

Skills North East

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

1–3 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders do not take clear and decisive actions to secure rapid improvements in provision.
- Too many learners do not make good enough progress in developing the skills that they need for their future careers.
- Too many assessors do not plan, monitor and assess activities for learners' self-study time. As a result, learners do not use this time efficiently to improve their skills.
- Assessors do not take sufficient account of learners' starting points to plan and deliver learning which meets their needs. As a result, too many learners do not develop their skills to the level of which they are capable.
- Assessors do not provide learners with enough opportunities to develop their skills in English and mathematics.
- Managers and assessors do not ensure that learners understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

The provider has the following strengths

- A high proportion of learners complete their programmes and achieve qualifications in nail technology and nail services.
- A high proportion of learners progress to employment in the beauty industry or to higher-level study following completion of their qualification.
- Leaders collaborate well with employers to meet regional priorities in the provider's four geographical locations.
- Leaders and managers have created a culture of respect and tolerance which runs throughout the organisation.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Skills North East is based in Northumberland and offers courses for adult learners. There are currently 50 learners on level 3 programmes, the vast majority of whom are on courses in nail services and nail technology. A very small minority of learners are on a social care course. Learners fund their courses through advanced learner loans.
- Skills North East delivers courses in the North East, Kidderminster, Doncaster and Hull. All these locations have unemployment levels which are higher than the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Set assessors specific targets to improve the quality of their teaching and to secure rapid improvement in learners' progress. Closely monitor the progress that assessors make in improving their teaching.
- Incorporate a wider range of subjects and skills into learners' programmes to support them in their future careers.
- Provide clear and individualised programmes for self-guided study which extend and develop learners' skills. Ensure that assessors plan, monitor and assess the progress of learners during self-guided study time.
- Train all assessors to assess learners' existing skills and knowledge accurately at the start of their courses. Ensure that assessors use this information to plan and deliver programmes that enable learners to make rapid progress.
- Develop learners' skills in English and mathematics by:
 - training assessors to identify accurately learners' English and mathematics skills on entry
 - ensuring that assessors have the necessary skills to use this information to plan and deliver relevant programmes of study which develop the English and mathematics skills of learners of all abilities
 - providing the opportunity for learners to improve their qualifications if they do not already have English and mathematics qualifications at level 2 or above.
- Develop learners' understanding of radicalisation and extremism by:
 - training staff appropriately about the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty so that they are able to develop learners' awareness of risks
 - monitoring the impact of this training to ensure that learners' awareness is improved and that learners know how to protect themselves.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders' and managers' actions are not clear or decisive enough to achieve rapid improvements. Leaders use their self-assessment process to identify the organisation's strengths and weaknesses accurately. However, too many targets in their improvement plan focus on the introduction of new processes rather than the impact that these processes will have on bringing about improvement. For example, too many targets set by managers do not consider or set out clearly their intended impact on learners' progress.
- Leaders and managers do not manage the performance of assessors sufficiently or take appropriate actions to ensure that assessors improve their teaching quickly enough. Managers do not provide specific guidance to assessors about what they need to do to improve. Leaders have recently introduced new and more rigorous methods of identifying weak practice and now set clearer actions for assessors to improve. It is too early to see the impact of this initiative.
- Leaders and managers do not pay enough attention to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the impact that this has on the progress of learners. Staff spend too much time discussing how to meet awarding organisation criteria at the expense of improving the quality of their teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders do not ensure that learners have sufficient opportunities to develop a wide range of skills that will be useful to them in their future careers. Managers have recently offered a range of additional courses to help to address this issue that includes starting a business and spray-tanning. However, they are not part of the learners' programme, and many learners are unable to fund these courses themselves. Consequently, only a small number of learners have participated in the courses to date.
- Until very recently, leaders and managers did not monitor effectively the progression and destinations of learners who completed their courses. Leaders recognised that this was an area for improvement and, as a result, now have a firm understanding of learners' destinations on leaving the organisation. The provider's data indicates that a high proportion of learners progress to further study or employment.
- Leaders place a high priority on selecting high-quality salon environments and well-qualified assessors. They effectively demonstrate the demands and expectations of the beauty industry to learners.
- Leaders collaborate effectively with employers and employment agencies to design the provision so that programmes develop the skills required to meet regional employment opportunities. Leaders and managers have good links with Jobcentre Plus and employment agencies to help learners find employment after their programme. Leaders work effectively with award-winning beauty salon owners in Doncaster and Kidderminster who provide sector specialist advice and guidance on curriculum design and delivery.
- Leaders and staff promote a culture of respect and tolerance which embraces the values of the organisation. Staff and learners demonstrate these fundamental values well. Assessors develop learners' knowledge and positive attitudes towards equality and diversity well. Most learners demonstrate appropriate attitudes and behaviours for life in

modern Britain.

The governance of the provider

- Until very recently, leaders have not received sufficiently robust external challenge to support them to review the impact of their actions to improve the provision. Leaders have now begun to receive more rigorous challenge from a non-executive director and an education consultant who act as 'critical friends'. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of their challenge.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place and implement their safeguarding responsibilities well. The safeguarding lead and deputy-lead have appropriate safeguarding qualifications. Managers follow safe recruitment policy. A record of recruitment checks on staff is in place and is accurate.
- Learners gain an understanding of the meaning and importance of safeguarding during their practical sessions, and learn how to keep themselves and clients safe. Managers use salon and centre risk assessments appropriately, and monitor the safety of learners and assessors.
- The safeguarding lead and deputy-lead have appropriate local council contacts in the provider's four locations. Managers have recently improved their liaison with local professionals and support services to enable them to refer learners to specialist support should the need arise.
- Leaders and managers have taken appropriate steps to meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. Staff and learners have received training and updates in relation to radicalisation and extremism. However, this training has not had sufficient impact and some staff lack the confidence to engage in meaningful discussion about these issues with learners.
- Leaders have completed a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment as part of the self-assessment process. However, actions identified are not clear or specific enough to ensure that all staff fully understand their role.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Assessors do not establish learners' starting points accurately enough so that they can effectively plan and deliver learning that meets learners' needs and ensures that learners develop their skills rapidly. Assessors determine learners' suitability and commitment to the course; however, they do not effectively assess whether learners have previous experience in nail skills or need help with basic industry skills.
- Assessors do not check learners' understanding and skills well enough, and do not encourage learners to think through answers fully. They spend too much time ensuring that written evidence is completed to meet awarding body requirements rather than developing the skills that learners need for their future careers.
- Assessors do not plan, monitor and assess learners' activities and progress effectively

enough between formal taught sessions. Learners have a considerable amount of their programme allocated to self-study time. However, assessors do not ensure that learners are using their self-study time well enough to improve their nail skills. Too many learners do not have access to the correct nail industry equipment, such as manicure and acrylic materials to practise and develop further their nail skills beyond the salon environment.

- Assessors use a good range of teaching resources which stimulate learners' interest and engagement in developing their nail skills. They use a range of professional salon equipment, books and online materials which supports learners' progress. Assessors deliver sessions in well-equipped professional salons, often with the additional support of the salon owner. As a result, learners improve their nail techniques.
- Learners are clear from the start of their programme which assessments they need to complete and by when. Assessors support learners well to understand the assessment requirements and provide additional help if they struggle to achieve them. As a result, the large majority of learners plan their work well and submit work of an appropriate standard within the agreed deadline.
- Most assessors provide clear feedback that helps learners to understand what they need to do to improve their nail industry knowledge and skills. Assessors use their nail subject specialism well. However, in a minority of cases, assessors do not provide sufficiently clear feedback so that learners know what they need to do to improve.
- Assessors provide effective support which helps the large majority of learners remain on their programme and catch up with work if they are behind. Assessors provide particularly strong support for learners who are experiencing personal challenges, such as ill health or family problems. Assessors are readily accessible to learners for support outside sessions and through a regulated online support group. While assessors provide extra salon sessions for additional practical experience, too many learners report that they cannot access them if they have other employment or family commitments or live some distance from the centre.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too many learners do not have the opportunity to develop their English and mathematics skills. Not enough learners complete assessments of their ability at the start of their programme. Learners who have not already achieved an English or mathematics qualification at level 2 do not benefit from the opportunity to gain these qualifications. As a result, too many learners do not improve their English and mathematics skills quickly enough beyond improvement of their spelling.
- Until recently, not enough learners received careers guidance on their programmes to help them make informed choices about their future employment in the beauty and nail industries, in social care, or in other vocational areas. Current learners starting their programmes in 2017/18 benefit from improved careers guidance as a part of their course; however, it is too early to judge its impact.
- Too many learners report that they struggle to reach a high enough standard for employment in the sector, despite the additional support offered by assessors through catch-up sessions. A high proportion of learners develop practical skills in nail techniques that meet required standards for their qualifications. However, too many learners report that they lack confidence and that they will not be job-ready and able to work to

challenging commercial deadlines once they have finished the course.

- Too many learners do not understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Assessors have insufficient knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty and are only able to communicate a very superficial understanding of the risks of extremism and radicalisation to learners.
- Learners on the nail technology programme study in one of three well-equipped professional salons located in Kidderminster, Doncaster and Hull. Working in these salons enables learners to gain an industry-standard awareness of practice that helps them to demonstrate positive behaviours and contribute to the workplace.
- All learners demonstrate a strong understanding of their own and their clients' safety when working in salons. For example, learners recognise and minimise the risks of using beauty products incorrectly and the risks of poorly maintained electrical equipment. Learners understand and take account of the requirements when working with children.
- Learners' attendance is good. Where learners have problems attending, assessors support them well to catch up by putting on additional sessions which are available to the vast majority of learners.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Too many learners on nail service and nail technology courses do not carry out activities to help them develop their skills rapidly to a professional standard. Learners begin their courses with a wide range of abilities, with some already having well-developed skills in beauty and others being relatively new to the profession. However, all learners follow exactly the same programme regardless of their starting points, and too many do not achieve their full potential. The very small group of learners on social care programmes are not making rapid enough progress.
- A high proportion of current learners do not make good progress in developing a broad range of skills which will help them in their future careers. For example, there are too few opportunities for learners to develop skills in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology, or enterprise and job application skills.
- A high proportion of learners in 2016/17 completed their programmes and achieved nail technology and services or beauty qualifications. Of the small number of learners in the current year who were due to complete their programmes by the time of inspection, all have successfully achieved their qualification.
- Since September 2016, around three quarters of learners who have completed their qualification have progressed to positive destinations in the beauty industry or on to higher-level study. Many of these learners have set up their own small businesses providing nail treatments.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1237128
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	74
Principal/CEO	Michael Winship
Telephone number	0191 250 4590
Website	www.skillsnortheast.org.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	47	-	3
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
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	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, 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

Richard Ronksley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tracey Mace-Akroyd	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathryn Townsley	Ofsted Inspector

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