

# Inspection of The Vocational Academy Essex Ltd

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 July 2023

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this provider

The Vocational Academy Essex Limited (TVA) is an independent training provider. Its head office is in Southend-on-Sea, with a training centre in Chorley. TVA teaches apprenticeships predominantly in the north east, north west and east of England. TVA gained its own delivery contract in September 2020.

At the time of the inspection, there were 148 apprentices on apprenticeship standards from level 2 to level 7, including children, young people and families, team leader or supervisor, construction programmes and community activator coach. Most apprentices study children and young people and family practitioner at level 4, with small numbers of apprentices on the remaining programmes.

There were 141 apprentices studying functional skills qualifications. In English, 21 apprentices were studying at level 1 and 43 studying at level 2. In mathematics, there were 22 apprentices studying at level 1 and 55 studying at level 2. There were 25 learners with additional learning needs.

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

Most apprentices value the time they spend in their studies. Apprentices in the care sector particularly appreciate the opportunity to study flexibly, allowing them time to manage their apprenticeship work and meet complex shift patterns in their employment. Apprentices welcome additional workshops that tutors organise so that they can catch up with missed work if they have not been able to attend taught sessions.

Apprentices are supported well by their tutors. They recognise that, recently, new managers and tutors have provided them with improved teaching and guidance on their programmes. Many apprentices felt that, at the start of their apprenticeship, communication about their course was not detailed or helpful and that the organisation was poor. Those apprentices who have recently been recruited from other organisations value the support and quality of teaching they now receive.

Most apprentices have gained confidence in carrying out their job roles. Apprentices in community activator have benefitted from opportunities to be volunteers in the community, which has in turn allowed them to put into practice what they have learned in their apprenticeship.

Apprentices feel safe in their workplaces and in their online study. They understand who they should report any issues to and feel confident that matters would be dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

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

Leaders have not ensured that the quality of education is good. They have not identified the declining quality in provision or taken appropriate actions to rectify weaknesses swiftly. As a result, too many apprentices have not completed their apprenticeship qualifications within the planned timescales, and too many leave their apprenticeship early.

Recently, leaders have made substantial changes to the leadership team and employed new members of teaching staff. New managers have put in place revised policies and procedures and are using these effectively to improve the quality of provision. Although a few improvements are evident, it is too early to assess the impact of these.

Leaders have not prioritised the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills. They have not ensured that apprentices have sufficiently high-quality teaching to improve their skills and to prepare them effectively for their functional skills qualifications. As a result, too many apprentices have not taken their functional skills qualifications prior to their planned end date. Recently, new managers have taken action to rectify this, but it is too early to assess how effective these changes have been.

Leaders and managers have revised the curriculum offer. They now focus on providing apprenticeships at level 3 and above. They have recently introduced, for example, a level 7 apprenticeship in senior leadership and a level 5 apprenticeship in children, young people and families manager. Leaders have recognised the areas in which they are not able to provide training of a high quality, such as construction. They are currently in the process of subcontracting that provision to another provider.

Managers and tutors have sequenced the curriculum so that it is logical and builds on apprentices' skills. Apprentices learn how to perform basic tasks and then learn more complex skills. At level 7, senior leaders learn about communication in the workplace and how to adapt it to different audiences. Senior leaders later understand how to use this effectively to lead change within organisations. Tutors work with employers to ensure that apprentices can apply their learning competently in the workplace. They ensure that the new knowledge and skills that apprentices gain are beneficial to the apprentice and meet the organisational goals of employers. In level 3 human resources, tutors adapt the programme to help apprentices prioritise their work and manage their time effectively, as per to the needs of employers.

Tutors do not prepare apprentices well enough for their assessments at the end of their course. Apprentices understand that they will be assessed, but they do not know early in their courses what their assessment involves, how the work they are doing contributes to their assessment or that they can achieve passes at a high grade. As a result, apprentices do not aspire or work towards achieving high grades.

Managers provide apprentices with appropriate advice to ensure that they are on the correct apprenticeship programme at the start of their course. However, managers do not make certain that apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance about the broad range of careers available to them on completion of their apprenticeship. Most apprentices understand the careers options available to them in their own organisations and what their next steps will be.

Managers and tutors do not provide most apprentices with sufficient opportunities to develop their interests more broadly outside of the curriculum. Apprentices on level 2 community activator benefit from additional qualifications, such as paediatric first aid, which helps them to perform their job roles more effectively.

Leaders and managers do not monitor data sufficiently well so that they understand thoroughly the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They do not monitor apprentices' attendance well enough. Leaders do not have a good enough understanding of whether apprentices attend taught sessions or whether they catch up swiftly with missed learning. Leaders do not monitor whether apprentices are making rapid progress, including those who are not achieving within the planned timescales or who have been transferred from other providers. As a result, leaders do not put interventions in place to secure rapid improvements to the quality of the provision.

Governors do not have a detailed understanding of the breadth of their role and do not receive the information they need to provide the challenge required to secure sustainable improvements. Governors are committed to the organisation. They have relevant experience to carry out their roles, but their impact is underdeveloped.

Tutors are well qualified and experienced in their specialist vocational areas. They use their knowledge skilfully, sharing their experiences to make learning interesting and helping apprentices to understand different work contexts. Most tutors use a variety of different teaching strategies to develop apprentices' new knowledge and skills. In level 7 senior leader apprenticeship, tutors use probing questions to promote discussions and explore different responses to management challenges. As a result, apprentices become more able to consider different solutions to problems in their own organisations.

Tutors use assessment effectively to check apprentices' understanding of concepts. They use questions and quizzes expertly to revise topics and check apprentices' learning. Tutors check that apprentices have a sound understanding of the topics they have studied previously. Consequently, apprentices are well equipped to move on to the next topic and build on their prior learning.

Most tutors provide helpful feedback on apprentices' work. As a result, apprentices know what they do well and what they need to do to improve. In a minority of apprenticeships, such as level 7 senior leader, tutors' feedback is too confirmatory and does not provide the developmental challenge that apprentices need to work to a high standard. Apprentices produce work of at least the expected standard. In level 4 children, young people and families practitioner and level 5 children, young people and families manager, apprentices take pride in their work, present their assignments well and produce work above the level required by the apprenticeship.

Most tutors help apprentices to improve their English skills within their work. In level 7 senior leader, apprentices learn to write concisely, accurately proofread their work and improve their academic writing skills. In level 4 children, young people and families practitioner, apprentices gain confidence in working with groups of young people and communicating effectively with them. On level 2 community activator apprenticeship, tutors do not routinely correct apprentices' spelling and grammar in their written work.

Tutors support apprentices diligently. They are available to help apprentices with their work, clarify misconceptions and arrange additional sessions for apprentices who require it. Tutors support apprentices with additional learning needs confidently. They identify apprentices' learning needs at the start of the apprenticeship and make adjustments to apprentices' programmes. Apprentices with dyslexia are provided with one-to-one support or additional taught sessions. As a result, apprentices with learning difficulties progress at least as well as their peers.

Tutors ensure that apprentices work in calm and professional working environments. Apprentices develop the professional behaviours required to achieve success in their

workplaces. Apprentices on level 7 senior leader learn to create professional work cultures and to model behaviours expected from their staff.

Most apprentices have a basic understanding of fundamental British values and can demonstrate their understanding confidently in the workplace. Apprentices understand the importance of respectful relationships with their clients. For example, in level 4 children, young people and families practitioner, apprentices understand the different needs of their clients when planning their care and how to create an inclusive culture. Apprentices on level 7 senior leaders do not have a good understanding of fundamental British values or how these apply to their work roles or their everyday lives.

Most apprentices gain substantial new knowledge and skills and become more skilled in carrying out their job roles. As a result, apprentices gain in confidence and can work independently. In level 5 children, young people and families manager, apprentices feel confident to take on more management responsibilities at work. Apprentices on level 7 senior leader make a substantial contribution to the businesses in which they work. Employers report that apprentices can better communicate with senior staff and the board of directors and that they can assist in changing policies, such as how to manage complaints, more effectively.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have created a strong culture of safeguarding. They have put in place relevant policies and procedures, which they use successfully to keep apprentices safe. Those managers responsible for safeguarding are appropriately qualified and experienced.

Managers ensure that staff have frequent training to update their safeguarding knowledge. Managers have established helpful links with external agencies so that their knowledge is current, and they have a good understanding of the local risks.

Managers responsible for recruiting staff are qualified in safer recruitment and take appropriate action to continuously improve their practice. They ensure that staff are safe to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

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

- Leaders must ensure that they use relevant data effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses in the provision and to put interventions in place to secure improvements swiftly.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices make good progress and understand how they will be assessed so that they complete their apprenticeship within planned timescales, including those apprentices recruited from other providers.

- Leaders must ensure that apprentices improve their English and mathematics skills swiftly and that they are prepared well for their functional skills examinations.
- Leaders must ensure that governors have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities and that they have relevant information to enable them to challenge leaders and secure sustained improvements in the quality of provision.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance so that they have a good understanding of the broad range of career opportunities available to them when they complete their apprenticeship.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	2654173
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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Michael Rickards
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Not applicable

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of delivery, 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

Lynda Brown, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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