

# Inspection of Functional Skills UK Limited

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 June 2022

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

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

## Information about this provider

Functional Skills UK LTD is an independent specialist provider based in Brighton at the Sussex Functional Skills Centre. In March 2021, Functional Skills UK LTD received a monitoring visit and was judged to have made reasonable progress in the first two themes and significant progress for safeguarding arrangements.

Functional Skills UK LTD provides education and training to adults and apprentices. They work with key employers including Sussex and Surrey Police and the local NHS trust.

At the time of the visit, there were 573 adult learners studying adult programmes, including 111 learners studying functional skills English, 148 studying functional skills mathematics, 71 studying lean management at level 2 and 43 learners studying mental health in the workplace. In apprenticeships, there are 13 adult apprentices and two 16 to 18 apprentices studying three standards, level 2 leisure team member, level 3 duty team manager and level 3 personal trainer standard. A very small number of apprentices have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

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

Learners and apprentices, including those with EHC plans, enjoy and have a positive attitude toward their learning. They attend well. They build their confidence and resilience quickly despite the many adult learners who have had past negative experiences in education. Learners and apprentices feel well supported by tutors who provide high-quality, flexible learning opportunities which help them to meet their own needs and goals. As a result, the large majority of learners and apprentices make good progress and gain valuable qualifications which support their future employability

Apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need for their jobs rapidly. They speak enthusiastically about the impact the apprenticeship has on their current job roles and future aspirations. For example, apprentices become adept at working with a range of clients, developing their understanding of health and fitness and working within the leisure sector. They develop quickly the knowledge and skills needed to work in a range of leisure centres and organisations, including public and private businesses.

Learners and apprentices value the opportunities provided by leaders to extend their learning beyond their qualifications, which helps them to develop their personal and professional skills very well. For example, level 3 leisure duty manager apprentices learn how to manage teams effectively, using their increased knowledge of legal, financial and resource management. As a result, almost all apprentices make good progress in their studies and gain additional responsibility, increased pay and promotion. Many adult learners studying level 2 lean management benefit from completing an accredited leadership qualification which is valued by employers and supports their career progression.

Learners and apprentices value the inclusive and respectful environment staff create. Staff support them to understand how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to make a referral if they have a concern. However, learners and apprentices do not know enough about the specific regional risks and so are not aware of how to keep themselves safe from these potential threats.

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

Leaders work very effectively with external partners including the local authority, job centres, the local NHS trust and Sussex and Surrey Police. Together, leaders and managers ensure that courses meet sector and regional business needs. For example, leaders provide effective functional skills education to staff in the police and, as a result, many progress successfully on to the police community support officer apprenticeship. Leaders have worked with the local authority to provide valuable functional skills learning opportunities in response to the growing number of Ukrainian refugees in the local community. On the level 2 leisure team member apprenticeship, leaders have included an additional swimming teaching qualification at the request of employers to provide apprentices with valuable coaching skills to

support their future employability. As a result, employers speak very positively about the impact the apprenticeship has on their staff.

Leaders and managers have designed and sequenced the apprenticeship and most of the adult learning curriculum carefully and logically. For example, staff plan the mental health at work course so that learners develop essential communication skills and a basic understanding of anatomical knowledge so they can then work diligently with others to support their mental health. On the level 2 leisure team member apprenticeship, apprentices develop their swimming ability and first-aid skills through a recognised and accredited lifeguard qualification before they progress to teaching swimming. However, staff teaching lean management plan lessons that are too guided by the qualification syllabus and not planned to meet the needs of the learners they teach.

Staff have high expectations that apprentices will achieve high grades and gain additional responsibility or promotion as a result of their programme, which many do. Leaders ensure that staff are aware of the specific needs of apprentices with EHC plans. While leaders have not developed a systematic procedure for using EHC plans, they have put in place additional support so that apprentices make sufficient progress.

Staff are highly experienced, well qualified and specialised in the areas they teach. For example, tutors within mental health first aid are experts in the subject and are working towards high-level mental health first-aid qualifications. Tutors within lean management use their extensive knowledge to provide relevant examples and activities for learners to fully explore themes such as Maslow's hierarchy and how it applies to management.

Teaching staff plan lessons carefully to allow learners and apprentices to become more competent and skilled through useful activities. As a result, they develop mastery and fluency in their work. For example, in functional skills mathematics, staff teach adult learners to add negative numbers successfully and frequently use practice papers to help learners hone their skills to undertake more complex mathematical activities.

Staff feel proud to work at the organisation and value the high-quality leadership. Staff speak positively about the focus of leaders to adapt learning opportunities to meet the needs of learners in the community. Leaders are sensitive to the workload and well-being of staff, particularly in a growing and rapidly changing business. They provide valuable training for staff on managing workload and well-being. As a result, staff feel well supported and valued by leaders.

Leaders and managers identify staff's training needs well and implement an effective programme of development so staff can develop the necessary skills to support all learners and apprentices skilfully. For example, in apprenticeships, staff speak positively about useful training on supporting apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, they have made changes to how they assess apprentices' starting points to better identify and understand specific needs.

Leaders and managers know most of their strengths and weaknesses well. They recently appointed a highly experienced and qualified staff member to support tutors to provide consistent, high-quality feedback. Tutors now provide more detailed feedback that challenges learners and apprentices to produce work of a higher quality. While leaders have developed clear plans to track and monitor the progress of apprentices, it is too early to see the impact of this. As a result, tutors are not fully clear on apprentices' progress.

Leaders and managers provide valuable opportunities in most cases for learners and apprentices to make well-informed decisions about their next steps. For example, apprentices speak positively about the useful information they receive about opportunities within the leisure sector such as management roles. Those hoping to progress to higher education benefit from additional support to research and apply.

Staff cover safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values at the start of apprentices' and learners' courses through useful inductions. In apprenticeships, tutors help learners to develop their knowledge of these topics, including local threats and internet safety. However, although staff exemplify these values well, they do not revisit these topics explicitly for adult learners during training sessions to help them develop and improve their knowledge. As a result, too few learners can recall and apply their earlier learning about these topics in any detail.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that designated safeguarding leads (DSL) are suitably trained.

DSLs take swift action to help learners with any concerns with safeguarding, welfare or the 'Prevent' duty. The DSLs have established relationships with useful external agencies such as the local 'Prevent' duty coordinator to understand local risks in Brighton and Hove. While leaders have a clear understanding of these risks, they do not sufficiently ensure all learners and apprentices revisit these topics to ensure they have a secure understanding.

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

- Leaders and managers must ensure all learners and apprentices benefit from a planned personal development curriculum that develops their knowledge and awareness of the 'Prevent' duty, British values and local risks.
- Leaders and managers must ensure they have effective procedures in place to track and monitor apprentices' progress so they can better support apprentices to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that staff review students' education, health and care plans annually. Leaders and managers should set these students

ambitious and specific targets to ensure they make rapid progress in their learning.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Paul Smith
<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 operations 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 visiting 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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