

Serco Limited

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	54333
Name of lead inspector:	Montserrat Pérez-Parent, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Serco Limited was inspected in March 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Serco Limited offers specialist apprenticeship provision to education providers throughout England. Leaders and managers also offer adult education courses funded by the West Midlands Combined Mayoral Authority to support adults in the region who are low paid or low skilled.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 600 adult learners and 197 apprentices in learning. One adult learner and 22 apprentices were on breaks in learning. Apprentices were studying standards up to level 7. Serco Limited subcontracts almost all of its adult provision. Two-fifths of learners were studying functional skills in English and/or mathematics. The remaining adults were studying vocational courses in a variety of areas, including care, construction and information technology.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and governors made in ensuring they understand thoroughly and improve successfully the quality of adult and apprenticeship provision? Reasonable progress

Following the previous inspection, leaders and managers quickly reviewed their adult and apprenticeship provision. They set sensible and detailed action plans, which they monitored frequently. Many of the actions that leaders and managers took have had a beneficial impact on learners and apprentices (learners). For example, more learners are completing their studies and achieving their qualifications and apprenticeships.

Leaders and managers now have better oversight of the adult provision they subcontract. A dedicated member of staff holds useful monthly meetings with subcontractors to track key performance indicators such as quality of training and learner satisfaction. Managers work well with subcontractors and support them effectively when needed. Subcontractor staff value how they have a better understanding of their own provision because of this closer and more frequent scrutiny. For example, having to report attendance weekly has prompted one

subcontractor to focus more on learners who miss lessons. They now identify learners at risk of dropping off sooner and offer catch-up sessions to support them to continue with their studies.

Leaders acknowledge that they do not monitor the quality of their subcontracted apprenticeship provision as robustly. They do not routinely check the quality of the training that apprentices on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship receive.

Leaders and managers prepare detailed reports which, for the most part, break down relevant performance data into useful categories. This allows governors to challenge leaders more effectively. On occasions, leaders do not collect the information they need to assure themselves and governors that their actions have a beneficial impact on learners. For example, leaders systematically collect data on when apprentices are due to come back from breaks in learning, but not on whether they return when expected. Therefore, they cannot assure themselves that the actions they take to support these learners to return are effective.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that learners with additional learning needs receive the support they need in a timely way? **Reasonable progress**

Learners rightly value the opportunity to discuss their support needs with managers before they start their courses. Staff use the information they gather sensibly to put in place the support learners need to make good progress in their studies.

Most learners with additional needs speak highly of the responsive and timely support they receive. For example, learners with medical issues value the flexible and caring way in which staff support them to continue with their learning.

The newly appointed manager for the additional learning support area circulates useful electronic newsletters to raise staff and learners' awareness of additional learning needs. As a result, staff identify and support learners with additional needs more effectively. Learners, in turn, are more confident to make disclosures of need.

Governors and leaders monitor the progress that learners with additional needs make closely. They use this information well to challenge managers to ensure appropriate support is in place for these learners. For example, governors asked leaders to monitor in more detail requests for additional support from learners once they have started their courses. They wanted to reassure themselves that the increase in mid-course requests was due to learners' increased awareness and confidence to ask for support rather than any remaining issues with the process for identifying learner needs before they start their courses.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that learners receive appropriate impartial careers information, advice, and guidance? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have improved their processes for gathering information about learners' prior knowledge and career aspirations to ensure that learners study courses which are suited to their future prospects. Leaders now ensure that, throughout their courses, most learners benefit from helpful and regular discussions with experienced staff about their next steps.

Most staff use their professional expertise to provide clear and useful career guidance. For example, staff provide considerable individual support to help apprentices apply for promotion to more senior posts. In the directly taught adult provision, trained skills coaches provide learners with helpful guidance on completing applications, preparing for interviews and writing personal statements. Consequently, most learners gain the confidence to pursue new roles.

Subcontractors of adult provision plan the curriculum to include careers information, advice and guidance to their learners. Tutors know the sectors in which they teach well. They provide learners with useful information and advice on the best way to get work in different professions and discuss opportunities for progression to higher levels or other courses. As a result, learners are aware of the opportunities available to them to get into better employment or further learning, and many of them do.

Leaders acknowledge that there is inconsistency in learners' access to their repository of online careers resources. They are currently working to ensure all learners have access to these resources, but it is too early to see the impact of these actions.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that all apprentices have sufficient time to complete their studies, reducing the burden on apprentices of completing assessments and other off-the-job learning in their own time? Reasonable progress

Leaders have taken reasonable steps to ensure that apprentices have sufficient time to complete their studies through their entitlement to off-the-job training. Leaders and managers ensure that line managers are fully aware of apprentices' right to this entitlement. When they take on new apprentices, they provide an induction for their line managers about the entitlement and what counts as off-the-job training. Leaders and managers do this thoroughly, repeating the induction when there is a change in an apprentice's line manager.

Staff complete sufficient checks on apprentices' entitlement, through review meetings and monitoring apprentices' logs. Where apprentices fall behind in the number of hours they dedicate to their studies, managers take appropriate action to intervene and resolve underlying issues. For example, managers act swiftly when employers do not support their apprentices well enough to access this important aspect of their apprenticeship.

Whilst managers and staff have more oversight of off-the-job training, leaders acknowledge that they do not have an unfettered view of this area of the apprenticeship provision. They rightly recognise a need to better record where they have taken action to assure themselves all apprentices receive this entitlement.

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