

Inspection of SR Supply Chain Consultants Ltd

Inspection dates:

26–29 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

SR Supply Chain Consultants Ltd (SRSCC) began delivering procurement training in 2007. In May 2017, the Education and Skills Funding Agency awarded SRSCC an apprenticeship contract. The provider offers training for the commercial procurement and supply chain apprenticeship standard at levels 3 and 4. It is a study centre for the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS). The CIPS diploma is a mandatory qualification within the apprenticeship standard.

Currently, SRSCC has 220 apprentices on the level 4 programme and 20 apprentices on the level 3 programme. Most apprentices are adults, with a few aged 16 to 18 years. SRSCC is a national provider, with learning centres in nine towns and cities across England. At the time of the inspection, all learning was delivered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The managing director is a member of the level 4 and level 6 Trailblazer Groups for the procurement and supply chain apprenticeship standard. SRSCC supported the development of the level 3 apprenticeship to introduce new apprentices to the profession.

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

Apprentices and employers recognise the increased knowledge and skills that apprentices gain through the mandatory qualification within the apprenticeship. For example, apprentices now apply the principles of the procurement cycle knowledgeably in their job roles and know how to implement thorough and ethical tendering processes. Apprentices who have been in their roles for a considerable time told us that they have developed a greater technical knowledge than they had previously. They have learned useful management skills, such as being able to prioritise tasks at work more efficiently.

Apprentices receive regular reviews from their mentor that they find helpful and supportive. Most apprentices feel that their mentors 'know what's going on' and respond swiftly to their individual needs. For example, they arrange workshops to help apprentices understand difficult concepts, such as ratios, when there is not enough time in the main training sessions to review these topics. Mentors have recently put manageable plans in place to help those apprentices who have fallen behind to get back on track as quickly as possible. However, a large minority of apprentices feel overwhelmed by the volume of work they have to complete alongside their job roles. This is particularly evident for those apprentices who are required to study English and mathematics qualifications as part of their apprenticeship.

Mentors monitor the well-being of apprentices during their reviews. There are monthly virtual 'coffee mornings' to encourage apprentices to mix with others and to celebrate success. Leaders have introduced 'apprentice of the month' and 'apprentice of the year' awards which they share on their website and with employers. Leaders plan to implement additional activities to support apprentices' well-being and ways to manage their workload, such as pre-exam yoga sessions. However, these are not yet in place.

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

Leaders have established a clear vision for their apprenticeship programmes. They provide an appropriately sequenced procurement and supply chain curriculum that successfully builds apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours over time.

Most apprentices gain in confidence from their apprenticeship programme. For example, apprentices explain how they can now speak to a range of people to discuss prices and take the lead in resolving problems at work. Most apprentices work with greater independence. They take on more responsibilities in their workplaces.

Leaders ensure that tutors are appropriately qualified for the subjects that they teach. Tutors have significant industry experience. They skilfully relate lesson content to their experience of industry practices that helps apprentices contextualise

their learning. Tutors maintain their occupational competency through the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply.

Not all teaching staff have high enough expectations of what apprentices can achieve. They do not support all apprentices to achieve beyond a pass grade in their final assessment. Mentors do not intervene quickly enough when assignments are not completed or are submitted significantly late. Tutors' feedback on apprentices' work is often overly positive. It does not help apprentices to understand how they can improve their work and achieve higher grades. While tutors identify apprentices' starting points at the beginning of their programme, including those with additional needs, managers agree that this information is not yet used effectively to plan individualised programmes of learning that meet the different needs and experiences of apprentices.

The standard of apprentices' work on level 3 apprenticeship programmes is high. However, the quality of work that apprentices produce at level 4 is not always of a sufficiently high quality. Apprentices who commenced their studies more recently submit work that better reflects the apprenticeship standard and level. For example, level 4 apprentices demonstrate their knowledge of different approaches to commercial negotiations that they use to help them inform decision-making at work.

Most employers attend and contribute to progress review meetings with their apprentice. This helps them to understand the progress that apprentices make and how to ensure that apprentices complete appropriate off-the-job training. However, too many apprentices do not have individualised off-the-job training plans that link specifically to their job roles. Consequently, they cannot systematically apply the knowledge they gain in training sessions to what they do at work.

Leaders do not support apprentices sufficiently to develop their English and mathematical skills. Apprentices access learning through an online platform. They complete learning activities at their own pace. They do not receive the support they need to complete their functional skills qualifications by the planned date. Consequently, apprentices who need to complete English and mathematics qualifications make slow progress towards achieving their apprenticeship.

Leaders recognise that a small minority of apprentices and employers do not see the value in achieving the full apprenticeship once apprentices have achieved the mandatory CIPS qualification. Leaders have put plans in place recently to ensure that all apprentices complete their full apprenticeship. However, they have not yet had sufficient time to demonstrate the effectiveness of their new approach.

Apprentices attend their training sessions regularly and on time. Tutors raise any incidents of poor attendance with the apprentice and their employer. They provide alternative sessions or recordings of missed sessions to help apprentices to catch up. Tutors have developed a respectful culture in online training sessions. However, tutors have not provided sufficient training on online etiquette, such as blurred backgrounds. A few apprentices and mentors are unaware of the consequences of their backgrounds being visible to others.

Apprentices develop an effective, general knowledge and understanding of the importance of equality of opportunity, celebrating diversity, democracy and individual liberty through their apprenticeship. They demonstrate that they apply this knowledge in their workplaces, for example in their understanding of employee rights and ethical and legal procurement practice.

Leaders and tutors provide general information about apprentices' next steps based on their own industry experiences. While the majority of apprentices gain promotion in their workplaces, leaders do not provide sufficient impartial careers information, advice and guidance that helps apprentices to understand the wider opportunities available to them on completion of their apprenticeship.

Leaders identify the general strengths and weaknesses of their provision accurately. However, they agree that they do not yet have a fully structured quality process in place that helps them to routinely monitor all aspects of the quality of their apprenticeship provision. They have recently introduced a more rigorous approach to monitoring apprentices' progress. This includes implementing support plans to motivate apprentices who have fallen behind to catch up and achieve. However, this process is new. It has not yet reached those apprentices who have been on their apprenticeship for a significant amount of time. A minority of these apprentices have a considerable amount of outstanding work to complete.

Governance arrangements are too informal. Too many quality monitoring targets relate to the financial stability of the provider and to auditing requirements. This means that leaders are not held to account sufficiently for the actions they take to improve the quality of education that apprentices receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Apprentices feel safe and know who to contact if they have concerns. For example, incidents of bullying in the workplace are dealt with swiftly by the safeguarding team and the apprentice's employer.

Apprentices complete online assessments to confirm their knowledge of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Mentors regularly revisit these topics throughout their apprenticeship programme. However, despite these measures, not all apprentices demonstrate a secure understanding of the risks from radicalisation and extremism or see the relevance to their work roles and responsibilities.

Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training. However, leaders do not have a good enough understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, particularly the risks in the towns and cities where they deliver face-to-face training. Leaders carry out appropriate checks when recruiting new staff.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that all teaching staff have high expectations of what apprentices can achieve and that they support more apprentices to achieve high grades in their final assessment. They should ensure that all tutors plan individualised programmes of learning that meet apprentices' different needs and experiences.
- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices have individualised, off-the-job training plans that link specifically to their job roles to enable apprentices to apply the knowledge that they gain in training sessions to what they do at work.
- Leaders should ensure that they support apprentices fully to develop their English and mathematical skills to enable all apprentices to achieve their apprenticeship in the planned time.
- Leaders should ensure that they provide appropriate, impartial careers information, advice and guidance that helps apprentices to understand the wider opportunities available to them on completion of their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that they implement rigorous quality processes that helps them to monitor all aspects of their apprenticeship provision effectively, including implementing formal governance arrangements.
- Leaders should ensure that they have a good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism across the towns and cities where they deliver face-to-face training. They should ensure that apprentices understand the relevance of the risks of radicalisation and extremism in their work roles and responsibilities.

Provider details

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Website	http://www.srscc.co.uk
Principal/CEO	Susan Rashid
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operations manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous new provider monitoring visit 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 online learning sessions, scrutinising apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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