Learners have very good awareness of health and safety at work, which enables them to apply safe working practices.
- IT apprentices have a good awareness of measures to prevent radicalisation and extremism. They have a good understanding of British values included in workshop sessions as 'the topic of the week'. A wide range of subjects are covered, including safeguarding, political issues and topical news items relating to themes such as sustainability, recycling and Britain's exit from the European Union.
- A recently introduced and helpful booklet that includes issues relating to radicalisation, extremism and modern British values, such as democracy and the rule of law, is available to all apprentices and recently recruited trainees. The workbook provides a very well constructed set of challenging ethical dilemmas for learners to consider and debate within their group. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of this new initiative.
- Employers, although aware of equality and diversity, are not so aware of the 'Prevent' duty. Some have heard of it through other activities, for example through working in schools or other public sector settings. Management apprentices have a less well developed understanding of British values and the significance of preventing extremism and radicalisation.
- Trainees develop a good work ethic through high-quality work placements. Expectations on punctuality, reliability and communication skills are consistently emphasised throughout the programme and employers testify to the high levels of motivation and work-readiness of Skills Team's trainees.

## Outcomes for learners

## Good

- Learners make good progress in lessons and throughout their training programmes and as a result the vast majority achieve within their planned timescales. Trainees' progress is good. All 15 trainees who started remain on the programme and all from the first group have started a work placement with high-quality IT companies.
- Achievement rates have continued to rise year on year since the previous inspection in 2014 and are now high in 2015/16. Apprentices achieve particularly well at all levels and the vast majority achieve on time.
- Senior leaders and managers have been successful in closing the achievement gap between overall and timely achievement rates. This has improved further in 2015/16. The small number of IT advanced apprentices did not achieve as well as their peers in 2014/15 and there was some slight variability in achievement rates between men and women. The slight gap in achievement rates has narrowed overall and senior leaders are more closely analysing the achievements of different groups of learners.
- The vast majority of learners achieve functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and IT at levels 1 and 2, although too few learners achieve their functional skills qualifications at the first attempt. The recently introduced dedicated support has resulted in current learners making good progress.
- The standard of learners' work is good both in lessons and at work, and closely matched



off-the-job training links well to both apprentices' job roles and trainee activity in the workplace. The standard of trainees' work is good. As well as compiling a curriculum vitae (CV), trainees post blogs online, which effectively capture their experiences each week. This increases their confidence and helps them to evaluate the new skills they have acquired. Employers value the blogs in assessing previous skills and knowledge.

- The skills and knowledge learners acquire on the traineeship programme are good. Throughout the first four weeks learners work together in small groups to develop an IT application. They research existing technology, conduct market research, cost projects and allocate roles to each team member. The culmination is a presentation to a group of employers, who rigorously cross-examine them on the viability of their proposal.
- Learners enjoy their training and confidently apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge to their work. Progression rates to further learning at higher levels and into sustainable work are high. The vast majority of apprentices who complete their programme progress into sustained employment or receive promotion at work.

## Types of provision

### Apprenticeships

**Good**

- Currently 62 apprentices are on programmes. The large majority of apprentices are on team leading and management programmes. The remainder are on IT programmes. The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeship in the planned timescale has improved, and is now above that of similar providers.
- Apprentices benefit from regular progress reviews and workshops which allow them to link learning to their working practices. Progress reviews are effective and detailed. They include individualised targets which help apprentices to achieve their aims. The productive involvement of employers in progress reviews enables timely support and interventions for apprentices at risk of falling behind.
- Apprentices develop good personal, social and employability skills, for example structuring and chairing meetings, team leading, conflict management, managing workloads, professional behaviours, creating and delivering presentations and self-reflection skills. Apprentices are able to apply these newly acquired skills in the workplace.
- Assessors make skilful use of questioning techniques to stretch and challenge apprentices, which enable them to self-reflect and further improve the quality of their work. For example, apprentices develop their skills in IT, health and safety, formal communication and in the delivery of presentations. As a result, most apprentices make valuable contributions to their workplaces through the application of these acquired skills.
- Assessment for learning is good. Apprentices receive frequent verbal, written and electronic feedback that enables them to improve clearly the quality of their work. Assessors routinely correct spelling and grammatical mistakes, and encourage apprentices to develop appropriate strategies to improve these. Most apprentices benefit from positive reinforcement in developing their English skills in vocational settings. They understand the importance of developing these skills, for example the importance of producing grammatically correct documents for stakeholders.
- Apprentices find the induction useful, which enables them to understand the course requirements and their rights and responsibilities at work. The learning programmes are individualised to meet the needs of apprentices in line with their next steps. Assessors

negotiate with apprentices to identify appropriate learning modules closely linked to their job roles. Apprentices receive timely initial and diagnostic assessments. The initial assessment summary documents clearly identify the levels and areas for development. However, a significant minority of apprentices do not have sufficient awareness of what these areas of development are.

- Apprentices feel safe and they know who to go to should they have any concerns. They know how to keep themselves safe. Assessors emphasise the importance of developing health and safety practices, particularly those specific to the rail industry, mental health and the well-being of themselves and their colleagues. Apprentices are able to apply this knowledge working through manual handling and electrical health and safety booklets. However, a minority of apprentices lack a clear understanding of what British values are and how to apply these to life in modern Britain.

## Traineeships

**Good**

- Skills Team has been offering traineeships for five weeks. In this time 15 trainees have started, five in the first group and 10 in the second, which started the week before the inspection. No learners have completed the full nine-week programme, which includes a four-week work placement.
- Programmes are well-planned and meet the requirements of traineeships, including the provision of work preparation training, training in English and mathematics and high-quality work experience. Training sessions are lively and trainees participate enthusiastically in activities. Teachers effectively question learners to check understanding and to ensure all are actively involved.
- Support for trainees is good. Feedback on presentations, while positive, gives trainees clear ideas on how they might improve. Trainees are encouraged to reflect on their own performance and identify their own areas for improvement.
- Trainees undertake a good initial assessment of their English and mathematics skills at the outset of the programme. Those that have good levels of English and mathematics continue to develop their skills in these areas throughout the programme. However, the results of initial assessment to plan sessions so that trainees can improve specific areas of weakness are not routinely used.
- The embedding of English into the programme is good. Feedback from employers has shown that many young people lack adequate business communication skills. As a result, functional skills lessons at Skills Team focus on the way English is used at work and the use of different types of formal and informal communication.
- In a small minority of lessons teachers too readily provide solutions to the problems they set and the questions they ask. This does not always give trainees the chance to explore different solutions and arrive at their own answers. In a small minority of lessons the most able trainees have to wait for their peers to finish work before they can progress. While most work on developing their CVs or research their own projects, there are insufficient focused extension activities to develop their knowledge further in specific areas.
- The use of work placements to develop employment skills is good. Most placements are with small IT companies where trainees benefit from a variety of activities to develop their knowledge in web design, digital marketing and technical support. Staff carefully match trainees to work placements with both the aspirations of the trainee and the work



of the employer considered. Employers value the opportunity to take trainees on shorter placements where they can assess effectively trainees' skills and attitude and consider their suitability for an apprenticeship.

- Assessment is thorough and rigorous. Achievements are recorded accurately and trainees benefit from frequent reviews of their progress, where they can discuss both personal and academic aspects of their training. Targets set at reviews are often too general, using terms such as 'upskill English'. This does not provide sufficient detail for teachers or trainees to clearly identify what they need to work on.
- The training centre provides a safe and secure learning environment. Trainees receive clear guidance on their rights and responsibilities, and the organisation's safeguarding responsibilities. Trainees know what to do if they feel bullied or unfairly treated. Online safety is a feature of many sessions and trainees have a good understanding of how to stay safe when using mobile phones and the internet. While employers are supportive and provide safe working environments, their knowledge of responsibilities in respect of the 'Prevent' duty and British values is generally low.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	58340
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	696
Principal/CEO	Denise Ellison
Telephone number	020 3008 8545
Website	<a href="http://www.skillsteam.com">www.skillsteam.com</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	–	15	3	41	1	2		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	15		–		15			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency/Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by Skill Team's quality management consultant, as nominee. 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 learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and scrutinised records of progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

## Inspection team

Rosy Belton, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Pemble	Her Majesty's Inspector
Asfa Sohail	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Flint	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Baber	Ofsted Inspector

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