

Inspection of Universal Skills Centre Limited

Inspection dates:

31 January to 3 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Apprenticeships

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Universal Skills Centre Limited is an independent learning provider based in Wakefield. It began providing levy-funded apprenticeships in the construction and utilities sector in January 2019. Apprentices work for large utility companies nationwide. At the time of the inspection, 50 apprentices were on standards-based programmes in dual fuel smart meter installations at level 2. All apprentices are over 18 years of age.

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

Apprentices demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning. The vast majority are retraining and work hard to achieve the best results that they can. Apprentices are made fully aware of the requirements of their end-point assessment (EPA) and what they need to do to achieve a distinction grade. They are eager and determined to get distinctions in their EPA, and are supported and spurred on by their tutors, who share their high expectations.

The support that apprentices receive from their tutors enables them to produce work of a high standard. The written assignments that apprentices produce demonstrate that they have a good technical understanding of installing gas and electrical meters and their ancillaries, and that they can write accurately.

Apprentices demonstrate a deep understanding of British values relevant to their job role and their lives in general. Tutors expertly plan and weave teaching on wider skills and life in modern Britain into the curriculum, so it is understood, contextualised, remembered and applied by apprentices. Apprentices are fully prepared to work effectively with customers and colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds. They can articulate clearly the signs that they may notice if they visit a customer who has been radicalised or could be in danger. They are aware of current risks, such as county lines activity and cuckooing, that they may encounter in customers' homes.

Apprentices benefit from excellent careers advice and guidance. They appreciate from the start of their programme that smart meter installing is not a job that will be available long term. Tutors ensure that apprentices know the options open to them after their apprenticeship. These include the different routes available to them relating to green technology and what further training will be required. Apprentices are excited about the prospect of further training and have plans for where they will take their careers after their apprenticeship.

Apprentices thoroughly understand the risks of their job role and have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They know to whom they should report concerns at the provider and with their employer, and are confident that action would be taken. Tutors fully support and prepare apprentices to keep themselves safe in their job roles, including mitigating the risks that arise from working with dangerous equipment and substances and from lone working. For example, apprentices wear correct personal protective equipment and follow safety procedures such as pressure testing. They carry out safety checks on customers' meters and appliances, and are confident to decommission or abort jobs if they are not able to make them safe.

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

Leaders have clear rationale for the curriculum that aligns with the government's green agenda. They provide specific training for dual fuel engineers and work

effectively with national employers to provide a valuable and useful workforce. Leaders and tutors work alongside specialists to ensure that they have a clear and strong understanding of industry requirements and the implications for the training that they provide. The curriculum contains all aspects of smart meter installation and successfully equips apprentices with a broad and deep understanding of the gas and electricity networks and relevant legislation.

Tutors plan the curriculum very effectively, ensuring that it relates specifically to apprentices' job roles. Employers are deeply involved in the design of the curriculum, ensuring it is up to date and meets their requirements. Tutors adapt the apprenticeship to meet the needs of each company they work with, including their particular codes of conduct and practice. They understand the skills and knowledge that apprentices need, both for the technical aspects of their role and for working alone. For example, tutors know that apprentices often struggle with pipework, which is a fundamental skill, so teach it early in the curriculum and ensure that apprentices have grasped it soundly before moving on. Apprentices acquire a breadth of knowledge, skills and behaviours for the job role which go beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship standard. They learn how to work in cramped spaces, deal with difficult customers and manage the hazards of the job role.

Tutors plan on- and off-the-job training effectively, which enables apprentices to develop and apply their skills seamlessly throughout their programme. Apprentices gain fundamental technical knowledge and skills in short block-release sessions in which tutors provide well-sequenced and thoughtful learning activities. They then go on site to apply their new knowledge and practise their skills. They initially consolidate their skills on site through working in teams with buddies and mentors before moving on to sole working once they have refined their skills and built up their confidence. Apprentices not only gain the technical skills needed to carry out their job roles, but successfully develop the personal behaviours that they will need in visiting customers' homes and in dealing with any conflicts, such as customers bypassing gas or electric meters.

Tutors use a wide range of assessments effectively. These includes written reports, practical tasks, simulated scenarios, observations both in the centre and on site, quizzes and online activities. Tutors are swift to check understanding and correct misconceptions to ensure that apprentices are working safely and efficiently. This contributes to the rapid development of apprentices' knowledge and skills.

Tutors develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills well during the course and apply this learning to apprentices' job roles. This is particularly strong in mathematics, where apprentices learn complex calculations for pipework, ventilation and adjusting pressure. Apprentices develop confidence in using these calculations in their work. Tutors provide valuable feedback on improving apprentices' written English, including grammatical accuracy and clarity of expression. Apprentices improve the quality of their written communication during their programme.

Apprentices who need to work towards English or mathematics qualifications achieve these qualifications early in their programme, usually at the first attempt. Many are

supported and challenged to achieve qualifications in these subjects at a higher level than that required for the apprenticeship. This equips them with the ability and confidence to use their improved English and mathematics skills during their apprenticeship and beyond.

Tutors are well qualified and experienced in working in the industry. They pass on the technical knowledge and skills that apprentices need in their work roles in a professional manner. Tutors deliver their sessions with confidence and draw on their vast experience of the sector and the subject. They use interactive and high-quality learning resources, such as dynamic models, to enable apprentices to gain a thorough understanding of the technical aspects of the curriculum. Apprentices value the help and support that tutors provide in enabling them to become effective smart meter installers.

Leaders and managers have a highly effective oversight of the quality of the training that apprentices receive. They have a sound understanding of the organisation's strengths and areas for development. They carry out a range of useful and effective quality assurance activities, including reviews of apprentices' work, visits to training sessions, and analysis of feedback from apprentices and employers. This enables them to gain a very accurate understanding of the quality of the provision and make rapid improvements when needed.

Leaders and managers are committed to the future success of their apprentices and have very high aspirations for them. They provide support for apprentices to carry out extra training to help them to progress within the industry. On completion of their programme, apprentices are offered additional training, such as electric vehicle charge point installation and solar panel installation. This equips them with a wider range of skills to support their progression within the industry and the longevity of their career.

All apprentices who complete their programmes are successful, and an increasing proportion gain distinction grades. Leaders ensure that apprentices have a clear understanding of the requirements and the criteria to gain a distinction grade in their EPA. They are passionate about their apprentices' achievement and work hard to create an aspirational culture. Leaders, managers and staff all aim for their apprentices to 'reach for the stars'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have implemented effective safeguarding policies and procedures that they use to keep apprentices safe. They have clear lines for reporting concerns, and when issues are raised, they are dealt with appropriately and swiftly. Leaders and managers recruit staff safely and ensure that all staff are suitable to work with apprentices.

The designated safeguarding lead and members of the safeguarding team are appropriately trained and experienced for their roles. They understand their responsibilities for safeguarding apprentices, and support them with a wide range of issues. Leaders and managers provide staff with frequent training on safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and wider curriculum topics, and ensure that staff have the most up-to-date guidance about these topics.

Leaders and managers understand the need to prepare apprentices for the specific risks that they may face in the locations where they work. The safeguarding team works effectively with agencies that can support them with safeguarding. They liaise frequently and have formed effective working relationships with the regional 'Prevent' duty coordinator and West Yorkshire Police.

Provider details

Unique reference number	57463
Address	Units 41-43 Monckton Industrial Estate Denby Dale Road Wakefield WF2 7AL
Contact number	0333 323 2723
Website	www.universalskillsgroup.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Daniel Taylor
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 apprenticeship 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

Sarah Seaman, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Karen Anderson	His Majesty's Inspector
Steve Hunsley	Ofsted Inspector

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