

# Short inspection of SSE Services PLC

Inspection dates:

7–8 January 2020

## **Outcome**

SSE Services PLC continues to be a good provider.

## **Information about this provider**

SSE Services PLC (SSE) became an employer provider in 2017. SSE is a large national utility company providing energy to 9 million households and employing 20,000 staff. It delivers levy and non-levy funded apprenticeships to its workforce. Currently, there are 107 apprentices on the level 3 power networks craftsperson apprenticeship standard; 16 apprentices on the level 2 dual fuel smart meter installer apprenticeship standard; and 36 apprentices finishing their framework apprenticeships on electrical installation at level 3. The level 2 dual fuel smart meter installer standard is not being continued following the company's decision to sell its retail division.

The provider works with five subcontractors. They provide technical qualifications and functional skills for the apprentices on a range of programmes.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Apprentices benefit from a comprehensive training programme that enables them to become skilled craft workers across a wide range of roles within the utility industry.

Many apprentices secure long-term careers with the company, progressing through the ranks to its most senior levels.

Apprentices develop strong team working and leadership skills through participation on extra-curricular activities, such as outdoor bound courses.

Apprentices grow in personal confidence and get their first taste of independence from home through their attendance on residential courses with subcontractors.

The company enables apprentices to access the same benefits packages as its other employees. For example, apprentices use interest free loans to pay for driving lessons and tests that enable them to become registered drivers with the company, widening their potential employment opportunities.

Apprentices demonstrate a deep understanding of the company's safety-first culture.

From induction through every stage of the apprenticeship programme, apprentices apply rigorous risk assessments to all their activities.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders and managers have developed an apprenticeship curriculum that enables the company to address its need to recruit and train skilled staff to meet its core strategic business objectives in a highly competitive marketplace. The programmes are all designed to develop substantial new skills, knowledge and behaviours.

Managers and assessors use carefully structured curriculum plans to build the theoretical knowledge and technical skills of apprentices to enable them to become competent craft workers in different branches of the utility industry. On the level 3 power network craft person standard, all apprentices undertake mandatory units in core hand tool skills and health and safety knowledge before branching into specific training for cable jointers, overhead linespersons and electrical fitters.

Assessors are vocational experts who maintain their required licences to practice. Many of them keep their skills current by working on stand-by for the company. They use this experience to enhance their coaching and mentoring skills. As a result, assessors can effectively link the theory they teach in the classroom to the practical tasks that apprentices apply in their workplaces.

Apprentices build their skills and demonstrate their competence through the repetition of tasks. For example, apprentices learn how to install the different components of a smart meter, first in the classroom, then under the supervision of a mentor in a customer's home, before finishing their training by completing these tasks independently under the watchful eye of a quality auditor.

Apprentices benefit from being taught in up-to-date training facilities, using the latest tools and technology. They can develop their electrical installation skills in realistic mock sub-stations and simulate the conditions of line repair work by climbing replica pylons at the New Forest training centre.

The arrangements for providing careers advice are broadly effective. Pre-programme information provides prospective apprentices with a clear view of the expectations of the programme. Recently introduced career aspirations meetings held with apprentices in their second year enable them to identify what roles they would like to pursue in the company once they complete their programmes. Many achieve these career goals.

Assessors do not specify what or how apprentices can improve the quality of their written English skills. As a result, a minority of apprentices continue to repeat mistakes and do not master the technical language they need to progress on to higher-level training or roles within the organisation.

Workplace mentors do not use the evidence gathered through progress reviews to

communicate precisely to apprentices and those that support them what it is they need to do to improve. They provide written feedback that is aimed more at motivation than setting clear actions for development.

After three years of significant improvement in the proportion of apprentices achieving their overall qualifications, there was a decline in 2018/19. This was due to an increase in the number of apprentices withdrawing from the level 2 dual fuel metering standard following the company's decision to sell its retail business.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the challenges faced by the managers responsible for the apprenticeship programme. They have a detailed knowledge of operational issues. They support managers to make decisive changes, such as changes in subcontractors to improve performance.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staying safe is at the heart of the company's culture and ways of working. Leaders and managers have gone beyond the safeguarding requirements expected of an employer provider. For example, assessor staff all have enhanced DBS checks.

Leaders and managers address the safeguarding risks that are relevant to their apprentices. For example, they provide guidance on staying safe when in hotels on training residentials and work with a charity to raise awareness among apprentices about the causes of male suicide.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Company directors need to ensure that the strategic decisions they take about the future direction of the business do not have a negative impact on the ability of apprentices to complete their programmes.
- Managers should ensure that assessors have the teaching skills and confidence to support the development of apprentices' writing skills and use of technical language.
- Workplace mentors should improve the quality of their written feedback to apprentices, so that apprentices and the other staff that support them are clear about what it is they specifically need to improve.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	58590
<b>Address</b>	Training Department SSE Services PLC 5 Pipers Way Thatcham RG19 4AZ
<b>Contact number</b>	07741 127721
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ssen.co.uk">www.ssen.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	John Stewart
<b>Provider type</b>	Employer provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	12 November 2015
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	2020 Learning UCT Bridgewater and Taunton College Bracknell and Wokingham College Focus Training

## Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since SSE Services PLC was judged to be good in November 2015.

The inspection team was assisted by the apprenticeship quality and performance manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Charles Searle, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Hughes

Ofsted Inspector

Carolyn Brownsea

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Lacey

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
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