

# Inspection of Skills to Group Limited

Inspection dates:

28 June to 1 July 2022

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Information about this provider

Skills to Group Limited mostly provides vocational training for people living in the Plymouth area. In addition, it has small centres for hairdressing training in Newton Abbott and Exeter and has recently opened a centre in Penryn in Cornwall to teach plant operations.

In 2021/22, 102 learners aged 16 to 18 studied a programme that is designed to move them onto an apprenticeship. This course consists of an initial eight-week programme focusing on personal development, followed by vocational training and, where necessary, English and mathematics. Nearly 250 employed adults followed short courses designed to enhance their contribution to their workplace or prepare them for future employment. Over 550 apprentices study on apprenticeships, mostly at level 2. The largest proportion of these have jobs in the construction industry with most others employed in childcare, hairdressing, business administration and the automotive sector. Nearly all apprentices are from the Plymouth area with the remainder in Cornwall and other parts of Devon. A small number of learners with high needs attend specialist provision at a training centre in the centre of Plymouth.

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

Adult learners and apprentices are mostly well prepared for their next steps as a result of the extensive knowledge leaders and trainers have about the industries in which the apprentices work. Adults learn new skills that they quickly apply in their workplace. Apprentices' trainers work closely with employers to ensure apprentices are given the opportunities in the workplace that they need to practise the skills they learn. This gives them the experience they need to establish themselves in their chosen industry. Nearly all the learners who complete their study programme progress into an apprenticeship but do not practise sufficiently the personal skills they need to develop alongside their practical trade skills. Learners with high needs do not experience a curriculum that takes sufficient account of their learning difficulty or disability.

Learners enjoy their courses and apprenticeships. This is in no small part due to staff successfully helping learners and apprentices understand how their training prepares them for employment and further progression in their industry. Adult learners and apprentices particularly value the confidence that their newly developed skills give them when at work. Most learners enjoy their study programme because the small groups in which they are taught, and the strong emphasis on practical skills, provide a different experience to their previous education. For many, their success at Skills to Group and the confidence they develop sets them on a positive path to adulthood.

Learners are taught by highly committed and well-qualified trainers. A particular strength is the depth of industry experience that trainers have in trades, such as construction and automotive. Leaders have invested heavily in excellent facilities that reflect the industries for which they are training their learners and apprentices.

Too much responsibility is placed on learners on study programmes to let staff know when they need support and then seek help. These learners are on complex programmes made up of a number of different training elements, including an introductory eight weeks of personal development, English, mathematics and vocational training. No-one monitors learners' progress across all of the different strands or coordinates the support and help that they may need. Learners do not receive clear targets for improvement and too much of their feedback from trainers does not encourage them to strive for higher success. In contrast, apprentices receive good pastoral support from their trainers and assessors.

Learners and apprentices do not routinely receive impartial careers information, advice and guidance. Trainers organise opportunities for them to learn about their industry, for example, through site visits and masterclasses from industry practitioners. But this is not a substitute for learners and apprentices being told about the full range of options they have as they progress through their career.

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

Leaders' valuable insight into employers' needs is illustrated by the fact that they developed a study programme to bridge the gap between learners' lack of prior achievement and an apprenticeship. Measured by the progression of study programme learners into apprenticeships, this is highly successful. However, when considering the need for personal development that many young learners have, the programme content, and the skills of teachers to support this development, are found wanting. For example, young learners are not encouraged sufficiently to improve their low levels of attendance and they do not get sufficient feedback on the progress they are making on their personal development or English and mathematics.

Leaders recognise that many young learners have not previously succeeded in education and have gaps in their knowledge or readiness for work. Therefore, at the beginning of the study programme, they sensibly teach learners about the personal qualities they need. However, they do not revisit these sufficiently when learners progress to learning a craft or trade, so learners do not apply sufficiently the knowledge from the first few weeks of their study programme. In contrast, staff help adults and apprentices develop their character and confidence well. In the best childcare apprenticeships, employers and assessors work well together to assess how apprentices' personal and professional behaviours develop during the apprenticeship. This helps apprentices develop their professionalism well.

Leaders and managers have not trained vocational trainers on how to teach a curriculum that encompasses all aspects of a study programme, including English, mathematics and personal development, or to take account of the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) some of their learners have. As a result, learners with high needs and learners aged 16 to 18 do not achieve a sufficient depth of understanding of key concepts.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that trainers identify what young learners know and can do when they start their study programme. Therefore, it is not clear how they are making decisions about the length of time a learner stays on a study programme before progressing to an apprenticeship.

The provision for learners with high needs, who are not yet ready to study a vocational course, is not planned or taught well enough. Staff are not sufficiently aware of how to support these learners or the targets towards which they should be working. These learners do not have the opportunity to attend a work placement and arrangements to support them into vocational training are not sufficiently effective.

Two aspects of leadership have a particularly significant negative impact on the quality of programmes. The first is the lack of well-thought-through and well-understood strategies for tackling areas for improvement that leaders have identified. These include raising achievement, improving some aspects of teaching

and improving attendance by some young learners. Their plans for dealing with these are vague or lack clear actions their staff need to take. Some strategies for making improvements, such as observing lessons and identifying learners' preferred learning style, have few discernible benefits.

The second is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for what and how staff are held to account for the quality of their work. Arrangements for monitoring a learner through their study programme are complex and opaque and leaders do not hold managers to account for the quality of the programmes for which they are responsible. While staff are hard working and committed to their learners, these two issues mean that standards across different programmes, and within the various strands of the study programme, vary too much.

Leaders maintain a resolute focus on providing training to people who have low levels of qualifications, have not succeeded in education or need more skills in order to progress in their career. They have, over many years, built secure and productive relationships with employers who provide apprenticeships, work placements and advise on the content of courses. However, leaders have not dealt with the long-standing weakness in recording the quantity and quality of training and do not consistently ensure that apprentices and employers organise this well enough.

Trainers provide apprentices and adults with useful feedback on what they do well in workshops and what they need to do to improve their work and achieve high standards. For example, a trainer provided feedback to learners on the joints of a casement they had built and encouraged them to make another to even stricter tolerances. Employers also provide valuable feedback to their apprentices and support trainers well by reinforcing the need for high standards of work and correcting apprentices when necessary. This helps apprentices become competent in the practical skills they need for the jobs they do or those into which they may progress.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have a high level of expertise in safeguarding practice and use this well to train staff and deal with safeguarding incidents and concerns. They use other agencies effectively to support their learners when necessary.

Trainers use their industry expertise well to provide safe working environments and to teach their learners and apprentices how to stay safe in the workplace. They teach learners to carry out thorough risk assessments before undertaking tasks in the workshops. Trainers assess the risks to health and safety on work placements but do not also assess other aspects of safeguarding in the workplace, such as employers' approach to bullying and harassment or equalities, when carrying out these risk assessments.

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

- Establish clear responsibilities for leaders and managers and hold managers to account for how well they carry these out.
- Review the methods that leaders use to evaluate and improve the quality of the provision, particularly the study programmes and provision for learners with high needs. This includes setting realistic targets for improvement and identifying the strategies that staff will use to achieve these targets.
- Plan and teach the study programmes, so that topics from the first eight weeks are revisited throughout the programme and all trainers are confident to teach learners the knowledge and skills they need for their personal development.
- Ensure someone oversees a learner's progress through their study programme and monitors their attendance at training sessions and development of new knowledge and behaviours.
- Provide impartial careers information, advice and guidance to learners.
- Train staff in how to support learners with high needs and SEND.

## Provider details

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<b>Managing Director</b>	Sharon Chaffe
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent Learning Provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	July 2011

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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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