

Skills Edge Training Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

5–8 December 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 | Apprenticeships | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement | | |
| Outcomes for learners | Requires improvement | | |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | | | Good |

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have been too slow to address all of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and, as a result, the provision now requires improvement.
- Not enough apprentices make good progress while on their programmes and, as a result, too few achieve within the timeframe allocated to them.
- Learners make slow progress in developing their theoretical knowledge because too many trainers and assessors do not plan and deploy effective teaching methods to deepen and extend their understanding of theoretical concepts.
- Too many learners and apprentices make slow progress in developing the English and mathematical skills pertinent for their future prospects.
- Skills Edge managers do not assure the quality of training centres and do not routinely track and monitor learners' progress.
- Trainers and assessors do not ensure that learners have a good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and, as a result, learners' understanding is limited.

The provider has the following strengths

- Most learners develop good, industry-relevant practical skills.
- Most learners grow in confidence and enhance their personal and work-related skills; they apply these well in their everyday lives and at work.
- Almost all learners enjoy and value their training and the skills they develop; they add value to their employers' businesses.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Skills Edge Training Ltd (Skills Edge), formally known as 'Apprentice Funding Assistant Ltd', is a national provider that works with 25 salons based across the North East, the North West, London, the Home Counties and the East of England. The large majority of the company's provision is intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Recently, the board of directors has begun to broaden the offer to advanced and higher-level apprenticeship programmes in business administration, customer service, financial services and insurance services to meet local and economic priorities.
- Skills Edge Training recruits apprentices aged 16 to 18 and adult apprentices in most of its hairdressing and beauty therapy frameworks provision. A very small proportion of apprentices follow business administration, financial services, insurance services and customer service frameworks. It also recruits a small proportion of adults who claim advanced learner loans for level 3 programmes in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Put in place effective measures to secure rapid improvements and remove the weaknesses identified during this and the previous inspection.
- Ensure that managers routinely monitor and track robustly learners' progress and ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- Urgently ensure that centre managers plan and provide effective English and mathematics teaching in apprentices' programmes.
- Urgently ensure that centre managers plan apprentices' programmes effectively to enable apprentices to make good progress and to achieve within their allocated timescales.
- Deepen learners' understanding of life and work in modern Britain and the risks of radicalisation.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners by putting in place actions to:
 - regularly review and evaluate trainers' and assessors' craft of teaching and set precise actions to enable them to improve their performance
 - make certain that trainers and assessors make effective use of learners' starting points to plan and provide inspiring theory lessons to motivate learners and enable them to excel
 - ensure that trainers and assessors plan and deploy challenging and extending activities in lessons to deepen learners' skills, knowledge and understanding and support them to reach their full potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not sustained many of the key strengths identified at the last inspection and standards of provision have declined. Recent actions taken by leaders and managers to reduce subcontracted provision and to increase quality improvement processes at their national centres have not had sufficient impact to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners.
- Quality improvement and quality assurance arrangements are not effective enough. Managers have recently strengthened their performance monitoring of the 25 training centres; however, too many managers and staff at these centres do not comply with the company's quality procedures. Managers do not provide all centre managers with sufficient guidance of their expectations in the management of apprenticeships provision and they do not regularly carry out on-site support visits to ascertain the quality and support requirements of provision.
- Leaders have applied effective procedures for identifying and, where appropriate, removing staff who consistently underperform. However, the company's process for the observation of teaching and learning has not been effective because managers have failed to carry out sufficient observations of all staff within each centre. Too many trainers and assessors have not been observed for long periods; consequently, they have received little support or guidance about how they can improve. Completed observation reports are appropriately detailed but subsequent action planning does not give sufficient detail for trainers and assessors to help them improve their practice.
- Leaders' self-assessment takes into consideration the views of key stakeholders; however, their judgements are too generous. Many acclaimed strengths are no more than standard practice and managers give insufficient prominence to weaknesses in the outcomes of apprentices. Their self-assessment report makes few judgements about the quality of provision for learners enrolled on adult programmes and for learners following traineeships.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of provision of the three remaining subcontractors used by Skills Edge also require improvement. Skills Edge's managers do not routinely monitor and track learners' progress at the centres and do not assure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Recently, managers have put in place monthly quality meetings, and these are beginning to lead to improvements, but this has not yet had significant impact. Leaders have decided to cease the company's existing subcontracting arrangements as soon as current learners have completed their apprenticeship.
- Leaders' quality improvement plan acknowledges a few of the key weaknesses identified by inspectors. However, leaders do not sufficiently evaluate the variations of practice by staff at the different centres and what actions they may take to tackle them.
- In the last two years, leaders have begun to work in collaboration with the local economic priorities for skills shortages in the East of England and have plans to work with national skills boards to offer a more diverse range of courses to meet local needs. Managers now work with local businesses and plan and provide apprenticeship programmes such as financial management, business administration and warehousing; opportunities for

traineeships and adult learners.

- Learners receive appropriate careers information, advice and guidance when they are first enrolled on a programme. Once on programme, learners receive appropriate guidance on career options and possible next steps. As a result, most are able to articulate clearly their career aspirations and what they have to do to achieve their goals.
- Leaders' and managers' use of data requires improvement. Company managers have data on how well learners from different groups perform but they do not analyse this data effectively to identify trends or to minimise any identified gaps for the most disadvantaged. Data for learners on adult programmes is limited and managers do not have a clear understanding as to whether learners on these programmes make good progress. Managers' data on apprentices' destinations is incomplete and as a result, they do not know the impact of their provision.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is effective. The company has three board members, comprising a commercial director who works for the company full time, a managing director and a technical director, both of whom work part time for the company. Board members are well qualified and experienced to carry out their role. Between them, they have many years of experience of successfully running businesses and commercial ventures.
- Board members receive accessible and appropriately detailed management reports on all aspects of performance; they have a reasonably clear grasp of the company's main strengths and weaknesses. However, they have not taken sufficiently effective or prompt actions to arrest the decline in the overall quality of provision since the last inspection.
- Board members have put together an ambitious three-year business strategy to support their plan to expand the business but it is too soon to assess its impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders conduct appropriate pre-employment checks on staff. The commercial director maintains appropriate records of security clearance and the employment history of staff.
- The designated safeguarding officer has received appropriate training and provides effective leadership to ensure the safety of learners and apprentices. The officer investigates any arising issues to full resolution, makes appropriate referrals to outside agencies if required and maintains accurate records of the actions taken.
- Trainers and assessors receive appropriate training to support their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding principles and procedures. As a result, learners and apprentices feel safe. They have a good understanding of safeguarding topics, including how to stay safe online and how to report bullying. Trainers and assessors regularly ensure that staff at the centres maintain the health and safety of all learners the workplace. All learners demonstrate safe working practices.
- Despite the efforts of managers to promote the understanding of 'Prevent', few staff and learners are able to articulate clearly how they would protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of too much teaching, learning and assessment is not yet good. Too many hairdressing theory lessons are dull and uninspiring. Staff do not plan and provide teaching that encourages a curiosity for learning. Trainers often give apprentices the same tasks to complete, which means the most able do not receive sufficient challenge to excel or progress more quickly through their work. Hairdressing trainers place an over-reliance on the completion of workbooks to cover the theory requirements of the programme of study and in a few cases trainers dictate answers to learners.
- Trainers do not routinely support the development of learners' study skills. They do not ensure that learners take notes or reflect on skills during demonstrations to consolidate learning. For example, trainers do not ensure that apprentices consider a sufficiently broad range of methods to evidence their development to capture their learning from a practical demonstration.
- Most trainers and assessors do not provide learners with sufficiently challenging or constructive targets to enable them to progress swiftly in their learning. The targets are too narrow and do not focus effectively on what learners need to do to explore topics further or to improve a technical or academic skill.
- Most trainers provide effective practical learning sessions. Learners and apprentices enjoy practising and developing their skills. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of the health and safety requirements of the industries where they work. For example, hairdressing apprentices quickly organise their work areas and wear correct protective clothing and footwear, keeping themselves safe from exposure to chemicals.
- Trainers ensure that hairdressing and beauty therapy learners have a good understanding of the practical skills they must acquire to be successful. The majority of trainers question their learners and apprentices well to establish and reinforce their knowledge. They give useful verbal feedback that helps learners and apprentices know how they are progressing and the skills they need to practise further. However, some trainers do not ask probing questions and are too accepting of superficial answers that do not extend understanding or deepen knowledge. Additionally, they are too quick to give the answers, rather than allow learners to find their own conclusions.
- Learners who require additional support make slow progress. Trainers and assessors lack the skill and confidence to support apprentices with additional needs in lessons. As a result, learners become frustrated and quickly demotivated in their theory sessions.
- The teaching of English and mathematics functional skills requires improvement; the provision for apprentices' training and development of functional skills in English and mathematics starts too late in their programmes. Trainers and assessors do not support learners who experience difficulties sufficiently. Too many apprentices are expected to study for their functional skills qualifications independently using an online learning tool; as a result, they make slow progress and those who struggle do not receive appropriate support.
- Assessors' and managers' tracking and monitoring of learners' progress is appropriate. Assessment practice is regular, appropriate and meets the requirements of the qualifications learners undertake. Assessment methods for practical skills are effective. Trainers use their skills and knowledge well to provide a diverse range of industry

techniques and strategies to ensure that effective learning takes place. Trainers provide good-quality verbal feedback that ensures that the majority of apprentices quickly become confident working in their salons and with members of the public. For example, beauty therapy apprentices have benefited from community engagement activities in a salon for the elderly to support their development of confidence and respect for others.

- The promotion of equality and diversity for learners and apprentices is effective. As a matter of routine different hair and skin types form part of the consultation process carried out prior to treatments. Apprentices quickly learn and understand the importance of adapting their treatments for those clients with differing needs. For example, a theory session introduced the concept of how hairdressing services need to be adapted for those with restricted mobility.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- The vast majority of apprentices and adult learners attend their training and work-related learning regularly and on time. However, not enough make good progress in enhancing their English and mathematics skills and their understanding of theoretical concepts; consequently, they are not all sufficiently prepared for the world of work.
- Learners and apprentices do not develop the English skills they require quickly enough. Learners and apprentices do not always receive sufficiently helpful feedback to help them improve their English skills. In a few cases, learners and apprentices spell key technical words incorrectly.
- In some instances, apprentices develop good mathematical skills; for example, hairdressing apprentices learn the importance of accurate stock control and the requirement to keep costs to a minimum within a business. Assessors and trainers ensure that financial studies apprentices regularly update themselves on the stock exchange and current financial incentives.
- The standards of most apprentices' and learners' practical work is of good industry quality. However, a few adult learners following level 3 programmes do not have the confidence to work with clients. The standards of apprentices' theoretical work are appropriate to meet the requirements of the programme. However, too often the standards of their written work contain spelling errors of technical terminology and poor grammar.
- A significant majority of learners do not have a good understanding of British values and how these values can affect their work with clients. Leaders and managers have recently developed a bespoke online learning package that is currently being made available to learners and apprentices; however, it too soon to assess the impact of this initiative.
- Learners and apprentices enrolled on beauty therapy and hairdressing courses develop their confidence and practical skills well. Most learners and apprentices take pride in their work, undertaking haircuts and therapies efficiently and professionally. In a few salons, they have opportunities to develop practical skills beyond that required for their programmes, enhancing their progression opportunities. For example, they undertake additional qualifications in 'lash-lifting', ear-piercing, 'derma-plaining' facials and specialist eye treatments.
- Apprentices and adult learners are safe and feel safe. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe online and are careful with their personal data when using social media.

However, they do not have a sufficient understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation.

- Apprentices know how to work safely with clients in salons. They undertake appropriate consultations, risk assessments with clients before applying treatments, and have a good knowledge of the contra-indicators that would restrict or prevent particular treatments.
- Apprentices and adult learners receive appropriate information, advice and guidance to ensure that courses meet their needs. They are clear about the academic and vocational progression opportunities available to them after they complete their studies. Many advanced apprentices have secured permanent positions.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The majority of current apprentices are making slow progress, although a few apprentices following business administration, financial services and beauty courses make at least the progress expected. Most adult learners make good progress in acquiring good industry-relevant practical skills and subsequently add value to their own or their employers' businesses.
- Too few apprentices achieve their programmes within the timeframe allocated to them, as a result of poor planning of their programmes. A majority of apprentices do not achieve their functional skills qualifications in time. Often, after several attempts, too many apprentices do not receive timely and tailored support to enable them to improve their skills and knowledge. Consequently, this limits their chances of completing their full programme.
- Leaders have taken on a small number of apprentices from other providers who have ceased to operate. Managers and assessors have put in place targeted support and clear timescales to enable these apprentices to catch up on their work swiftly.
- Most learners develop good practical skills, which are appropriate to their job roles and of the standards expected. However, apprentices do not enhance their understanding of theoretical concepts sufficiently. As a result, they do not accelerate their progress and deepen their knowledge. Too many adult learners do not have the opportunity to undertake relevant vocational work experience.
- The exact number of apprentices who progress to employment and/or further study remains unknown to the provider. As a result, leaders do not know the impact of their apprenticeships provision. Most adults who undertake a short course to gain a qualification improve their employment prospects.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

- There are around 60 adult learners, who claim advanced loans, enrolled on hairdressing and beauty courses. Around a third follow short courses, with around two thirds enrolled on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses that last six to nine months.
- Although leaders have improved significantly the proportion of adult learners who

achieved their qualifications, leaders and managers do not monitor and ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at their range of centres. In a minority of centres, staff do not plan and deploy effective methods to ensure that programmes are effective and enhance learners' progress. Around a third of level 3 hairdressing learners do not have sufficient prior experience to commence their level 3 programmes and as a result are placed on the wrong course.

- Most adult learners develop a broad range of new skills during their studies. Learners following beauty therapy courses make good progress in relation to their starting points because they receive effective practical coaching and learning from their trainers. They broaden their range of skills and as a result improve their chances of gaining enhanced roles at work and/or employment. For example, learners on hairdressing courses learn new skills in relation to current fashion colouring techniques such as 'balayage' and 'ombre' techniques.
- Not enough unemployed adults have good access to real work settings, and as a result, they are not well prepared for their next steps. A few learners take part in work experience, which supports their studies well; however, trainers do not make use of the skills that learners gain during work experience to review learners' progress and inform further learning.
- Most trainers do not review learners' progress well enough on hairdressing courses. As a result, many learners make slow progress in grasping theory and have an unrealistic view of their how well they are doing. In practical sessions learners benefit from regular coaching and precise verbal feedback; however, during reviews and theory lessons trainers do not make effective links between practical skills development and theoretical concepts. This results in learners making slow progress in their assessment tasks.
- Most learners following beauty therapy at level 3 make good progress and apply the new skills they learn effectively to their workplace. For example, a learner enrolled on a reflexology qualification confidently articulated the skills she has acquired during the course that will enable her to change her career. A beauty therapist has taken an advanced make-up course and now has the skills to offer wedding and photographic make-up services.
- Most adult learners have a limited understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and how these may relate to them and their work. Most learners feel safe and are aware of whom to contact should they feel concerned about themselves and others.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- There are currently around 300 apprentices enrolled on intermediate and advanced apprenticeship programmes, with most following hairdressing, barbering and beauty therapy apprenticeships. Of the remainder, the largest numbers are in business administration, and the remainder are in retail, customer service and financial services.
- Leaders ensure that the apprenticeships provision meets the principles of the apprenticeships programmes.
- Too many apprentices following hairdressing programmes make slow progress. Most apprentices in beauty and advanced apprentices in business administration and financial services make expected or better progress.

- Most apprentices do not develop good independent study skills to support them to develop their academic knowledge and understanding. For example, in theory lessons apprentices do not reflect and evaluate their practice or the quality of their written work. The feedback they receive from trainers is limited and does not inform them how to improve the standards of their work and practice. Apprentices do not consistently complete homework to help them progress.
- Apprentices do not make sufficient progress in the development of their English skills. Trainers' feedback on apprentices' online written work lacks sufficient detail on how learners can improve their use of grammar, punctuation and capitalisation. In a few cases, learners spell key technical words incorrectly and trainers do not correct these. At times, apprentices do not receive feedback on their written work for a substantial period. Although a few apprentices have the opportunity to develop mathematical skills which relate to their job roles, not enough apprentices who have already achieved their level 2 functional skills deepen their mathematics skills further.
- Most trainers and assessors do not set and record apprentices' meaningful short-, medium- and long-term targets. As a result, apprentices lack a good understanding of the progress they make, how to improve their skills and knowledge and how to accelerate their learning. Too many assessors do not evaluate effectively apprentices' starting points to enable them to build on prior learning. Dates for reviewing progress against targets are too far apart; this results in slow pace and slow progress from one review to the next.
- In practical lessons, apprentices enjoy their learning and grow in confidence. Trainers make use of well-planned activities, which inspire apprentices and enable them to make substantial progress with their practical skills in relation to their starting points and the work they undertake. The standards of apprentices' practical work is of good quality and often in beauty therapy and hairdressing, apprentices acquire a broad range of extended skills. For example, hairdressing apprentices learn how to cut a standard 'bob' cut and then move on to further advanced cutting skills. They quickly learn the importance of stock control and its impact on cost control.
- Most trainers and assessors make use of effective coaching methods to challenge and probe apprentices' understanding. Apprentices following business administration and financial services at advanced level have sound knowledge of the financial life cycle, data protection and financial products. The vast majority of employers value the contributions that apprentices make to their organisations.
- Apprentices are safe and feel safe in their work environments. They also have a good understanding of how to stay safe online, but the vast majority have little understanding of the risks of extremism and radicalisation.
- The great majority of apprentices often lack knowledge or understanding of democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty and how these apply to life in modern Britain.

Provider details

| | |
|---|--|
| Unique reference number | 59147 |
| Type of provider | Independent learning provider |
| Age range of learners | 16–18/19+ |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 364 |
| Principal/CEO | Mr Simon Lampert |
| Telephone number | 03333 583559 |
| Website | www.skillsedge.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 learners (excluding apprenticeships) | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 46 | 0 | 10 |
| Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | | 19+ | |
| | 176 | 29 | 52 | 49 | | | 1 | |
| Number of traineeships | 16–19 | | 19+ | | Total | | | |
| | 1 | | 0 | | 1 | | | |
| Number of learners aged 14 to 16 | | | | | | | | |
| Number of learners for whom the provider receives high-needs funding | | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | Fusion Hair Consultants HairStation Academy The Academy of Hair | | | | | | | |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the commercial 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 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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| Jai Sharda | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Roger Pilgrim | Ofsted Inspector |
| Chris Bealey | Ofsted Inspector |
| Alison Gray | Ofsted Inspector |
| Ruth Harrison | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Heather Marks | Ofsted Inspector |

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