

SR Education

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

21–24 March 2017

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

- Leaders and managers have put a range of effective strategies in place to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which are now good.
- A high proportion of adults, who form the large majority of apprentices, achieved their apprenticeships in 2015/16.
- Apprentices develop good levels of professional competence, skills and confidence as a result of their apprenticeships.
- Managers and staff work hard to improve apprentices' achievement of functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics; as a result a high proportion are successful.
- Assessors use their skills, industry knowledge and expertise very effectively to plan relevant learning for apprentices, who make good progress.
- Staff liaise very effectively with employers, understand their requirements fully and develop flexible apprenticeship courses which meet their needs.
- Managers are highly committed to their workforce and invest in a wide range of good-quality support and development for assessors, leading to improved coaching and training of apprentices.
- Too few apprentices aged 16 to 18 achieved their apprenticeships in 2015/16.
- Senior leaders have been slow to assure themselves that the quality of the subcontractor's provision is good enough.
- Managers do not effectively analyse information on apprentices' destinations after they complete their programmes; consequently, managers cannot use this data to inform future plans or to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance for apprentices' next steps once they have completed their programmes.
- Insufficient good, up-to-date resources exist for health and social care apprentices.

Full report

Information about the provider

- SR Education is a medium-sized national provider of apprenticeships with an administrative base in rural Nottinghamshire. It was established in 2009 and has held a contract with the Skills Funding Agency since 2012. It subcontracts approximately one quarter of its provision to Wise Origin College in Leicester. Most apprentices are based in the East Midlands and the North East of England, and approximately three quarters are adults. All training and assessment occur at the apprentices' workplaces.
- SR Education provides intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in five different subject areas, the largest of which are health and social care, customer services, and business administration. It also offers higher-level apprenticeships in the management of health and social care.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Evaluate more fully the standards of teaching, learning and assessment in subcontracted provision, and monitor carefully any required improvements to ensure that apprentices make the progress expected of them.
- Increase the number of younger apprentices who achieve their apprenticeships. To do this:
 - monitor their progress through all aspects of their apprenticeships very closely to identify and provide early individual support for any who fall behind
 - develop appropriate English and mathematical skills early in their apprenticeships so that they pass their functional skills qualifications in good time.
- Make better use of information about apprentices' destinations following completion of their apprenticeships, to inform strategic planning, and to ensure that all apprentices receive effective advice and guidance to help them fulfil their ambitions.
- Ensure that all apprentices have access to good-quality, independent learning resources through the virtual learning environment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have secured improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for apprentices. These are now good.
- Leaders have a clear strategy for the future and plan to broaden their apprenticeship offer further to meet the changing needs of employers both locally and nationally. Managers have established very effective links with employers, who are involved constructively in decisions about the development of apprenticeship programmes. Apprenticeship programmes are well designed and highly flexible so that they meet closely the demands of specific employers. The positive working relationship between managers, assessors and employers enables apprentices to make good progress.
- Where new apprenticeship standards are used, they are meeting employers' requirements very effectively. For example, an information technology (IT) network company has a bespoke advanced apprenticeship programme to develop the specialised, high-level technician skills which the company needs.
- Senior leaders have an accurate and full understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. They have used this to develop a detailed action plan which is linked well to their priorities for improvement. They have made good progress in achieving these.
- Senior leaders introduced well-conceived strategies which are now having a positive impact on apprentices' achievement in English and mathematics functional skills. These included the appointment of a lead tutor for functional skills, improved professional development for assessors and better learning materials for apprentices. Managers monitor apprentices' progress in functional skills closely and take appropriate and effective actions if apprentices are not making the progress they should. As a result, apprentices' achievement of functional skills qualifications is good.
- Senior leaders have high expectations of apprentices and staff. They prioritise and support effective, ongoing professional development for their staff which is focused on key priorities for improvement. This training has been particularly successful in improving the teaching of functional skills, assessors' understanding of safeguarding, and how to keep apprentices safe from radicalisation and extremism. All assessors make good use of professional development logs which encourage individual reflection on the impact of training on their professional practice. New and inexperienced assessors benefit particularly from managers' high commitment to their training and development, which helps them to support their apprentices well.
- Managers evaluate the work of assessors effectively through regular performance reviews. They draw on a wide range of evidence, including observations of sessions and internal quality reviews, and set clear targets for improvement. New assessors are supported well by mentors. As a result, they improve the quality of training for apprentices.
- Managers have introduced sound recruitment processes for employers and apprentices which match applicants to apprenticeship vacancies well. Staff provide effective

information to employers and apprentices at the beginning of the programme. Ongoing advice and guidance to help apprentices decide what to do after their apprenticeships are not systematic enough, and many do not receive the specific support or information they need to make the right decisions.

- Managers have not established sufficiently formal arrangements for the management of subcontracted provision. Working relationships with the new subcontractor are good, and senior leaders have put in place a suitable contract, regular meetings and relevant policies which ensure an appropriate exchange of management information between them. However, managers have been slow to conduct their own independent assessment of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so cannot be certain that this is good enough. They do not plan and monitor actions sufficiently well to ensure that the subcontractor meets the agreed target for apprentice enrolments for this academic year.

The governance of the provider

- The senior management team hold each other to account effectively through regular board meetings. Their decision-making is sound and based on information on apprentices' progress and achievement, good understanding of their employers' requirements and a good knowledge of the apprenticeship sector. They understand the scope and perceived impact of forthcoming government-driven changes such as the employer levy.
- Currently, no independent, external support or challenge exists to bring different, informed viewpoints to the decisions and actions of the senior team. Senior leaders are planning revised governance arrangements to include external scrutiny of their management plans and performance in line with their growth plans.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers have addressed effectively shortcomings highlighted at the previous inspection. They have established a safeguarding team which ensures that staff and apprentices know how to report concerns. The team respond appropriately to such concerns, deal with them effectively and record and monitor incidents well.
- The designated safeguarding officer has good links with external professionals such as local authority 'Prevent' coordinators; these links are used to develop good-quality training, and provide regular updates for staff and apprentices on issues such as cyber-bullying and how to protect care home clients in public and social settings.
- Managers ensure that new staff undertake necessary safeguarding checks prior to working with apprentices. They maintain a central record of these checks, including those carried out on staff working with their subcontractor.
- Managers have an appropriate 'Prevent' risk assessment in place, which relates well to local contexts and identifies suitable controls and actions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Assessors use their industry expertise and knowledge well to plan very effective learning sessions. They have good knowledge of employers' settings and apprentices' job roles; they tailor learning sessions to meet these well. This contributes to apprentices' development of a range of occupational skills that are highly valued by employers, such as communicating with vulnerable clients with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or designing marketing campaigns. Assessors participate in employer-provided training to maintain their own professional knowledge, on subjects such as social media analytics in digital marketing, and safer working practices within a care organisation.
- Staff accurately identify apprentices' personal and learning support needs early in their apprenticeships, and assessors use this information well to provide individualised coaching and support through frequent visits to the workplace. This support helps apprentices to develop their vocational and technical skills in the workplace. Apprentices in advanced digital marketing develop new websites and social media campaigns, for example, to make current and potential clients aware of products and services in an optical prosthetics company. Advanced IT apprentices know how to configure local area networks and run diagnostics on clients' remote IT systems.
- Assessors use a range of appropriate methods to assess apprentices' competence and progress. For example, assessors conduct skilful discussions with apprentices on their health management job roles, care sector skills and experience, which enable apprentices to make good progress. Staff with quality assurance roles provide detailed feedback to assessors to improve their practice further. Assessors explain carefully each aspect of assignments, research tasks or units of work so that apprentices understand what they need to do to make good progress.
- Staff identify gaps adeptly in apprentices' knowledge in English, mathematics or information and communication technology (ICT) early in their apprenticeships. Specialist functional skills staff and assessors work collaboratively to help each apprentice close these gaps effectively, taking apprentices' job roles and levels of responsibility into consideration, so that learning is relevant and progress is swift.
- Employers are kept well informed of their employees' progress. Assessors work well with employers to provide effective support for apprentices who fall behind, which helps them catch up. However, assessors do not routinely include employers when setting learning targets for apprentices as part of the review process; as a result, links between on- and off-the-job training are not reinforced effectively, which is having a negative impact on the extent to which all apprentices receive appropriate challenge to achieve their potential. Apprentices' on-the-job training provides additional and highly relevant short occupational updates and training. For example, agricultural technicians undertake training with 'blue chip' manufacturing and machinery companies. Apprentices value their employers' support, and in turn have a positive impact on employers' businesses.
- The quality of written feedback and target-setting is too variable between assessors across regions. A small number of health and social care apprentices receive superficial written feedback that is positive but does not provide points for development to help them improve their work sufficiently. Assessors set apprentices targets that are focused on unit and workbook completion, but too often these are not precise enough to challenge the most able apprentices to improve their work above basic requirements, or

add value to apprentices' job roles.

- Learning resources available for apprentices in health and social care are not of sufficiently good quality and are often out of date. As a result, apprentices with varying requirements have less support than they need, and cannot develop a more in-depth understanding of topics. Staff are developing a new virtual learning environment, which is available presently to approximately half of apprentices on other programmes, and should include all apprentices later this year. Existing online resources for customer service apprentices provide an effective set of learning and assessment plans that guide apprentices progressively through their qualification. Learning resources for digital marketing strategies and design are of high quality, and are useful for apprentices to support their technical skills development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices gain a wide range of valuable skills and demonstrate good occupational competence in their job roles. They are professional in their workplaces, meet industry standards and show high standards of work, of which they are justly proud. For example, level 5 healthcare management apprentices developed a useful safeguarding pamphlet for clients. Apprentices work well with their colleagues, clients and assessors and show respect and tolerance.
- Apprentices enjoy their apprenticeships, including their job roles with their employers. Almost all gain in confidence, both professionally and personally, and are motivated to do well; they want to stay working with their current employers or progress to higher-level roles.
- Development of apprentices' English skills is mostly good; for example, they communicate well with customers of an IT support company, and with patients or clients in health and social care settings. Apprentices produce good standards of written work, even if English is not their first language. However, apprentices on non-technical apprenticeships do not develop mathematical skills beyond those they need to pass their functional skills qualifications.
- Apprentices are safe. They show a good understanding of safeguarding, and those in the care sector use this knowledge well in their professional life. Apprentices know how to raise concerns about their own and others' safety. Most apprentices understand how to protect themselves from risks associated with extremism and radicalisation, including how to stay safe online. They benefit from effective and sensitive information on these subjects, and on the importance of fundamental British values, early in their programmes; assessors reinforce their understanding regularly and well.
- Apprentices receive good information, advice and guidance at the beginning of their apprenticeships which help them choose the right type of apprenticeship at the right level for them. Apprentices who are keen to progress to higher levels of learning are supported well to do so. Not all apprentices receive such effective support during their apprenticeships, and are unclear on what options are open to them once they have completed their programmes.
- Apprentices with access to the provider's new virtual learning environment, mainly those on IT, digital marketing or customer service programmes, use this well to develop their

independent learning and study skills. Apprentices who cannot utilise this at present do not benefit from resources such as the wide range of up-to-date research material.

- Apprentices are punctual in the workplace and for their training sessions, with high levels of attendance. A very small number cancel their appointments with their assessors with little or no notice; staff monitor these rare occasions well and report concerns to employers.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The overall achievement rate of apprentices in 2015/16 was high. The proportion of adult apprentices, and of apprentices at intermediate level, who achieved their apprenticeships improved from previous years and was high; most did so in the time they were allocated. The achievement rate of advanced apprentices remained high despite a decline last year; achievement was particularly high in health and social care and sport. However, the proportion of advanced apprentices who completed in the time they are allowed was low.
- Male and female apprentices, and those of different ethnic backgrounds, achieved their qualifications at equally good rates. The achievement rate of the small number of apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was very high.
- Most current apprentices are making at least expected progress this year and many are ahead. Managers monitor apprentices' progress through their programme well and take appropriate steps to support the small number of apprentices who fall behind. These are mostly apprentices who were not provided with functional skills learning early enough in their programme and they have yet to pass their qualifications.
- Apprentices aged 16 to 18 made up one quarter of the total number of apprentices last year. The proportion of this age group who achieved their qualifications declined and was below the national rate. Almost half of these apprentices worked for an employer who had ceased to trade. Too few younger apprentices completed in the time allowed last year; managers have halted this decline and this year more apprentices are on track to complete by their planned dates.
- The number of apprentices achieving functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics last year was high overall, and most apprentices who have taken these qualifications this year have passed. Apprentices' achievement of ICT functional skills at level 2 so far this year is high and improved from previous years, although the achievement rate for a small group of apprentices at level 1 has declined and is low.
- The vast majority of apprentices remain in permanent employment after completing their apprenticeships. Advanced apprentices in health and social care gain promotion, for example to team leader or training coordinator roles, although the low numbers reflect the few senior posts available. A low proportion of intermediate apprentices progress to advanced apprenticeships, mostly in health and social care or business administration; however, a few advanced health and social care apprentices progress to higher-level apprenticeships in the management of health services.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59184
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16 to 18/19+
Approximate number of all apprentices over the previous full contract year	356
Managing director	Mr D Mantle
Telephone number	01949 20976
Website	www.sreducation.co.uk

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	
Total number of apprentices (excluding apprenticeships)	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+		
	33	181	15	74	-	26		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of apprentices for which the provider receives high-needs funding	None							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Wise Origin College							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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 apprentices 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

Helen Flint, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Ward	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector
Maureen Deary	Ofsted Inspector

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