

Specialist Trade Courses Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

13–16 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Senior leaders and managers have successfully created a culture in which they and the staff have high aspirations for their learners and the business.
- Leaders and managers have established effective partnerships with employers, including care homes and beauty salons, which support apprentices and adult learners to develop skills to gain employment.
- Leaders and managers have invested in resources to support and develop learners' practical skills in health and social care, personal training and beauty therapy.
- Tutors and assessors plan and teach learning sessions effectively to meet both employers' and learners' needs.
- The proportion of learners who progress into employment or self-employment on completion of their course is high.
- Assessors work well with employers to coordinate the on- and off-the-job training. Apprentices receive good support from tutors, assessors and employers in order to develop and improve their skills.
- Learners have a very good understanding of fundamental British values, equality and diversity and how these impact on their behaviour in the workplace.
- Assessors very effectively monitor learners' progress and their achievement. The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications, including functional skills, is high.
- Learners' attendance on courses funded through advanced learning loans is not high enough.
- Leaders and managers do not have a strategy to develop learners' English and mathematics skills and tutors do not provide apprentices with detailed support to enable them to make rapid progress in developing their skills in these subjects.
- Leaders and managers do not use data on learners' current performance sufficiently well to put long-term quality improvement strategies in place.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Specialist Trade Courses Ltd is an independent learning provider based on two sites in Romford, Essex. The organisation has recently started to deliver level 3 and 5 apprenticeship standards to approximately 50 apprentices in health and social care. In addition to apprenticeships, the provider also delivers adult learning provision at levels 2 and 3 in beauty therapy, nail technician and personal training. Approximately 86 adult learners fund their course through the government's advanced learning loans.
- Specialist Trade Courses also delivers qualifications in construction on behalf of a range of other organisations. These courses are not in scope of this inspection. The majority of learners attending the provider do so in order to gain qualifications and skills necessary to progress into employment in the local area.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve learners' attendance at lessons.
- Leaders and managers should implement a strategy to ensure a coherent approach to the teaching of English and mathematics and provide the support apprentices and learners need to improve their skills in these areas.
- Leaders and managers should support tutors to identify the steps that apprentices need to take to improve their English and mathematics skills. They should set specific targets to improve apprentices' skills in these areas, as they progress towards the required level.
- Directors should consider how they can improve the independent scrutiny of their work to help them identify the improvements they need to make.
- Leaders and managers should use data on learners' current performance more effectively to put long-term quality improvement strategies in place.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision to provide high-quality training for their learners and to meet the needs of employers in the local area. Leaders set high standards and have high aspirations for the organisation. They have successfully established a professional and transparent culture that fosters a respectful working environment. They have a well-considered strategic plan which articulates their ambitions to their staff and strategic partners and informs the development and growth of the organisation.
- Staff at all levels of the organisation contribute to the development of the organisation's mission, vision and values. As a result, they understand how the values inform the standards that leaders set for the organisation's activities and performance. For example, leaders will turn businesses down if they feel that they are not able to fulfil a contract to a high standard.
- Leaders and managers have worked effectively with the job centre and local community organisations to provide courses which meet the needs of employers and the local community.
- Leaders and managers have put in place effective strategies to rectify previously poor achievement rates resulting from taking on learners from another provider. They have invested in resources that they use well to support these learners to achieve their qualifications.
- Leaders and managers support staff well to develop their knowledge and skills. They have established a comprehensive training plan which enables staff to gain qualifications that keep them up to date with developments in their industry. For example, in beauty therapy, tutors gain certificates in tanning and Indian head massage.
- Leaders and managers have put effective processes in place to assess their own performance. The judgements they make are broadly accurate in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. Leaders do not, however, identify how they will make improvements to the quality of provision and they are slow to complete the actions they have set for themselves.
- Leaders and managers do not use the data and information they gather sufficiently well to analyse their current performance and put long-term quality improvement strategies in place. Too often, they use informal communications and verbal reporting to rectify emerging and current issues. Their long-term action plans are not sufficiently self-critical. Leaders do not monitor these plans frequently enough to have an accurate oversight of how swiftly they are making progress.

The governance of the provider

- Specialist Trade Courses, a private limited company, does not currently have formal governance arrangements in place. The two directors of the business have oversight of business performance and set the strategic direction of the company.
- Directors and senior leaders have weekly management meetings at which they monitor

the progress of the business against key performance indicators. However, these focus predominantly on operational matters. The resultant action plans do not monitor all aspects of the provision in sufficient detail. They do not focus sufficiently on improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Directors do not benefit from enough critical support and challenge from external experts to identify the improvements they need to make.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and managers put the safety and welfare of learners as a high priority within the organisation.
- Staff receive frequent training on safeguarding so that they have a good understanding of issues affecting learners and apprentices. Managers provide relevant and personalised support to meet individual learners' needs, such as through referrals to external agencies. As a result, learners feel safe and are safe.
- Leaders and managers have put detailed policies and procedures in place for safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty, including a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and lockdown and critical incident procedures. Staff understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and know how to report any concerns that they might have. These are less well understood by apprentices and learners.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors accurately assess what learners can and cannot do at the start of their course and take account of apprentices' existing skills and their job roles. As a result, learners enrol on the right programmes at the right level.
- Staff have good qualifications in their subject areas and have good experience of being trainers and assessors. They plan learning well, including tailoring subject theory to learners' work contexts. They motivate and challenge learners to achieve their qualification aims and career aspirations. As a result, learners make at least the progress expected of them.
- Tutors plan their assessment of learners well. Their assessments are frequent and tailored to learners' work roles and support needs. As a result, learners present evidence of their competency at work with confidence.
- Tutors provide helpful feedback to learners on their work. Both adult learners and apprentices know what they need to do to improve. For example, where learners whose first language is not English misunderstand the nuances of the English language, tutors provide effective feedback to support their improvement.
- Staff have developed effective relationships with apprentices' employers. They involve employers well in planning learning, in particular in care homes. This results in tutors providing learning which meets both apprentices' and employers' needs.
- Tutors and assessors make good use of the range of resources available to them. For example, they use online resources to support learners to develop their understanding of British values and equality and diversity. Practical resources in beauty therapy and sports are good and tutors use them well to support adult learners' skills development. As a

result, learners make good progress.

- Assessors frequently assess learners' skills and set clear and motivating targets. In health and social care, assessors use targets well to support apprentices to develop their understanding of equality of opportunity. In beauty therapy, targets are specific to the techniques apprentices need to develop to be a successful therapist, such as adding hot stone massage to their repertoire of skills. As a result, these learners know what skills they need to develop and how to go about doing so in order to meet their targets.
- Tutors assess learners' skills in English and mathematics accurately and provide additional support when necessary. For a minority of learners, tutors do not identify the small steps learners need to take towards achieving their goals. As a result, their progress is slow.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners enjoy their courses and appreciate being able to bring their work experience into the classroom to extend their skills and knowledge.
- Learners have a good attitude towards learning and work. They are punctual and ready to learn. They have a good understanding of the expectations that staff set for them, in particular how to work safely. As a result, employers value the contribution apprentices make to their businesses. Learners aspiring to move into self-employment adopt good working practices to ensure that they develop sustainable businesses.
- Learners have a good understanding of British values, equality and diversity, and how to apply these to their work settings. For example, beauty therapy learners know how these apply to their attitudes towards clients when they provide them with massages.
- Learners feel safe and know how to keep safe, including when they are online. For example, learners are aware of the concerns about posting information on social media. Learners on personal training courses discuss marketing through social media, through which they learn about staying safe online. However, learners and apprentices do not have a sufficient understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. As a result, it is not clear whether learners and apprentices know the impact these have on them and their workplace and what to do when they have concerns.
- Learners benefit from access to work environments to support their development of practical skills. Learners on beauty therapy courses have access to good-quality salon environments to book their own clients in order to develop their skills. Personal training learners get three months free access to a gym to develop their skills. These contribute to learners making good progress towards achieving their qualifications.
- Learners on beauty therapy courses receive free equipment kits – including products – to develop their skills outside lessons. They also receive student membership of a local trade supplier to supplement their practical learning. As a result, learners develop good practical skills.
- Apprentices and adult learners complete additional training to enhance their ability to gain employment. For example, apprentices in the care sector receive training in autism spectrum disorder and dementia. Those wishing to become self-employed benefit from a business skills course to develop their knowledge of tax and the advantages and disadvantages of being a limited company.

- Staff have effective processes for screening learners for potential additional learning needs. Where necessary, tutors make appropriate adaptations to their lessons to meet learners' needs. For example, they provide additional time for learners to complete assessments and greater support to develop learners' skills. This contributes to learners making the progress of which they are capable.
- Learners have access to an appropriate range of external referral agencies to support any additional learning needs. For example, they have access to organisations providing support on mental health or disabilities.
- Most learners benefit from good ongoing advice from tutors about possible career options and how to access these. For example, tutors in massage and personal training provide helpful guidance on working in the sector, particularly around the unsociable working hours. However, leaders and managers do not have a strategy to ensure that all learners access advice or that it is of a consistently high standard.
- Learners' attendance is poor. Leaders and managers monitor attendance on a monthly basis, but they do not have attendance targets. As a result, they do not identify when attendance is too poor, nor do they take action quickly enough.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The proportion of adult learners who achieved their qualifications in 2017/18 increased compared with the previous year and was high. The proportion of adult learners who achieve their nail technician qualification is very high. The majority of adult learners achieve their qualification within the planned time. Current apprentices make good progress towards successfully completing their apprenticeship.
- The vast majority of adult learners secure jobs as either personal trainers or beauty therapists. A smaller proportion of learners go on to further study, primarily with the provider.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their functional skills English and mathematics qualifications at the first attempt is high and increasing. As a result, most learners develop the skills they need to move on to further study.
- Leaders and managers monitor learners' achievement closely. Learners from different ethnic groups and those with an identified learning difficulty or disability achieve at the same rate as all other learners.
- Learners' work is of a good standard. Adult learners and apprentices work to a high practical standard in beauty therapy, personal training, massage and health and social care. Learners' written work is of an appropriate standard for the courses they study.
- Apprentices and learners make appropriate progress towards achieving their qualifications. Learners are aware of what progress they are making and what they need to do to achieve the qualification.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Good

- At the time of inspection, there were 86 adult learners enrolled on level 3 courses in beauty therapy, nail technician and personal training.
- Leaders and managers have provided these courses in order that learners who have previously not been employed can gain the skills needed to get jobs or become self-employed.
- Staff work effectively with external partners to develop courses for adult learners that meet the local employment needs, and enable many learners to realise their aspirations of being self-employed.
- Learners are motivated and keen to learn. They come to lessons equipped and ready to work. They have high aspirations and want to progress into employment.
- Learners benefit from using a wide variety of resources to support them to achieve their qualification. For example, in sport, learners make good use of online teaching resources, such as video lessons, fact sheets and mock assessments, to practise their skills before their final assessment. As a result, most learners pass their assessments first time and make good progress.
- Tutors and assessors provide learners with good information on the careers available to them. For example, learners on sports courses understand the steps they need to take to be self-employed as personal trainers. As a result, learners feel confident they can reach their career goals.

Apprenticeships

Good

- Leaders and managers have recently introduced level 2, 3 and 5 apprenticeships in health and social care. At the time of inspection, no apprentices had completed their course.
- Leaders plan the apprenticeships well to ensure that they meet local and national skills strategies and employment opportunities. They work with employers, who are supportive and value the apprenticeship training. Apprentices' managers recognise the improvements in apprentices' care practice. Assessors visit apprentices in the workplace frequently and tailor visits to apprentices' support needs. This contributes to apprentices making progress within their expected timescales.
- Assessors and tutors provide clear and comprehensive information to apprentices about the apprenticeship standards. This includes details of end-point assessment, English and mathematics and the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected as part of the apprenticeship. As a result, apprentices receive good preparation for their next steps in the qualification.
- Assessors set effective targets for apprentices, which they match to individual needs, and focus on the skills that apprentices need to develop. Apprentices are aware of their targets and what they need to do to achieve them. As a result, apprentices make the progress expected of them.
- Apprentices in business administration and customer service benefit from well-planned teaching sessions that build on their prior knowledge and current workplace skills

effectively. As a result, apprentices make a good contribution to sessions.

- Assessors work well with employers to coordinate the on- and off-the-job training. Apprentices receive good support from tutors, assessors and employers in order to develop and improve their skills. For example, tutors support apprentices to gain skills in calming down agitated residents in care homes who have mental health needs. As a result, apprentices have a wide range of opportunities to achieve their qualification requirements.
- Tutors and assessors do not plan how apprentices will develop their English and mathematics skills to the required level. As a result, apprentices make slow progress in developing these skills.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1237130
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	180
Principal/CEO	Robert Botten
Telephone number	03455 652 656
Website	www.thestcgroup.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	91	-	2
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	2	20	1	22	-	9		
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 director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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

Steve Lambert, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lynda Brown	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rosy Belton	Ofsted Inspector
Gail Shenton	Ofsted Inspector

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