

Inspection of The Education and Skills Partnership Ltd

Inspection dates:

7 to 10 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

The Education and Skills Partnership Ltd (ESP) is an independent learning provider based in Ashford, Kent. ESP was founded in 2015 and has provided publicly funded apprenticeships and adult learning programmes directly since 2017. ESP last received a full inspection in August 2019 when it was judged to be good.

At the time of the inspection, 24 adult learners were studying two-week level 1 health and safety in construction environment courses at locations in Manchester and Wigan. Around 100 apprentices were enrolled at locations across England in apprenticeships in telecommunications, and business and management, at levels 2 to 5. Staff provide training remotely at apprentices' workplaces or at pop-up training centres within local communities.

ESP does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Nearly all apprentices and adult learners are well motivated to learn. They value the close support staff offer them. As a result, they benefit from an environment in which they learn effectively and are confident in asking questions that further develop their knowledge and skills.

The vast majority of adult learners and apprentices apply new knowledge quickly at work or develop skills they can use in future employment. For example, level 2 telecoms field-operative apprentices splice fibre cables as they build broadband connections. Adult learners produce detailed scale drawings and fully priced quotations for construction jobs. Consequently, apprentices and adult learners demonstrate valuable new skills that they use in their current work or new positions that they apply for.

Adult learners and apprentices benefit from useful information on topical themes that leaders and managers carefully select from current news stories and issues that learners and apprentices are encountering in their lives. Adult learners become familiar with the equality act, bullying in the workplace and domestic abuse. Level 5 operations manager apprentices discuss tolerance for lesbian, gay and bisexual people during the football world cup. As a result, apprentices and learners develop a secure understanding of contemporary issues that have relevance in their personal and working lives.

Apprentices benefit from opportunities to develop their professional interests beyond the requirements of their apprenticeship. For example, level 2 telecoms field-operative apprentices receive membership of the Institute of Telecoms Professionals. Level 5 operations manager apprentices have access to sessions on topics, including using word processing and spreadsheet software, and taking minutes. However, few apprentices take up these additional opportunities.

Apprentices and adult learners receive useful careers information, advice and guidance that helps them to plan their next steps. Adult learners complete a personal progression plan with their tutor that links their course to their career plans. Apprentices reflect on their career plans at the start of their programme and evaluate these with staff regularly at review meetings. A small minority of apprentices take up the opportunity to meet with a careers adviser who offers valuable support with making employment applications.

A few adult learners do not behave well enough. For example, they do not arrive punctually to class, they use their mobile phones inappropriately or they use bad language. Although, in most cases, staff deal with this behaviour effectively, in a small minority of cases they do not challenge it. As a result, learning is delayed occasionally for the whole group.

Adult learners and apprentices feel safe. Staff teach them how to stay safe, including when they are online. They are confident about how to report concerns should they have any. Adult learners become familiar with safe practices within the

construction sector. Level 2 telecoms field-operative apprentices learn how to use safety equipment, such as gate guards and gas detectors effectively.

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

Leaders and managers plan courses so that apprentices and adult learners cover relevant topics in a logical order. For example, adult learners begin by reflecting on their ambitions, personal attributes and how to apply for jobs effectively before they learn about health and safety in construction. Level 5 coaching professional apprentices learn about the importance of self-awareness before they explore specific coaching techniques such as the 'goals, reality, options and will' model. As a result, apprentices and adult learners connect their new knowledge and skills quickly to their own performance in the workplace and when they apply for jobs.

Coaches and tutors build on adult learners and apprentices' existing knowledge effectively when they introduce new ideas. For example, level 5 operations manager apprentices use their knowledge of Lewin's leadership styles framework to make sense of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's leadership behaviour continuum. Adult learners utilise their knowledge of the importance of loosening light fittings to help them understand why the heat from a bulb can cause the fitting to stick. Consequently, apprentices and adult learners incorporate new learning into their long-term memory securely.

Coaches and tutors use assessment effectively to establish what adult learners and apprentices know and to ensure they can demonstrate their new skills and knowledge. They have ambitious expectations for what apprentices and learners should be able to do. For example, tutors employ well-selected questions to relate difficult new concepts to skills adult learners find familiar, such as connecting reading body language to recognising positive reactions from friends. Level 2 telecoms field-operative apprentices benefit from carefully scheduled practice professional discussions that their coaches use to close gaps in their understanding and confirm their readiness for their final assessments. As a result, adult learners and apprentices achieve well in their qualifications and often gain high grades.

Leaders and managers ensure that their adult learning programmes are sharply focused on meeting the employment needs of disadvantaged adults in local communities. For example, leaders work closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Job Centre Plus to identify local skills shortages in construction and match these with people looking for employment. Consequently, adult learners gain appropriate certification to work on construction sites and learn skills and behaviours that improve their employability. Although adult learners receive an employment interview with a recruitment agency at the end of their programme, they do not benefit from direct contact with employers in the construction sector. For the substantial minority of adult learners, their progress to employment is slowed as a result.

Highly experienced and qualified coaches enable apprentices to develop vocationally relevant and up-to-date skills and knowledge quickly. For example, level 2 telecoms field-operative apprentices use their knowledge of assessing risk at work to write health and safety risk assessments for their teams. Level 5 coaching professional apprentices influence senior leaders in their companies to promote a coaching style of management. Level 5 operations manager apprentices utilise the skills and behaviours they have learned to move on to senior management roles in their own and other organisations. In most cases, employers work closely with leaders and managers at ESP to identify the skills needs of their staff and ensure their learning is tailored appropriately. As a result, the vast majority of apprentices either take on additional responsibilities at work or gain promoted roles.

In a small minority of cases, leaders and managers do not involve employers in apprentices' programmes sufficiently. A few employers do not participate fully in reviewing their apprentices' progress and so do not have a clear overview of how well they are doing. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices make slower than expected progress.

Leaders have put in place a range of well-considered measures to identify and respond to the well-being needs of staff. For example, they check regularly and limit the amount of driving learning and skills coaches need to do. As a result, nearly all staff feel their workload and well-being are supported and managed effectively by leaders.

A board of directors is familiar with the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. They support and challenge leaders regularly and energetically. Leaders acknowledge that they would benefit from independent governance that is separated from the company's ownership and operational management. They have responded to this by inviting an independent member to join the board, but it is too early to see the impact.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The appropriately qualified and experienced safeguarding team ensures that staff receive safeguarding training at recruitment which is updated every two years. Staff receive more frequent updates on changes to safeguarding practice.

Leaders have put in place a consistent policy for staff to have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Staff who have direct contact with 16- to 18-year-old apprentices are rightly required to have enhanced DBS checks.

Leaders have implemented suitable systems for recording and reporting safeguarding concerns. Staff are familiar with these and use them well. Safeguarding leaders assess concerns promptly to categorise them as safeguarding or welfare concerns and ensure that they are followed up appropriately.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that staff manage adult learners' behaviour consistently well.
- Leaders should ensure that adult learners on employability courses benefit from direct contact with employers so that they progress to employment more quickly.
- Leaders should ensure that employers evaluate the progress being made by their apprentices consistently so that they make timely progress in their learning.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1270929
Address	Williamson House Wotton Road Ashford TN23 6LW
Contact number	01233 632 111
Website	https://esp-ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jason Hargreaves
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	13 to 16 August 2019

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Head of Apprenticeships, 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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