

# Inspection of Somerset Skills & Learning CIC

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 October 2022

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

## Information about this provider

Somerset Skills and Learning (SSL) is a community interest company (CIC). SSL primarily provides education and training to adult learners, many of whom have barriers to learning, which aims to help them to achieve their potential in the community and at work. SSL offers a wide range of non-accredited community courses to adults, apprenticeships, and a small number of traineeship programmes to young people aged 16 to 18. SSL provides courses at five training centres in Somerset, online, and at community venues in targeted locations across the county.

At the time of the inspection, most of the 1,000 learners are adults studying multiple community learning programmes. Most programmes are short in duration, such as, a single introductory online lesson or a few weeks of classroom-based workshops. Many learners' study with one of SSL's 19 subcontractors. The subcontractors enable SSL to provide education and training to some of the most deprived communities in Somerset. Most subcontractors are specialists in providing training in personal and community development. For example, health and well-being and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Around 200 apprentices' study at SSL, most studying early years education or as teaching assistants, the others study business administration, customer service, or team leading. Around 30 young people study on the traineeship programme; most of whom are identified as being at risk of not being in education, employment or training.

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

SSL learners improve their prospects for employment, further education or personal fulfilment as a result of the courses they study. This is because staff at SSL and its subcontractors understand how to help the communities they serve, focusing on the people most in need of the courses they teach. Leaders at SSL have taken great care to enter partnerships with organisations that work closely with vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Somerset. Teachers create calm and welcoming learning environments in classrooms, online and outdoors. As a result, learners feel comfortable, enjoy attending classes and feel safe.

Adult learners see the health and well-being sessions as places where they can divulge safely personal information and feelings with their teacher and their peers. For example, they gain enough self-assurance to talk about what are often deep-seated issues. Adult learners increase in confidence and take part in activities that they would not previously have felt comfortable doing with other people, such as seated exercise.

Learners develop a positive attitude as a result of studying the curriculum and the interaction with their peers. Much of the health and wellbeing community provision helps adult learners stay physically fit and/or mentally healthy. This is because staff in the training and community centres, used for hosting courses, are welcoming and well-practised in how to gain the confidence of people who are anxious about starting a course.

Learners of all ages are mostly well prepared for life in modern Britain. Teachers of young learners and apprentices are knowledgeable and encourage learners to take part in discussions, such as, how democracy links to the workplace. For example, teaching assistant apprentices use this knowledge and understanding to help create student councils. However, adults studying on a minority of community courses, such as ESOL, have a rudimentary understanding of fundamental British values.

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

Teachers take great care to create an inclusive environment and encourage all learners to attend irrespective of background or ability. They develop and select appropriate learning resources, and adapt their teaching methods well, to help learners understand new concepts. For example, teachers develop successfully ESOL learners' understanding of irregular verbs and comparisons. However, in a minority of subjects, such as mathematics, teachers do not challenge young learners or apprentices well enough by ensuring they learn sufficient content that helps them to develop knowledge quickly and securely. Consequently, young peoples' achievement of the mathematics qualification is too low, and a minority of apprentices do not achieve the apprenticeship within the planned time.

Managers have designed a wide range of training opportunities, working closely with partners and subcontractors across Somerset, that mostly meet the varying

requirements of learners. For example, the aim of the community learning provision is to provide vulnerable and/or disadvantaged adults with the opportunity to improve their wellbeing while studying in a safe learning environment; ESOL learners, many of whom are Ukrainian refugees, study a curriculum which is flexible in structure and accommodates mixed ability groups successfully; apprentices study the early years education programme, which meets employer needs and helps to maintain the statutory ratio of staff to children within care and education settings. However, young people studying the traineeship programme do not receive sufficient opportunities to extend their personal development and be prepared fully for work placements. This is because learners do not take part in activities with employers to help them to understand the role and the expectations prior to starting their placement.

Leaders support and value their managers and teachers. They provide most teachers with professional development that helps them to extend their vocational expertise. For example, early years education teachers attend national conferences that are specific to their subject, and they use this insight to teach and support their apprentices well.

Teachers of the adult courses are involved closely in decision making about how to encourage the participation of people in targeted communities. Teachers have relevant professional experience and have a good understanding of their subject. Most teachers are skilled in making sure their learners feel included and in meeting their needs. However, SSL leaders do not have sufficient oversight of the quality of all adult courses. Consequently, on a few courses, teachers teach content too slowly and do not check if learners have understood the knowledge fully before moving onto the next topic. As a result, learners become bored, disengage with learning and do not attend frequently.

Most learners develop the knowledge and skills they need in order to progress to their next steps. For adults and young learners, studying the curriculum helps to develop their confidence to make positive changes to their lives and play an active role in the community. Most apprentices move into employment or further training. However, young learners studying traineeships and apprentices do not take part in frequent discussions about the progress that they are making in their studies and at work with their employer and teacher. As a result, employers do not know how to support and help them to increase their knowledge and improve their skills at work.

Governance arrangements at SSL are effective. The board of directors use their knowledge of education and training well to challenge and support SSL leaders. For example, board members support leaders in making SSL a valued and respected community partner that contributes significantly to the educational and social well-being of people in Somerset.

Managers have developed a robust process for identifying and working with a range of organisations to help SSL to provide appropriate provision that meet the requirements of the community in Somerset. Managers ensure that most apprentices receive their apprenticeship entitlement.

Leaders and managers do not monitor the quality of the provision closely enough. They do not check if courses are meeting the agreed objectives, the progress that learners make in knowing and remembering knowledge and skills and learners' attendance. In a minority of courses, such as traineeships, learners do not receive consistently useful careers guidance to help them to make well-informed choices about their next steps.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff responsible for safeguarding are knowledgeable and appropriately trained. Staff take part in frequent safeguarding and Prevent duty training. Managers and teachers monitor carefully any changes in learners' behaviour and use the information to identify a need for intervention. Staff with responsibility for safeguarding have established strong links with external agencies and use these effectively to support their learners. As a result, learners feel safe and are cared for well by staff. Learners know who to contact at SSL should they feel unsafe or have concerns.

Leaders have taken appropriate action to ensure that all staff joining SSL are appropriately vetted prior to the start of their employment. Leaders have plans in place to train more managers in the safer recruitment process.

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

- Leaders and managers must ensure that young people studying on the traineeship programmes and apprentices take part in discussions with employers so that they are prepared fully for their work placements.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that staff plan and teach mathematics lessons that include sufficient content to challenge learners so that they know and remember more and leads to improved levels of qualification achievement.
- Leaders and managers must involve employers more in the planning and implementation of the traineeship programmes and apprenticeships so that employers know how to support learners and apprentices to increase their knowledge and improve their skills at work.
- Leaders and managers must monitor closely the quality of education provided for adults so that they identify swiftly areas for improvement and take robust remedial actions to improve the quality of the provision.

## **Provider details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	1220982
<b>Address</b>	Courtenay House, Blackbrook Park Avenue Taunton Somerset TA1 2PX
<b>Contact number</b>	03303 327997
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.sslcourses.co.uk">www.sslcourses.co.uk</a>
<b>CEO</b>	Kathryn Baker
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27–30 June 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership Migrant Communities Inspired Together CIC

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of curriculum and quality, 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

Matt Hann, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Flint	His Majesty's Inspector
Nick Crombie	His Majesty's Inspector
Terri Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Maria Woodger	Ofsted Inspector

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