

Skills Edge Training Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 59147

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Inspection date(s): 22–23 August 2018

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This monitoring visit took place to assess the progress made following the full inspection carried out in December 2017 when Skills Edge Training Ltd (Skills Edge) was judged to require improvement. The focus of the two-day visit was solely related to five themes arising from the key recommendations in the previous inspection report.

Skills Edge provides apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced and higher levels for 16- to 18-year-olds and adults. The provider also offers adult learning courses at level 3 for a very small number of adults. Just over half of the apprentices are following frameworks, with the remainder following the new standards apprenticeships. Most apprentices study hairdressing and beauty therapy. However, since the previous inspection, there has been a small increase in the number of apprentices who study financial services, business administration, customer service, insurance and management programmes.

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Ofsted Inspector completed the monitoring visit over two days.

Themes

How effective are leaders' actions in securing rapid improvement of weaknesses identified at the December 2017 inspection?

Insufficient progress

Leaders accurately identify the weaknesses they need to rectify to bring about improvement, particularly of hairdressing provision. They now have an accurate understanding of the progress that apprentices are making. As a result, they have taken some actions to ensure that more apprentices make good progress and achieve. For example, where some apprentices have performed poorly, they have stopped their employers from recruiting further apprentices. A few apprentices who are at risk of not completing their studies have been transferred to other apprenticeship providers who are located more closely to where they work. However, too many weaknesses identified at the previous inspection remain and too many apprentices are not making the progress of which they are capable. Changes and turnover of staff have adversely affected the progress that apprentices studying business administration and customer service make; too few make swift progress.

Managers use regular performance quality monitoring meetings to assess the quality of provision. However, they do not focus sufficiently on improving the quality of the apprentices' experiences or plan the required actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment and secure good outcomes for learners. They do not ensure that their staff are trained and supported to provide stimulating and challenging teaching that motivates apprentices to make rapid progress.

What actions have leaders taken to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at least good and enables apprentices and learners to achieve their potential?

Insufficient progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have increased the frequency of their observations of teaching, learning and assessment. However, these observations often fail to identify accurately the specific actions required to help tutors and assessors improve their practice. The subsequent action planning process to improve teaching and assessment lacks rigour because managers do not effectively check the progress staff make against identified weaknesses.

Managers have identified too much poor assessment of apprentices' hairdressing practice. Although managers have created a comprehensive plan to improve assessment practice, the work is yet to commence.

Leaders and managers do not place sufficient focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, too many tutors and assessors do not deploy questioning techniques that extend apprentices' and learners' depth of understanding of topics. Too many tutors and assessors do not effectively teach theory. As a result, apprentices do not understand the relevance of the theory that underpins their practical work.

How effective are leaders and managers in ensuring that learners and apprentices receive high-quality training to improve their English and mathematics skills?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications in English and mathematics has increased. Managers now ensure that apprentices receive more discrete teaching than previously.

Some staff ensure that most apprentices have a good understanding of why they need to improve their English and mathematics skills and the relevance of such skills to their career aspirations. As a consequence, the majority of apprentices are keen to acquire good English and mathematics, particularly those studying business administration and financial services. However, vocational tutors and assessors do not consider this aspect of skill development in their apprentices' individual targets. Consequently, apprentices are not set challenging targets to improve their English and mathematics skills. Some tutors and assessors of hairdressing programmes do not correct apprentices' errors and misspellings of vocationally relevant words. As a result, apprentices continue to make the same mistakes and fail to improve their writing skills.

How well do leaders plan apprenticeship programmes to ensure that apprentices make good progress and achieve their qualifications within allocated timescales?

Insufficient progress

Leaders now have a much clearer understanding of apprentices' progress towards the completion of their qualifications than previously. However, they do not put in place enough actions to ensure that apprentices make good progress and successfully complete their programmes in a timely manner.

Leaders' data indicates that a greater proportion of apprentices make good progress than previously. However, they have not placed sufficient focus on ensuring that the quality of assessors' and tutors' practice, including their use of target setting, is effective and challenges apprentices to make rapid progress. Not enough apprentices improve the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to acquire in order to make valuable contributions to their employers' businesses. Leaders and managers do not ensure that staff conduct regular and challenging reviews of progress with their apprentices. As a result, too many reviews are missed or take place too infrequently, and too many apprentices make slow progress.

How have staff improved apprentices' and learners' understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation and what is required to work safely?

Significant progress

Leaders have developed a bespoke online training package that ensures that apprentices and learners have a good understanding of what is required to work safely. Apprentices speak confidently about what they have learned through studying topics such as the dangers of extremism, radicalisation in the workplace and female genital mutilation. Tutors discuss online material and effectively reinforce learning during one-to-one reviews and learning sessions in the workplace.

Apprentices and learners have a good understanding of personal safety. They know how to keep themselves safe and respect their peers and colleagues. Leaders ensure that apprentices and learners are aware of relevant reporting procedures and whom and how to contact when at learning and work; for example, how to use 'the safeguarding button' on the provider's website.

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