

Metskill Limited: Semta Apprenticeship Service

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

15–18 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			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Directors, leaders and managers work relentlessly and effectively, along with employers, to improve the quality of apprenticeships; they have resolved most of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- Leaders and managers respond well to national priorities, ensuring that a high proportion of apprentices aged 16 to 18 participate in advanced engineering apprenticeships.
- The large majority of apprentices experience good teaching, assessment and support, and this enables them to develop very good vocational and work-related skills.
- Apprentices develop good attitudes to work, are highly motivated and make a valued contribution to their employers' businesses.
- A high proportion of engineering apprentices achieve their qualifications; these account for the large majority of all apprentices.
- Apprentices receive good advice and guidance about the career paths and further training opportunities available to them.
- Almost all apprentices who complete their programmes remain in employment and many progress to higher levels of study, gain promotion or take on additional responsibilities.
- Assessors provide insufficient clarity for apprentices in written feedback on their work, and in the targets they set, which means that apprentices are not always sure what they need to do to achieve the highest standards.
- Assessors plan insufficient activities to challenge and support apprentices to improve their written English skills.
- Assessors and managers do not monitor the progress of apprentices rigorously enough from their starting points; as a result, despite improved outcomes, too many apprentices still take longer than the planned timescale to achieve.
- Apprentices who follow rail engineering programmes with a subcontractor make slow progress, and too many do not achieve their qualification; these account for a very small minority of all apprentices.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Metskill Limited is wholly owned by Semta and trades as the Semta Apprenticeship Service. Semta is a not-for-profit organisation that acts on behalf of employers in the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector. Semta Apprenticeship Service has one operational centre in Sheffield but works with apprentices and employers across England and has partnership arrangements in place with further education colleges across England. The large majority of apprentices attend a local further education college to study aspects of their qualifications.
- The large majority of apprentices follow programmes in engineering. In recent years, Semta Apprenticeship Service has broadened the range of apprenticeships it delivers into business and administration and warehousing and distribution, mainly for the large engineering employers it already works with to provide engineering apprenticeships. Through subcontractors, it also delivers a small number of apprenticeships in rail engineering and direct learning support for teaching assistants in schools.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Managers should provide training and development for assessors so that they all have the skills to:
 - provide apprentices with written feedback following assessments of their work that gives them clear and precise guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and achieve their potential
 - agree and set specific and challenging targets for all apprentices which clarify what they need to do to make good progress
 - plan activities for apprentices that will challenge and support them to improve their written English skills.
- Improve the rigour with which assessors and managers record and monitor apprentices' progress from their starting points, so that these staff have a much clearer view of which apprentices are not making the progress they should and can then provide additional support to enable them to be successful.
- Take action to improve the outcomes for apprentices on the minority of apprenticeships where these remain too low, particularly those following rail engineering programmes with one subcontractor.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Directors and senior leaders have a very clear strategy and an ambitious vision for the future direction of Semta Apprenticeship Service and the role it plays in the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector. They have successfully met their goal of increasing the participation of apprentices aged 16 to 18 on advanced-level apprenticeship programmes. The increased number of apprentices on these programmes enables them to meet the needs of employers in the engineering sector very well. New higher level apprenticeship standards are in place for systems engineering through a programme which commenced in early 2016. Semta Apprenticeship Service manages this effectively on behalf of a defence-industries employer group.
- Leaders and managers work relentlessly and effectively, along with employers and partner colleges, to improve the quality of apprenticeships. They have resolved most of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The result of this is that the large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications, progress to employed status and are valued by employers who recognise their high-level skills and potential.
- Leaders and managers are ambitious for further improvements, and set demanding targets to achieve these. They evaluate the provision and know very well what the areas for improvement are and apply effective strategies to achieve high standards. Many more apprentices now achieve within the planned timescale, which is a significant improvement since the last inspection; however, too many still do not. Leaders and managers recognise this problem. They seek further improvement to bring about, for example, more rigorous progress monitoring and better teaching and learning.
- Managers implement quality improvement actions thoroughly, and make good use of self-assessment to prioritise areas for further improvement. However, the current self-assessment report lacks sufficient evaluation of subcontracted provision. Managers use data well to inform their judgments. Managers make good use of the views of apprentices, employers and other interested parties such as partner colleges to inform self-assessment judgements.
- Managers rigorously evaluate the quality and outcomes of the work of staff. All staff work towards challenging performance targets based on outcomes for apprentices, and have clearly defined responsibilities. Staff participate well in training and development activities to support their personal improvement.
- Managers design, plan and provide apprenticeship programmes effectively in the vast majority of cases, collaborating closely with employers. Employers value the strategic and policy guidelines about apprenticeship provision that senior managers share with them through briefings and training events. The large majority of assessors make successful links with employers to plan training and assessment and monitor apprentices' progress. However, in a very few cases, assessors have not ensured that apprentices' programmes have the necessary clarity about the timing, planning and design of off-the-job learning, and how apprentices' entitlement to this learning is met.

- Employers value highly the gains in employability and social skills that apprentices make and the skills they apply in their work. Employers are very positive about the good support and training offered to apprentices and the particularly good, industry-standard training resources that apprentices use in colleges.
- Leaders and managers maintain strong links with the leading national engineering bodies and work to address skills-shortage areas and promote wider participation. They work closely with local small- and medium-sized enterprises to maintain crafts in the local steel industry, such as casting, forging and shaping metal parts using heat.
- Semta Apprenticeship Service works closely with a small number of subcontractors to extend the range of qualifications it provides. Management of these contracts is good. Apprentices with subcontractors make good progress in the vast majority of cases. One subcontractor providing rail engineering apprenticeships recently went into liquidation. Managers responded swiftly to find appropriate alternative provision.
- Leaders and managers promote well the understanding of equality and awareness of diversity. Managers monitor the progress and achievement of different groups of apprentices thoroughly and work to ensure that underachievement by any group is eradicated. Apprentices and staff work safely and well together and show mutual respect. Staff promote apprentices' understanding of modern British values well.

The governance of the provider

- Directors and trustees provide clear strategic direction for Semta Apprenticeship Service, setting out clear objectives for standards and performance. They provide effective challenge and support to senior leaders to ensure continuous improvement.
- Directors and trustees have made a significant investment in staff and resources over the past two years, which has benefited apprentices directly and improved the quality of the provision.
- Directors and trustees implement fully their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding apprentices and in implementing the 'Prevent' duty.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have implemented a comprehensive safeguarding policy for apprentices which they review regularly to ensure that it operates effectively. An appropriately qualified member of staff is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the policy and communicating with external agencies. The awareness and understanding of safeguarding by staff and apprentices are good.
- Appropriately trained staff carry out comprehensive assessments of health and safety in apprentices' workplaces. Assessors promote safe working practices very well. Consequently, apprentices' understanding of health and safety is good.
- Managers have ensured that all staff and apprentices have taken part in relevant training to reinforce understanding of what their responsibilities are for keeping safe and to be fully aware of the threats from radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices feel safe and have a good awareness of what to do if they need to report any concerns.

- Managers have invested significantly in making apprentices aware of, and protecting them from, the risks associated with inappropriate use of the internet.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- All learners, a total of 733, are apprentices. Just over half are aged 16 to 18. Around two thirds of all apprentices are on advanced apprenticeships, and just under a third are on intermediate apprenticeships. A small minority are on higher apprenticeships, mostly on the recently introduced level 7 systems engineering programme. Around four fifths of all apprentices follow programmes in engineering or in operations and quality improvement within engineering. The remainder of apprentices follow programmes in transport operations and maintenance, business management, administration, direct learning support, and warehousing and distribution.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Apprentices very successfully acquire the technical and theoretical skills required in their work. In the vast majority of cases, assessors and college tutors plan learning and assessment activities that motivate apprentices and are very effective in helping them to make good progress from their starting points, achieve their qualifications and realise their ambitions.
- A high proportion of apprentices gain extensive experience working for high-quality and sometimes prestigious employers who are committed to training apprentices. Apprentices are proud to work for their employers, which include contractors for the Ministry of Defence, an international airline and a leading Formula One motor racing team. These employers provide apprentices with excellent access to learning through high-quality precision engineering work.
- Assessors, including those who work for subcontractors, have good industrial experience and are well qualified. They use their occupational knowledge well to develop the practical and technical skills that apprentices need for their chosen career. This relevant knowledge motivates apprentices to work effectively to achieve their qualifications and make valuable contributions to their workplace through improved skills and knowledge.
- Assessors provide good initial advice and guidance to apprentices on the most appropriate apprenticeship and qualification options, based on the qualifications, skills, knowledge and experience they have when they start their apprenticeships. Assessors provide appropriate additional help or support, including assistive technology, for apprentices identified as requiring it.
- Assessors work very effectively with apprentices' employers, adapting programmes to meet both apprentices' and employers' needs well. Employers value the flexibility of assessors in delivering training and assessment at times to suit their businesses. Assessors agree with employers the most effective workplace activities to enable apprentices to improve their technical and work-related skills. As a result, the majority of apprentices make good progress.

- Assessors carry out regular checks of the skills and knowledge that apprentices are acquiring and the progress that they are making. Through feedback provided, apprentices have a good understanding about the progress they are making towards their long-term targets and achieving their apprenticeships. However, the majority of the targets that assessors set for apprentices following assessments and during progress reviews do not provide sufficient challenge or detail about what apprentices need to do to achieve the highest standards.
- Most assessors provide supportive and encouraging verbal feedback on completed work and tell apprentices what they need to improve. However, although the subsequent written feedback provided is positive and praises achievements, too often it fails to identify clearly to apprentices, particularly the most able, how to improve their work further.
- Assessors and college tutors plan training and assessment activities that enable apprentices to improve their mathematical skills quickly and to apply this well in their work. However, assessors plan insufficient activities, and provide only limited feedback, on completed work to challenge and support apprentices to improve their written English skills.
- Assessors promote equality, celebrate diversity and raise awareness of radicalisation and bullying through well-planned inductions, progress reviews and off-the-job learning activities. As a result, apprentices are respectful of each other and the people they work with and speak positively about how they apply their knowledge both at work and in their daily lives.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- The large majority of apprentices develop very good attitudes to work. They are enthusiastic and committed to their learning and the development of their skills. They grow in confidence and become valued members of staff with their employer.
- Apprentices behave well in their workplaces. They maintain and contribute to respectful work environments. They work well with their peers, employers, college tutors and Semta Apprenticeship Service staff.
- Good links between staff and apprentices' employers ensure that good workplace behaviour, including attendance and punctuality, have a high profile. As a result, apprentices' attendance and punctuality at work and college are good.
- Apprentices receive good advice and guidance at the start of their courses to inform them about the options available to meet their progression and career plans, so that they make well-informed choices. During and towards the end of their apprenticeships, they receive detailed and helpful information about future options and have a good understanding of their progression opportunities.

- Apprentices improve their awareness about their rights and responsibilities in modern British society while on programmes with Semta Apprenticeship Service. Leaders have recently invested significantly in producing a range of high-quality publications for apprentices which raise their awareness and provide guidance about issues pertinent to life in modern Britain, problems faced by individuals and groups in society, and good citizenship. Assessors' confidence in using these resources and discussing these topics with apprentices is increasing, although they and their managers recognise that they need to improve this further.
- During their introduction to programmes, apprentices are informed fully about what they should do and whom they should contact if they feel unsafe, experience bullying at work or have personal problems. They receive a good range of helpful information to support them should they have these difficulties. All apprentices, including those with subcontractors, can receive confidential, professional help if they are experiencing problems in their lives.
- Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe at work. They have a good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and what to do if they have any concerns. They are able to put this knowledge into context in their workplaces and at home, including how to stay safe when using social media and the internet.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The proportion of intermediate engineering apprentices who achieve is high and has been for three years. After a decline in 2013/14, the proportion of advanced engineering apprentices who achieve has been high for the past two years.
- Apprentices develop good vocational and work-related skills that help them to achieve and make good progress from their starting points. Through these improved skills, they contribute very effectively to their employers' businesses and in the development of their own careers.
- All apprentices, and particularly the large majority who work in engineering, improve and apply their mathematical skills well. Although apprentices communicate well verbally and quickly learn to use correct technical language in their work, they make slow progress in improving their skills in written English.
- Almost all apprentices who complete their programmes remain in employment. Many progress to higher levels of study, gain promotion or take on additional responsibilities.
- Following the previous inspection, managers introduced a system for tracking apprentices' progress; they are now better informed about apprentices who are at risk of not achieving as they approach the planned end of their programme. As a result, managers and assessors provide additional help to these underperforming apprentices. The proportion who achieve within the planned timeframe has improved considerably; however, it remains too low.
- Managers and assessors do not identify early enough those apprentices who are at risk of falling behind or not achieving their potential, particularly those on longer duration apprenticeships of two or more years.

- Apprentices who follow rail engineering programmes with a subcontractor make slow progress, and too many do not achieve their qualifications. These apprenticeships account for a very small minority of those delivered by Semta Apprenticeship Service. Apprentices on team-leading qualifications, who account for an even smaller minority, make slow progress because they have insufficient time to complete the necessary work. Few differences exist in the achievements of different groups of apprentices; those who follow these programmes form the only noticeable underperforming group.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53330
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,612
CEO	Alison Parkes
Telephone number	01142 446833
Website	www.semta.org.uk/apprenticeshipservice

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+
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	121	105	271	202	0	34		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of the inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	IMS Training Ltd KJ Training Solutions Ltd Electronics Yorkshire Ltd LRTT Ltd Peach Orator Ltd RCP Containers Ltd RS Fleet Installations							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating officer 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 progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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Christopher Dearnley	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Groves	Ofsted Inspector
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