

Inspection of Thatcham Research

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 July 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Apprenticeships **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Information about this provider

Thatcham Research is a national independent learning provider based in Thatcham, providing apprenticeship training to prepare apprentices for employment in the collision and repairs industry. At the time of inspection, there were 206 apprentices, 90 of whom were 16 to 18 years old. A total of 71 apprentices were studying the level 3 vehicle damage mechanical, electrical and trim technician standard, 45 were studying the level 3 vehicle damage paint technician standard, 45 were studying the level 3 vehicle damage panel technician standard and 45 were studying the level 4 vehicle damage assessor standard.

Apprentices work for more than 85 employers nationally.

Thatcham Research does not subcontract any of its provision.

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

Apprentices rapidly develop new knowledge and skills, quickly becoming technically competent. They improve swiftly to work with reduced supervision, carrying out essential tasks as skilled and trusted employees. They develop the expertise needed to work in the industry and are highly valued by their employers. For example, apprentices competently remove car subframes to test for bends and cracks before safely reassembling them.

Apprentices demonstrate the high levels of professionalism and standards that are expected in the collision and repair sector. They take pride in their work and environment and are courteous towards those around them.

Apprentices are considerate, tolerant and respectful of others. They demonstrate the knowledge and behaviours they need to contribute positively and thrive in the automotive sector and in modern Britain. Apprentices feel they are treated as equals and that they are all able to participate in learning, including female apprentices who feel confident in classrooms and workshops.

Apprentices appreciate the positive learning environment and they work confidently with staff and peers to build their resilience and learn from their mistakes. Apprentices attend well. They are very satisfied with their experience and they look forward to their learning at Thatcham Research. For example, apprentices have learned the strategies they need to avoid confrontation and are able to retain their roles in prestigious car dealerships.

Most apprentices value the careers advice that helps them to understand future opportunities in the collision and repairs industry. They benefit highly from additional learning and guidance that prepare them well for employment. For example, apprentices learn about technologies of the future such as electrical- and hydrogen-powered vehicles.

Apprentices feel safe. They know how to report concerns and they feel confident that staff will take rapid action to support them if they need help.

Apprentices do not yet benefit as well as they might from a personal development curriculum that enhances their wider skills and talents.

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

Leaders have a clear and strong rationale for the curriculum. They work successfully with a wide range of stakeholders, including employers, to design programmes that help apprentices quickly develop the necessary skills and knowledge employers are looking for. For example, they work closely with leading insurance companies to plan apprenticeships that will meet future workforce needs.

Leaders and trainers plan sessions carefully and logically so that apprentices build their skills and confidence quickly and effectively. Most apprentices make rapid progress and demonstrate mastery of the new skills they learn. For example, apprentices learn about minor body repairs before moving on to major repairs requiring the use of sophisticated equipment such as self-piercing rivets and structural bonding.

Trainers use assessment effectively to identify and meet apprentices' support needs based on their starting points. They provide helpful and individualised feedback that helps apprentices to know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. For example, in English lessons, apprentices welcome frequent feedback from trainers that helps them to improve their speaking and writing skills quickly.

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices, including apprentices with special educational needs and disabilities, are supported well to achieve. They provide apprentices with highly skilled coaches and workplace mentors who act rapidly and with sharp focus to ensure all apprentices stay on track. Apprentices highly value the help they receive from staff, which enables them to stay motivated.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. They use robust processes skilfully to ensure the standards of teaching are high. They scrutinise data to assure themselves that apprentices perform to a high standard.

Leaders and managers ensure that their highly qualified and experienced staff continue to develop their practice and stay up to date with a rapidly changing industry. They accurately identify skills gaps and plan for staff to undertake relevant further learning, which staff value highly. Apprentices benefit greatly from the expertise of staff and the cutting-edge knowledge they share. For example, trainers learn about carbon fibre processes for the repair of high-performance cars and share this knowledge skilfully with apprentices.

Leaders thoughtfully consider staff workload and working practices so that staff are able to balance their work and lives. Staff benefit from manageable workloads that enable them to provide apprentices with the help they need. Staff value the efforts that leaders have made. They are motivated to work to a high standard and are proud to work at Thatcham Research.

While leaders do not benefit from independent governance, those responsible for oversight strengthen managers' ability to develop apprenticeship programmes continually. They use their industry networks and influence to help meet skills shortages and improve apprenticeship standards. They capably hold managers to account and, as a result, the quality of provision improves over time.

Leaders and trainers do not ensure that apprentices and employers receive clear targets for improvement so they can further develop their specific knowledge and skills to the highest standards. As a result, not enough apprentices achieve distinction grades. Leaders and managers have clear plans to bring about improvement, but it is too early to see the impact of these.

Leaders have designed a purposeful personal development curriculum so that apprentices improve their understanding of tolerance and respect and develop their confidence and resilience well. For example, apprentices use the skills they have learned when dealing with customers to resolve problems. Leaders have plans in place to improve apprentices' understanding of healthy relationships and lifestyles and provide further opportunities for them to play a greater part in their communities, but it is too early to see the impact of these.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have created a culture of safeguarding that ensures apprentices are safe and they know what to do to stay safe. Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment practices strictly. They ensure staff understand the importance of safeguarding apprentices and that they remain up to date with appropriate training. They ensure apprentices are safe during residential stays.

Leaders and managers are further strengthening safeguarding procedures and safeguarding awareness through the introduction of a new website and an enhanced safeguarding log.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that trainers use assessment outcomes effectively to plan aspirational targets that enable more apprentices to achieve distinction grades.
- Leaders and managers should ensure all apprentices benefit from a personal development curriculum that enables them to develop their wider skills and talents.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54895
Address	Thatcham Automotive Academy Daytona Drive Thatcham RG19 4ZD
Contact number	01635 868855
Website	www.thatcham.org
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jonathan Hewett
Provider type	National independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	18 March 2013
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Academy Quality, Compliance and Funding 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 apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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