

Vocational Training Services Care Sector Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

1–4 November 2016

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications is high; most current apprentices make good timely progress.
- The standard of apprentices' work is high and employers value the contribution that they make in the workplace.
- Assessors have high levels of industry experience and knowledge that they use well to develop apprentices' practical skills and knowledge.
- Assessors provide good individual coaching; learning is linked very effectively to workplace tasks.
- Assessors provide precise oral and written feedback to apprentices on their work, which helps them to improve further.
- Assessors provide good impartial initial advice and guidance to ensure that apprentices embark on the right programme, taking into account their work roles, prior experience and career aspirations.
- Managers and assessors promote equality and celebrate diversity very effectively and enable apprentices to apply this learning to their work.
- Leaders and managers oversee and monitor the programmes well and track apprentices' progress very closely; they take appropriate action to ensure that apprentices who are falling behind are supported well.
- Managers work effectively with employers, external agencies and other stakeholders, including NHS Trusts, to develop programmes that meet regional and local skills needs.
- Leaders and managers provide good training and development for staff to update and extend their skills.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Vocational Training Services Care Sector Limited (VTS) was established in 1994 and specialises in providing training for staff in the health sector predominantly located across Essex. The provider's main training and administrative centre is based in Southend-on Sea, with another site in Colchester. VTS provides apprenticeships programmes in the workplace in a range of care settings including residential homes, hospitals and childcare centres. VTS also provides business administration, customer service and direct learning support apprenticeships to staff working in care settings and schools.
- VTS began providing apprenticeships for young people aged 16 to 18 under a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency in 2013. In December 2015, the contract was extended to include apprentices aged 19 and over. At the time of the inspection, there were 306 apprentices. In addition, VTS continues to provide programmes as a subcontractor on behalf of a local college-based partnership; this provision was not included in the inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should monitor effectively apprentices' achievement of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) functional skills and ensure that staff provide more specific and effective guidance to help apprentices to pass their functional skills tests at the first attempt.
- Leaders and managers should improve their self-assessment of provision so that their evaluation is more detailed and self-critical, particularly regarding teaching, learning and assessment, and ensure that quality improvement plans include measurable targets for success for all actions.
- Assessors should improve their use of information on apprentices' starting points to ensure that they develop apprentices' English, mathematics and ICT skills effectively.
- Assessors should improve their use of target-setting to enable apprentices to make more rapid progress and excel.
- Assessors should promote successfully apprentices' understanding of British values and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have created a very supportive, open and transparent culture that leads to good communication throughout the company. Through monthly staff meetings that are very well attended, managers ensure that they maintain good communication with the assessors who work independently in the workplace. Managers share information frequently with staff on business performance, strategic plans as well as operational details of assessors' caseloads and apprentices' achievements. This ensures that assessors are well aware of business objectives and priorities. Assessors work collaboratively, supporting one another when necessary and sharing good practice readily, such as in the delivery of English and mathematics, where some staff are more confident than others.
- Leaders and managers monitor the performance of programmes thoroughly. They scrutinise records of assessors' monthly visits to apprentices, progress reviews and assessments closely and hold assessors to account for the performance of each apprentice in their caseload through monthly one-to-one meetings. Managers monitor assessors' caseloads well to ensure that they can perform highly and consequently the proportion of apprentices who achieve their programmes continues to be high.
- Leaders and managers maintain strong collaborative links with employers, external agencies and other stakeholders. As a result, they develop programmes to meet local and regional skills needs. Employers provide good-quality work experience and workplace staff serve as inspirational role models for apprentices, including those who have previously been apprentices with VTS and have progressed in their careers to hold management roles.
- Leaders work with employers to design programmes to match their bespoke needs. VTS has recently started working with three NHS Trusts within the region, diversifying the range of programmes further to match specific roles within the health service. However, while leaders have established clear progression and career routes that enable most apprentices to advance, they have not established the opportunity for apprentices to study English and mathematics at GCSE level. As a consequence, the very small number of intermediate childcare apprentices without these qualifications who aspire to progress to advanced level are not able to do so with VTS.
- Staff undertake a wide range of training and development activities to update and extend their knowledge and skills. As a result, they have high levels of vocational skills and technical expertise. Assessors spend one day each year working alongside apprentices in their settings to update their vocational practice. At the start of each new contract year, assessors attend a continuous professional development week and reflect on the previous year's performance, plan relevant targets for the coming year and conduct pertinent training to improve their performance.
- Leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity well. Managers monitor the participation of different groups of apprentices and their achievements closely, and celebrate diversity through effective marketing materials and promotional activities. Leaders have ensured that there are very few gaps in achievement between different

groups of apprentices.

- Leaders' and managers' monitoring of apprentices' functional skills achievements requires improvement. Although managers collect information on overall achievement rates for functional skills tests at each level and subject, they do not know how many apprentices achieve at their first attempt nor undertake sufficient analysis as to why a minority of apprentices take their assessments several times before achieving. However, leaders have ensured that improvements to the teaching of functional skills qualifications, including further staff training and their use of a broad range of learning resources, has resulted in higher levels of achievement than previously.
- Leaders' self-assessment of the provision is broadly accurate and identifies the main areas of improvement. However, leaders do not evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment sufficiently nor use information on the outcomes for apprentices to support their judgements. Leaders' improvement planning fails to include a small minority of required actions for improvement and does not set sufficient measurable improvement targets in a small minority of instances.
- Managers observe assessors' teaching regularly but on occasion focus too much on what the assessors do and not enough on the impact of their actions on apprentices' learning. A minority of action plans for staff following observations are too general and do not result in precise actions that will secure specific improvement in practice.

The governance of the provider

- The leadership team works very effectively to manage programmes and improve performance. They bring complementary skills and knowledge to the company and provide good support and challenge for one other.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of VTS's challenges and most of the areas for improvement and, in the large majority of instances, are taking action to address them.
- Managers use labour market information and their good links with local agencies very effectively to ensure that the provision evolves to match local skills needs.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders implement and monitor comprehensive policies and procedures that ensure that all apprentices are safe. They deal with any arising safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively.
- Staff have undertaken relevant safeguarding training and leaders ensure that they have regular checks to ensure their suitability to work with young and vulnerable people.
- Staff promote safeguarding well and check apprentices' understanding and application of safeguarding principles frequently. Apprentices say they feel safe and know whom to contact if they have any concerns. Assessors ensure that apprentices follow their employers' safeguarding procedures thoroughly in the workplace.

- Leaders and managers have responded to the 'Prevent' duty well and provide relevant training for staff. However, leaders have yet to ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of the importance of British values and the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Assessors use their considerable industry experience well to plan learning programmes that meet the needs of apprentices and their employers very effectively. Particularly strong joint working with NHS Trusts enables apprentices to gain valuable skills, employment and progression within the health sector. For example, perioperative clinical support apprentices can follow a clear career progression to higher education to complete their operating department practitioner diploma.
- Apprentices have good communication with their assessors and benefit from regular support by telephone and emails between frequent face-to-face sessions. Assessors work flexibly, planning their visits to optimise learning and assessment opportunities that arise at work, often doing so at short notice.
- Assessors provide very good coaching for apprentices. Assessors use very effective questioning techniques to help develop apprentices' thinking skills and enable them to apply their learning to workplace scenarios. Assessors generate lively discussions, check apprentices' understanding of topics successfully and help them relate new knowledge to real workplace tasks so that they meet the criteria for their assignments. For example, assessors facilitate health and social care apprentices to use their experiences with service users with complex difficulties to explain adeptly aspects of good practice in person-centred approaches to care.
- Assessors provide good-quality feedback that is supportive and encouraging, and points out clearly what apprentices need to do to improve further. Oral feedback during discussions is explicit and immediate and enables apprentices to consolidate their knowledge very effectively. Written feedback and 'top-up' questions help apprentices understand what they need to do to improve in order to complete their assignments to at least the required standard.
- Apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity in the context of their workplace and work role is good. Assessors use a good range of high-quality learning resources in sessions that enable apprentices to apply their heightened understanding of equality and diversity in the workplace. For example, assessors discuss skilfully with apprentices how to meet the needs of service users who have different religious or cultural backgrounds in residential care homes.
- The vast majority of employers and workplace supervisors support apprentices well and go to inordinate length to arrange opportunities for observations and provide written statements of what apprentices have completed in the workplace that can contribute to assessments. However, a small minority of employers are not sufficiently involved in the planning of programmes or apprentices' progress reviews. These employers are not aware fully of their apprentices' progress and what they can do to support them.
- Although assessors incorporate English and mathematics skills development routinely in

sessions and support apprentices to develop their spoken and written English well, a minority of apprentices develop these skills too slowly. In these instances, assessors do not use the assessment of apprentices' starting points to identify specific learning goals for them to work on. Assessors rely too heavily on apprentices completing practice test papers and provide little other stimuli to challenge apprentices; as a result, apprentices switch off from the learning process.

- Apprentices complete successfully a broad range of specific work-related training offered through their employers, such as dementia training and first aid. However, assessors do not routinely record this training or reflect on the skills they have gained as part of their personal learning and thinking skills development.
- The targets for apprentices set by assessors at progress reviews are not sufficiently effective. Targets focus too much on the completion of units of qualifications and do not pay enough attention to the development of new knowledge and skills to improve their overall performance in the workplace. Apprentices' broader development, including their performance at work, is not captured sufficiently well in the targets set.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices take pride in their work and become more self-assured as they develop new skills and achieve success in learning. Many apprentices have returned to studying after a gap of several years and are working hard to balance their work, learning and home responsibilities each day. Staff recognise and celebrate their efforts and achievements frequently.
- Assessors provide good impartial information, advice and guidance for potential apprentices, including a clear overview of the available learning opportunities, entry requirements and career paths. This enables apprentices to select the most appropriate programme that meets their needs.
- The induction process is thorough and includes detailed information on what is required of apprentices, including English, mathematics and ICT requirements.
- Assessors and employers provide good role models and apprentices develop very effective personal and practical skills from the examples set by their more experienced colleagues. Employers are keen to give their apprentices more responsibilities in the workplace as soon as they are able. For example, one early years learner independently organised a creative exercise with an autumnal theme for a group of children. The learner planned the activity, arranged appropriate wall displays, paid close attention to safety and facilitated the children to produce a rich collage of leaves and twigs.
- The large majority of apprentices develop good skills in English and mathematics, including those who already hold qualifications in these subjects. They produce fluent written work with few spelling or grammatical errors. They apply their mathematics skills well in the workplace, for example when calculating work place areas in a nursery to enable peers to display collages. However, a minority of apprentices do not sufficiently develop their ICT skills, including those who do not have access to a computer outside the classroom or workplace.
- Most apprentices make good progress towards achieving their qualifications and produce work of a high standard. They develop the work-related skills and attitudes that employers require and attend well and on time. Assessors challenge poor attendance

rigorously and, as a result, the attendance of apprentices is high.

- Apprentices display mature and professional standards of behaviour. They demonstrate high levels of respect and consideration towards the people they care for and their peers. Apprentices are able to deal successfully with a range of challenging issues. For example, in a childcare nursery a learner resolved sensitively a potential conflict situation involving a group of parents, demonstrating very good interpersonal skills.
- Apprentices feel safe and have an in-depth understanding of how to stay safe at work and how to report any concerns they may have relating to issues such as bullying or harassment. They understand the risks posed when using the Internet and know how to keep themselves safe online. They demonstrate safe working practices and apply their employers' safeguarding policies rigorously.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work. They apply this knowledge to their work settings and understand relevant requirements, such as the importance of meeting care sector standards and of meeting the individual needs of diverse clients.
- Apprentices demonstrate the importance of recognising and respecting individual preferences and differences when working with service users. For example, in a hospital a learner has introduced a rota system, which enables patients of different religious beliefs to use the prayer facilities at appropriate times. However, apprentices have insufficient understanding of British values; assessors do not raise apprentices' awareness of the importance of tolerance, the rule of law and democracy. Consequently, apprentices develop a very rudimentary awareness of how to protect themselves and others from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The proportion of apprentices who complete their programme successfully is high. In 2014/15, which is the first year that data is available since the start of the direct contract, overall achievement was high. Leaders' data for 2015/16 indicates that this level of achievement has been maintained. The proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes within the agreed planned timescales continues to be high.
- In 2014/15, overall and timely achievement rates for intermediate apprentices were considerably higher than those of advanced apprentices. The difference in overall achievement rates between the two programmes narrowed in 2015/16 due to successful action taken by managers to provide more intensive support for those at risk of not completing their programmes on time.
- Most apprentices make good progress during sessions with their assessors and throughout the training programme. They develop good practical and vocational skills and produce work that is of a high standard.
- Leaders' data for 2015/16 indicates that upon completion of their programmes, more than three quarters of apprentices progressed directly onto higher-level training or remained in employment, often gaining promotion or taking on additional responsibilities. In addition, several apprentices who completed their intermediate programmes in 2014/15 progressed to advanced apprenticeships in 2015/16 following a period of consolidating their skills at work and gaining supervisory roles to enable them to meet

the requirements of the advanced programme.

- Although the vast majority of apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills well, too few apprentices pass their functional skills tests at the first attempt, as tutors do not prepare them well enough for the specific challenges of the assessments. Managers have taken action to improve functional skills training and apprentices' preparation for the tests; consequently, first-time pass rates have increased in the last six months but require further improvement.

Provider details

Unique reference number	55230
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	327
Principal/CEO	Gail Cooksey
Telephone number	01702 353557
Website	www.vts.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	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+		
	34	112	17	141	-	2		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	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 the operations manager, as nominee. 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 learners 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.

Inspection team

Pat Hornsby, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector

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