

# Inspection of Valkyrie Support Services Ltd

Inspection dates: 28–31 January 2020

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this provider

Valkyrie Support Services (VSS) Ltd is a privately-owned training company established in 2005. In May 2017, the company received public funding to enable it to deliver levy-funded apprenticeships. Previously, it had provided apprenticeships through subcontracting arrangements run by a range of further education colleges and independent learning providers.

The company offers apprenticeships at levels 2, 3 and 5 in environmental management, engineering and manufacturing, food production, and team leading and management. It works with a small number of high-profile employers across the whole of England. Most apprentices are employed as engineers, process operators, team leaders and managers in the automotive and manufacturing sector, with smaller numbers in the food and confectionary manufacturing sector.

At the time of the inspection, VSS Ltd had 152 enrolled apprentices, the very large majority being standards-based apprenticeships in engineering, food manufacturing, supervisory management, and leadership. A very small minority of apprentices are studying towards intermediate- and advanced-level framework qualifications – all in engineering and manufacturing. Most apprentices are aged 19 and over with around 80% studying at level 3; the remainder are studying at level 2 and level 5. The provider does not subcontract any provision.

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

Apprentices benefit from well-considered and organised programmes of learning that carefully extend their appreciation of, and confidence in, how to improve their effectiveness in the workplace. They learn well from expert tutors who use their detailed industry knowledge and experience effectively.

Apprentices speak enthusiastically of the industry-specific knowledge and skills that they develop on the programme.

The vocational and technical projects that apprentices complete as part of their course enable them to develop new practical and theoretical skills that are of immediate relevance to the workplace. Apprentices take pride in their work and what they accomplish, quickly becoming more confident and self-assured.

The apprenticeship curriculum ensures that apprentices develop a deep and secure understanding of current work-related practices and how to apply what they know in the workplace. For example, apprentices in team leading confidently use their increasing level of knowledge of different management theories to gain a greater understanding of their own workplace teams. Employers recognise the benefits that apprentices bring to their business and most take an active interest in the skills development of their employees.

Apprentices – some of whom have previously not had positive experiences in education – are well supported by their tutors in improving their confidence and motivation and in overcoming any difficulties with their progress and achievement. Apprentices benefit from monthly individual tutorials where they receive additional learning guidance, including help with assignments or support with their English and mathematics skills. This contributes to their enjoyment of and commitment to learning.

A high proportion of apprentices complete their course in the planned time and move into sustained employment.

Apprentices feel safe and work safely as a result of effective safeguarding arrangements.

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

Leaders work closely with employers and end-point assessment organisations to ensure that they design the curriculum appropriately to meet the needs of apprentices. They carefully plan the apprenticeship curriculum in line with the company's current capacity and staffing expertise. They are ambitious for apprentices and the contributions they make to their employers' businesses.

Initial advice and guidance ensure that apprentices who join programmes fully understand and are committed to their chosen career and the demands associated with their course.

Apprentices' starting points are defined clearly through skills scans and base-line assessments that are detailed and relevant to the specific programme that they are starting. Tutors use the results of these assessments effectively to plan apprentices' learning programmes carefully, and to set challenging and individual targets that help apprentices to make the progress of which they are capable.

Apprentices benefit from very flexible timetabling for planning their learning. Tutors adjust the duration of apprentices' programmes to address individual employment circumstances, such as those working unsocial hours, variable shift patterns or at weekends. Apprentices value how this helps them to fit learning around work or home commitments and most participate enthusiastically in lessons.

Tutors work effectively with employers to ensure that apprentices gain relevant new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours during their training. They monitor apprentices' progress thoroughly and assess the development of their skills accurately. Where necessary, tutors liaise closely with employers to ensure that apprentices are moved around different parts of the company's business to maximise the opportunity for them to acquire the workplace skills and experiences that will help them to succeed.

Tutors use their detailed knowledge and expert industry experience very effectively to help apprentices develop a sound knowledge base that relates closely to their work activities. For example, apprentices in engineering and manufacturing quickly learn the importance of accurately calculating the weight limits for lifting equipment based on the slinging angles of the load to be lifted, and how to use specialist tools and equipment with confidence and precision. Apprentices in team leading and operational management develop a much-improved understanding of how relevant employment theory and legislation apply in the workplace and to the team that they lead and manage. As a result, most apprentices make good progress and improve their industry-specific knowledge and skills.

Apprentices are supported well to develop and improve their language and numeracy skills; this increases their effectiveness in the workplace and confidence in applying these skills in their personal life. For example, apprentices in food production ensure that documentation related to food manufacturing, such as the use of flavouring and colouring agents, is accurately completed in accordance with legislative requirements. Engineering apprentices accurately use algebra to calculate accurately the dimensions and tolerances associated with complex geometrical engineered components.

Tutors are knowledgeable about the end-point assessment process for apprentices. Consequently, the majority of the few standards-based apprentices who have completed their apprenticeship to date have gained merit or distinction grades.

Managers ensure that employers have a good awareness of the need for apprentices to receive appropriate time to complete planned training. As a result, most apprentices receive their full entitlement to planned off-the-job training, and this

enables them to make assured progress. However, in a small minority of instances, a few employers prioritise work-related demands over the immediate training needs of their apprentices. These apprentices complete planned learning in their own time and do not make as much progress as their peers.

Apprentices benefit from a thorough induction which includes themes related to safeguarding, equality and diversity themes, and life in modern Britain. However, during subsequent group workshops and reviews of progress, tutors do not routinely reinforce or deepen apprentices' knowledge of topics such as citizenship and democracy or the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. As a result, apprentices are not able to talk confidently about how such matters apply to them as individuals or in the context of their job roles.

Apprentices nearing the end of the training receive very limited advice and guidance about their next steps. A significant minority of them are unaware of what options are available to them at the end of their course and are unable to plan effectively for their next steps in learning or employment.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders promote a culture of safeguarding and have established effective systems and processes to ensure that apprentices are safe. Managers ensure that appropriate practices and checks are in place for staff recruitment.

VSS has two designated safeguarding officers (DSOs) who are trained appropriately. Staff are alert and act quickly in notifying the designated officers of any changes in apprentices' behaviour or conduct that may indicate a potential safeguarding or welfare-related concern. The DSOs maintain detailed records of all safeguarding concerns and make appropriate and timely referrals to relevant external agencies, where necessary.

Apprentices feel safe in their workplaces and demonstrate safe working practices on the job. They routinely use the correct personal protective equipment and promote the use of health and safety procedures to their peers. Apprentices are well supported and know that if they have any issues, tutors and managers will deal with them promptly and with sensitivity.

Leaders do not use local intelligence to inform their understanding of the risks and threats in the areas where apprentices live and work.

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

- Ensure that employers adjust apprentices' work patterns, so that they are routinely able to take part in planned off-the-job training. Provide more detailed guidance to all apprentices, setting out precisely how their learning entitlement will be secured.

- Develop and implement effective arrangements to ensure that tutors promote and develop routinely apprentices' understanding of the importance of British values and their relevance within the workplace and the communities in which they live. Ensure that tutors provide apprentices with clearer guidance and information on the 'Prevent' duty so that they know how to protect themselves from those who hold or promote extremist views.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices can access impartial careers information, advice and guidance throughout all stages of their programme. Tutors should provide apprentices with timely guidance for their next steps on the full range of opportunities available to them when they complete their course.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	1276411
<b>Address</b>	School House Farm Beamhurst Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5EA
<b>Contact number</b>	01889 566263
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.vsslearning.co.uk">www.vsslearning.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Richard Hick
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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

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