

Skillnet Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

20–23 February 2018

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

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved and are now good in both direct provision and subcontracted provision.
- Leaders have established clear and effective procedures for Skillnet and ensured that the organisation is prepared for the introduction of standards-based apprenticeships.
- Managers have responded decisively to deal with weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, through effective quality improvement.
- Leaders and managers maintain strong and beneficial links with key employers in the motor vehicle industry.
- Leaders and managers ensure a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development for staff. Across the organisation, staff are highly experienced and qualified, with extensive knowledge of their fields of expertise.
- Apprentices have particularly good access to high-quality accommodation and resources, in their training settings and in the workplace.
- Leaders have been effective at increasing achievement rates for apprentices.
- Apprentices receive very good support from teachers, skills coaches and their employers. As a result of this support, apprentices make good progress.
- Apprentices develop an extensive range of workplace skills and, as a result, do well in the workplace; many achieve promotion or gain additional responsibilities.
- Apprentices gain a range of qualifications in addition to completing their apprenticeships. This enhances their employability.
- Apprentices develop good mathematical and digital skills. They apply these skills confidently and accurately in the workplace.
- In a few cases, teachers do not use information from the assessment of apprentices' starting points to plan learning and set challenging individual targets.
- Too many apprentices do not develop their written English well enough. Leaders have partially dealt with this weakness from the previous inspection but there is still work to do.
- Too many apprentices only have a superficial understanding of fundamental British values, and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Women and apprentices from Asian, Black and mixed heritages did less well than their peers in 2016/17. Leaders have taken action to narrow the gap between their performance and that of others.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Skillnet Limited is based in Watford and provides apprenticeship training for just over 1,500 apprentices working at employers across the country, predominantly in the motor vehicle industry. Just over half of the apprentices are aged 16 to 18. About two thirds of the apprentices are on intermediate apprenticeship programmes. The rest are almost all on advanced apprenticeship programmes, with a very few on higher apprenticeship programmes. A very small proportion of apprentices are following standards-based programmes.
- The majority of apprentices follow programmes in motor vehicle engineering. The rest follow programmes in warehousing and distribution, administration and business management. Most of these apprentices are also employed within the motor vehicle industry.
- Skillnet no longer provides apprenticeships in areas in which it is not specialised.
- Skillnet uses 14 subcontractors, of whom two provide all aspects of the apprentices' programme and the rest provide the classroom-based theory and skills training. The training is delivered by teachers in subcontractors' premises. Skills coaches are directly employed by Skillnet to provide workplace coaching, assessment and guidance.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should monitor closely the achievement rates of different groups to ensure that all apprentices achieve their qualification by the planned end date and achievement continues to rise.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
 - use the assessment of apprentices' starting points to plan learning and set targets for personal skills development
 - take suitable steps to improve the quality of apprentices' written English
 - make better use of questioning to check the learners' understanding and stretch their learning.
- Improve apprentices' understanding of fundamental British values and their understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have established clear and effective strategic priorities for Skillnet, which focus strongly on providing high-quality training for employers and manufacturers in the motor trade and exceptional service to its apprentices. All managers actively promote these priorities and focus relentlessly on achieving these goals.
- Leaders have ensured that the organisation is suitably prepared for the introduction of the apprenticeship standards. They are working closely with employers and other industry organisations to enable the smooth introduction of the new apprenticeship model. At the time of the inspection, a small proportion of apprentices have been recruited to the new standards-based programmes.
- Managers have responded decisively to deal with weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, through effective quality improvement. Staff are actively involved in quality reviews, and directors have clearly defined operational accountabilities. Leaders have made the decision to withdraw from vocational areas where they lacked the breadth of expertise to deliver a high-quality programme.
- Leaders have focused well on improving the quality of subcontracted provision. They have reduced the proportion of subcontracted provision, and managers now monitor the quality much more effectively. Managers work more closely with subcontractors' staff and provide robust challenge to them. As a result, subcontracted provision is now consistently good, and achievement rates have improved in line with Skillnet's own provision.
- Leaders have been effective at increasing the stability of the workforce with reduced staff turnover rates. They have introduced more thorough processes for tracking and reviewing apprentices' progress.
- Leaders use the positive feedback from employers and apprentices well to help inform quality improvements. Changes made by leaders have resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and in outcomes for learners. These changes have also helped raise the overall effectiveness of the provision.
- Leaders and managers maintain particularly strong links with key employers in the motor vehicle industry. They use these links to help ensure that training comprehensively meets the education and training requirements of the sector. It also enables apprentices to make good progress, gain the knowledge and skills they require, and to progress successfully in their chosen field of work. Leaders have also used these links well to meet regional and national skills needs.
- Performance management processes are effective. Staff have clear and suitably challenging targets. Managers communicate well with their staff. They regularly hold one-to-one meetings at which they review progress against targets and identify personal and professional development needs. Managers use the outcomes from the observations of teaching and learning effectively to help identify areas for development for all staff.
- Leaders and managers have implemented a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development for all staff. For example, motor vehicle skills coaches regularly spend time working in their specialist industry setting to maintain their skills and knowledge. Skills coaches are also required to achieve relevant assessor and teaching

qualifications, as well as gaining appropriate literacy and numeracy qualifications if required. Senior managers and directors also undertake a broad range of appropriate and relevant higher-level management development programmes. As a result, staff across the organisation are highly experienced and well qualified. They have extensive insight and expertise in their respective fields.

- Leaders have worked extremely well to ensure that apprentices are working in high-quality workplaces. Employers are very supportive and ensure that apprentices have access to cutting-edge technology on which to train. For example, apprentices with a subcontractor have access to state-of-the-art heavy goods vehicles, donated by the industry, on which to develop their skills, as well as access to a new workshop for large vehicles.

The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements are effective. The board has steered the organisation well through the significant changes since the previous inspection, resulting in clear improvements.
- The board comprises senior executives from the organisation. They meet regularly and review performance thoroughly against the organisational priorities, and also review the financial status of the organisation.
- Directors use well their wealth of experience in both the motor vehicle industry and training organisations to guide the provision and provide robust challenge to managers.
- Directors have ensured that Skillnet has suitable checks and balances in place to monitor the quality of provision. Directors commission appropriate external audits to help review and monitor the financial health and quality of the provision.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff and employers work conscientiously to ensure that apprentices fully understand how to stay safe in the workplace. Apprentices feel safe in training settings. Managers have suitable arrangements in place to safeguard apprentices in residential settings while on block release. Apprentices are aware what actions to take if they have any safeguarding concerns. Skills coaches discuss and deal with any safeguarding concerns at each assessment.
- Apprentices are generally aware of how to keep themselves safe online. However, some apprentices do not understand the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. Managers are aware of these areas for development, and have plans in place to deal with them.
- Leaders ensure that managers adhere to safer recruitment practices.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Apprentices receive good teaching, learning and assessment from well-qualified and highly knowledgeable teachers and skills coaches. Teaching, learning and assessment in subcontracted provision have improved and are now good.

- Apprentices complete learning tasks that are highly relevant to their sector and, consequently, they quickly master and extend their industry knowledge and skills. For example, in heavy vehicle practical sessions, teachers devise increasingly complex electrical testing regimes which develop apprentices' fault-finding skills well.
- Apprentices following information technology (IT) programmes develop higher-level skills with a major motor vehicle manufacturer and experience a variety of business and technical departments. For example, one apprentice is a team leader responsible for coordinating work on developing androids to help development and production. Others are based within research and development teams testing vehicle performance.
- Support for apprentices is good. Skills coaches establish a good rapport with apprentices and meet their needs well. For example, one apprentice, observed in the parts department in a dealership, was encouraged to proofread his work, use correct terminology and write in sentences rather than bullet points. This helped him to gain confidence in his communication skills.
- Effective teaching and enhanced individual support provided by a newly established functional skills team and by skills coaches are having a positive impact on apprentice progress and achievement.
- Apprentices understand how to keep themselves and others safe in the event of an emergency situation. For example, large companies rehearse responses to terror threats alongside their fire procedures. Apprentices know to whom to report issues or concerns they have when working online.
- Apprentices benefit from excellent resources and accommodation. The majority work for major international motor vehicle manufacturers, or their approved dealers. Leaders have worked well with a prestigious sports car manufacturer, which now employs a few apprentices making these vehicles. Staff use well a wide range of electronic learning technologies. Technical resources include the latest production vehicles and specialist test equipment that enable apprentices to extend their practical skills development very well.
- Apprentices benefit from good-quality practical training by their employers at high-quality workplaces, which enables them to develop valuable skills. Skills coaches work well to ensure that the employer training is well integrated into the apprentices' programmes.
- Employers ensure that apprentices get workplace experience which reinforces their skills development, for example by moving apprentices to different areas within the production and maintenance processes. Apprentices complete pre-MOT tests on heavy goods vehicles, reporting on areas for concern and completing maintenance activities like changing brake pads and discs to a high standard.
- Assessment for learning is frequent, reliable and accurate. Skills coaches use a wide range of assessment techniques to determine apprentices' competence, including online assessment, video and voice recording, frequent questioning and discussion.
- Apprentices benefit from constructive and developmental verbal feedback on their progress. This is generally immediate and clearly identifies areas for future development and how apprentices can improve. Feedback is supportive and helps the apprentices to build their confidence and develop good workplace skills, for example in always ensuring that equipment is put away and there are no potential trip hazards.

- Many apprentices are working at higher-than-expected levels and are trusted by employers to work on specific jobs unsupervised, such as safety and warranty checks and vehicle servicing.
- Employers and skills coaches give apprentices good advice and guidance. As a result, few leave their apprenticeship early. The majority of apprentices receive effective advice and guidance at the start of their programmes. This ensures that they study on a programme that meets their needs, goals, aspirations and prior attainment.
- Careers advice is focused on the opportunities within the employers' companies and not on those in other areas. As a result, apprentices do not have a sufficient understanding of how the skills they are developing could be used in other areas of engineering, such as aerospace, or newer technologies such as wind turbines.
- In a few cases, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to ensuring that all apprentices make good progress. Some teachers do not use the information on apprentices' starting points sufficiently well to plan learning that challenges the apprentices effectively. In these cases, the more able apprentices repeat relatively undemanding work from previous courses while waiting for the others to catch up. This slows their progress.
- In too many cases, teachers do not use questioning techniques effectively. When their questions are minimal and undirected, they do not probe apprentices' understanding sufficiently. In particular, teachers fail to explore or challenge the responses from apprentices to extend their thinking.
- Target-setting requires improvement. In too many cases, teachers and skills coaches set targets that focus solely on the completion of qualification units and not on individual skills development. In too many cases, insufficient emphasis is placed on setting apprentices targets to develop their personal and social skills and workplace behaviours, for those who need to improve them further.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices are proud of themselves, their workplaces and their work. They are smartly turned out, confident and assured. They thoroughly enjoy their learning. They make a significant contribution to the road transport industries.
- Staff help learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. As a result, they are very respectful to each other, staff and the equipment with which they work.
- Apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity is good because teachers promote it effectively. This is reinforced with practical applications. For example, body repair and refinishing apprentices are painting the motor cycle that will be ridden by the first amputee to ride in the Isle of Man TT races this summer. The bike has considerable adaptations to allow it to be ridden one-handed at high speed. Dealership apprentices have additional training on how to service and repair adapted vehicles.
- Apprentices with a major motor vehicle manufacturer have access to specialist mentors who support diversity. The provider arranges, for example, for the apprentices to join support groups where they meet with colleagues to discuss personal issues and interests.
- Apprentices develop their workplace skills well and, as a result, improve their future job prospects. Staff use their rich industry experience very effectively to help apprentices

develop these workplace skills to great depth. Apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships develop very well the required behaviours.

- As part of their programme, many apprentices receive additional development relating to their life skills. This includes healthy living and eating, road craft, substance abuse and social awareness. Apprentices feel safe and are safe. They adopt safe working practices and are well aware of how to keep themselves safe online.
- Staff robustly monitor apprentices' attendance at training. Last year the average attendance figure was high, and the in-year figure this year is similarly high. Effective arrangements are in place to quickly identify absence and carry out checks to ensure that the apprentice is safe. The provider shares attendance figures with skills coaches, partners and employers, to help improve attendance generally and for individual apprentices. Managers receive detailed reports on attendance at training, including what elements are missed. Staff work well with employers and colleges to plan catch-up training as soon as possible.
- Apprentices' achievements are widely celebrated. Employers have 'apprentice of the year' awards, as does Skillnet itself. Apprentices appreciate these events and competition is fierce. This helps apprentices have pride in their work and seek to continually improve. For example, one major large goods vehicle manufacturer has an 'apprentice of the year' award for each of the three years of the programme. Apprentices with this employer are keen to achieve the 'triple', that is, to win the award for each of the three years consecutively. So far, three apprentices have achieved this goal.
- Leaders acknowledge that not all apprentices have a good enough understanding of fundamental British values and the dangers posed by extremism. There are robust plans to address the weaknesses, but improvements have not yet reached all aspects of the provision.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The majority of current apprentices are making good progress. The proportion making expected, or better than expected, progress at this stage in the year is higher than the figure at the same point in the previous year.
- Across the provision, achievement rates have been rising steadily year-on-year. Achievement rates for apprentices with subcontractors are similarly improving and are now good for all subcontractors, a significant improvement on the previous year.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve by their planned end date is increasing overall. The provider's in-year data shows an improving picture for 2017/18; the actual rate for the proportion of apprentices achieving by their planned end dates for the first quarter of 2017/18 is good and higher than last year.
- The proportion of business administration apprentices who achieved their programme by the planned end date reduced noticeably in 2016/17. The provider is aware of this and their in-year data shows an improving picture.
- Achievement rates for apprentices who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities rose swiftly in 2016/17, ensuring that they achieved nearly as well as their peers. Achievement rates for apprentices completing level 2 functional skills qualification in mathematics, English and information and communication technology (ICT) have increased since the

previous inspection and are high. An increasing number of apprentices gain the ICT functional skills qualification for the first time.

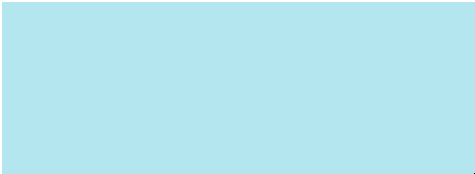
- A few gaps remain in the 2016/17 achievement rates for different groups. For example, women did less well than men, particularly those female apprentices working in health and social care. Apprentices from Asian, Black and mixed ethnic groups also do less well than their peers. The provider is aware of these gaps and is taking firm action. As a result, the provider's in-year data shows an improvement.
- The majority of apprentices achieve a range of additional qualifications related to the motor vehicle industry. This means that they become more than generic engineers; they are industry-specific engineers and, therefore, are more employable. For example, apprentices who work in dealerships for a major large vehicle manufacturer gain a qualification to work on the air-conditioning systems for those vehicles, which is an additional advanced skill.
- Apprentices progress well in the workplace, for example gaining promotion and additional responsibilities during their training.
- Apprentices develop good, and extensive, vocational and technical skills. Employers value highly the contribution that this makes to their business. These skills provide the apprentices with an excellent start to their working lives and make them very employable in the motor industry and other engineering vocations. The IT apprentices develop skills beyond the requirements of their programmes.
- Apprentices improve their mathematical and digital skills well because teachers promote the relevance of such skills in industry, and they adeptly set apprentices tasks that challenge them and develop problem-solving skills. Apprentices apply their mathematical knowledge and use it to solve practical problems in the workplace. Apprentices frequently access manufacturers' online data to compare test readings and settings data. Apprentices competently use measurements to work out fuel and oil consumption, tyre tread depths and pressure levels, in accordance with manufacturer and employer guidelines.
- For too many apprentices, their written English is not sufficiently developed. Inspectors saw too few good examples of English skills being positively developed. Apprentices' understanding of the correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar is not consistently good across the provision. Inspectors saw examples where apprentices' basic English mistakes were not being corrected, so that they were then repeating the same errors. Skills coaches do not always provide sufficiently clear guidance to apprentices on how to improve their written English.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54402
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,895
Principal/CEO	Lee Acton
Telephone number	01923 630800
Website	www.skillnet.org

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+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	678	379	179	309	9	15		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	None							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barnet and Southgate College• Blackpool & Fylde College• Bridgwater College• Brooklands College• Carshalton College• Colchester Institute• City of Bristol College• Farnborough College of Technology• Fleetmaster• FTEC							

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- Havering College
 - Mid Kent College
 - Reading College
 - University of Greenwich
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Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the organisation's quality 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. Inspectors observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Derrick Baughan, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Nelson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kanwaljit Dhillon	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Barbara Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Tucker	Ofsted Inspector

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