

# Inspection of Gower College Swansea

Inspection dates:

5–7 October 2021

**Overall effectiveness****Good**

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Apprenticeships

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

**Information about this provider**

Gower College Swansea (GCS) is an independent learning provider specialising in apprenticeship programmes. GCS is a general further education college in South Wales. Most of its apprenticeship provision is based in Wales and therefore not in scope for an Ofsted inspection. However, it has a small number of apprenticeships based in England, funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

At the time of inspection, 28 learners were studying one of three apprenticeship programmes based in England: Level 3 facilities management supervisor standard; Level 3 customer service specialist standard; and Level 3 electrical and electronic product service and installation engineer standard.

The majority of apprentices are working for three employers. Electrical service engineer apprentices are based across England, the employer's headquarters being based in the Medway area in Kent and comprise over half of all apprentices. Customer services apprentices are based in Manchester. Most of the remaining apprentices are following the facilities management programme at a large healthcare provider in Bristol.

GCS works with one sub-contractor, Track Training, but at the time of inspection Track Training had no apprentices based in England.

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

Apprentices enjoy their training and value the support from their trainers and supervisors. They all participate fully in their studies. This is commendable given that a few apprentices have previously lacked confidence in, and/or experienced barriers to, learning.

Apprentices are highly motivated. They benefit from respectful and positive relationships with their trainers. Apprentices develop a good level of new knowledge and skills as a result of their training. Apprentices feel valued in their workplaces and take pride in the contribution they make to their communities and society.

Apprentices feel safe and well looked after in their workplaces. They are confident about the procedures for reporting safety concerns. They understand their responsibilities to keep others safe in the workplace. For example, apprentices at a large hospital manage their teams in delivering government and NHS directives on infection control. They also manage and practise for major incidents, such as lockdown procedures.

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

Leaders have developed curriculums that are ambitious for their apprentices. They reflect local and regional employment and training priorities. Curriculums are expressly designed to give apprentices, including those with additional learning needs, the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in employment and more generally in life. Managers use market intelligence effectively in order to identify employment gaps, and they work closely with employers to ensure that programmes lead to career progression for apprentices.

Leaders and managers have worked closely with employers to ensure that the curriculum is structured logically so that apprentices' learning builds incrementally. They work closely together to coordinate on- and off-the-job training. Where necessary, the timing of learning is altered to meet employers' requirements. For example, GCS leaders collaborated with one employer to adjust what was taught and when, so that apprentices' skills were developed to meet a particular business need. Facilities management apprentices reviewed and updated their workplace health and safety risk assessments in the light of the knowledge gained during their first few weeks on the programme.

Tutors provide apprentices with effective help to develop positive behaviours and attitudes. Tutors communicate well their clear expectations about how apprentices should behave during online classes. Consequently, learning takes place in a relaxed, respectful and purposeful online environment. Apprentices attend online lessons ready to learn, having either pre-read written material or completed practical activities before their class starts. For example, electrical services apprentices used a popular 'lab in a box' resource to build an electronic tennis game. The tutors subsequently reviewed the practical task in the taught element of the learning session.

Most apprentices' written work shows a strong commitment to achieving high standards. They complete their work on time. They are confident when talking about their training and what they have learned. Apprentices are rightly proud of what they are achieving. Employers recognise that their apprentices are making a valuable contribution to their workplaces.

Apprentices make substantial and sustained progress from their identified starting points. They quickly become ambitious and seek further training and responsibility at work. For example, some have taken on additional work in setting up vaccination facilities in health centres and devising plans for dealing with the vast quantities of hazardous waste created by the pandemic.

Tutors develop apprentices' English, mathematical and digital skills well. Tutors encourage apprentices to use subject-specific, professional and technical vocabulary. This makes discussions with other professionals and clients more meaningful. In the electrical and electronic apprenticeship, apprentices routinely test and calculate unknown current flow and resistance in electronic circuits. In hospital settings, apprentices use specialist NHS software to manage the estates and facilities teams.

Tutors use assessment appropriately to establish how well apprentices are learning. They identify and correct any misconceptions. However, while tutors mark work accurately, their feedback lacks detail on how and where incremental improvements can be made to achieve the highest standards.

Leaders, managers, and employers ensure that apprentices benefit from careers advice and guidance, which are tailored to the context of the different apprenticeships. Apprentices are prepared well for the next stage of employment, training, or work roles within their organisations. However, they have too little understanding of career paths outside of them. Nearly half of facilities management apprentices gain promotion; some before they have finished their apprenticeship programme. These apprentices have an in-depth understanding of their varied potential career paths inside the health trust. Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices working in the charitable sector receive careers advice and guidance near the beginning of their training. This helps these apprentices on fixed-term contracts understand early on what their next job could be.

Leaders and managers have established positive relationships with most employers and parents. Initially, they develop the working relationship carefully before recruiting any apprentices. For example, the GCS tutors and designated safeguarding lead meet with employers to establish apprentices' expectations and requirements, including access to off-the-job training. However, a few employers' representatives do not routinely engage in three-way progress review meetings with apprentices and tutors and do not shape apprentices' learning. Parents of apprentices under 18 years of age are made aware of and become involved in the programme requirements, including any residential components.

Governors maintain close oversight of the provision. As a result, they are aware of the provision's strengths and areas for development and can offer informed support and challenge to senior leaders. Governors are allocated to specific roles and receive specialist

training to ensure they can discharge their statutory responsibilities with authority. Governors were able to support the work of the teaching teams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have effective safeguarding processes and procedures to ensure that apprentices are safe and remain safe. They have an effective referral process in place so that learners can seek help easily and be supported appropriately. Staff work with parents of younger apprentices to plan for additional safeguarding requirements. Tutors work with employers to identify potential safeguarding risks in certain settings, for example, the raised threat of a terrorist attack, kidnapping and child abduction in a healthcare setting. However, apprentices do not all have deep enough understanding of fundamental British values or the dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation.

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

- Develop further apprentices' understanding of fundamental British values and the dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation.
- Ensure tutors' feedback on apprentices' work shows how and where incremental improvements can be made so they can achieve the highest standards.
- Ensure that apprentices receive unbiased careers advice to give them a clear understanding of all the career options available to them beyond their current workplaces.
- Ensure that tutors, employers, and apprentices consistently undertake three-way progress reviews to promote apprentices' progress.

## **Provider details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	2495062
<b>Address</b>	Jubilee Court Unit 1–2 Jubilee Court Swansea SA5 4HB
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<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Mark Jones
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractor</b>	Track Training

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Head of Work-based Learning, 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising apprentices' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

Russell Shobbrook, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Jon Bowman	Her Majesty's Inspector

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