

# Skills to Group Limited

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

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Lowenna Bradley, His Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Address:</b>	Horizon Building Western Wood Way Plympton Plymouth Devon PL7 5BG

## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

Skills to Group Limited was inspected in June 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.

Skills to Group Limited is based in Plymouth and mostly provides vocational training for people living in the Plymouth area. The visit focused on themes related to education programmes for young people and provision for learners with high needs because these were judged to require improvement at the previous inspection. The provider continues to offer apprenticeships and adult learning programmes.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were around 40 learners aged 16 to 18 studying programmes designed to help them to move on to an apprenticeship, including a very small number of learners with high needs. There were fewer than 10 learners with high needs attending specialist provision at a training centre in the centre of Plymouth.

### Themes

**What progress have leaders made to improve their evaluation of the quality of the provision, including the setting of realistic targets and strategies for improvement?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders have used the previous inspection report to identify their main strengths and weaknesses. Leaders have broken down the areas for improvement into a set of appropriate remedial actions. Each month, leaders follow up with the staff responsible and check on the progress made towards the implementation of these actions. As a result, leaders know which actions have been prioritised and taken. For example, leaders have improved the management, oversight and curriculum for programmes designed specifically for learners with high needs. Managers have increased the focus on developing learners' employability skills and have introduced more work placement and work experience opportunities for learners with high needs.

Leaders and managers undertake a number of useful activities to gather information about the quality of provision. These activities include analysing data, such as attendance rates and the number of learners who stay and achieve their qualification, and visiting training sessions. Leaders record what they see in training

sessions. However, they rarely evaluate the impact of trainers' actions on the progress that learners make in their learning over time. Leaders and managers have started to talk to learners about their experiences, but they do not yet look at how well learners develop their skills and knowledge. Leaders have suitable plans in place to improve the information they gather and how they analyse this to get a better overview of the quality of teaching and training that learners receive. However, these activities are not yet fully integrated and therefore it is too soon to see an impact.

Leaders have information at course and curriculum area level that they use to give them an indication of differences in strengths and weaknesses. This information is based on managers' reports on data and visits to training. However, leaders do not bring this together to be able to make accurate judgements and identify new areas for improvement early. Leaders plan to do this, but this work has not yet started because they are focusing on known areas for improvement.

**What progress have leaders made to ensure trainers are appropriately trained and confident to support learners, including those with high needs and special educational needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), with all aspects of the curriculum?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders have increased the frequency and usefulness of the training they provide for staff who work with learners. Leaders provide weekly training in online meetings, responding to requests from staff to provide the training they need. Leaders often use staff within the organisation to share teaching strategies that they find successful. This helps trainers, career development coaches and learning support assistants (LSAs) to improve their skills in supporting learners' learning and personal development. For example, leaders have provided training for vocational trainers to improve their confidence with, and use of, English and mathematics in their training sessions. This enables trainers to support learners to practise and develop further their English and mathematical skills, and to highlight the relevance of these skills to their vocation.

Leaders have provided staff with three informative training sessions on how to support learners with SEND. This has improved most trainers' understanding of education, health and care plans, and of specific educational needs and learning difficulties, such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia and dyspraxia. Leaders rightly recognise that new staff have not yet received this training and that they need to revisit these important training sessions to ensure all staff have the knowledge they need. Leaders have produced useful one-page summaries that outline the specific needs of learners with SEND and the strategies staff should use to support them. Leaders discuss these specific strategies with staff, and staff ask for further help from the SEND team when needed. As a result, staff feel more confident to use different approaches.

Leaders support new trainers and career development coaches, who teach personal development sessions, to gain level 4 qualifications in education and training. Leaders and managers encourage relevant staff within the organisation to contribute to this training. New staff value this training and develop their teaching strategies with the help of mentors.

Leaders and managers provide SEND trainers and LSAs with relevant training to support them to better understand the needs of their learners. For example, SEND trainers and LSAs have completed autism awareness training to help them understand how to create supportive learning environments and avoid potential triggers. SEND trainers have completed training on healthy relationships and now feel more confident to talk about this topic with vulnerable learners.

**What progress have leaders made to ensure effective oversight of learners' progress and attendance for all elements of their study programme, including English and mathematics?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have introduced a new reporting structure that includes information from a study programme manager who has oversight of the programme and its learners. Leaders plan a suitable study programme for learners that comprises vocational training, a personal development curriculum that focuses on employability skills, and English and mathematics qualifications for learners who need them. Managers allocate a coordinator to each learner. This coordinator is responsible for monitoring the progress that learners make in all aspects of their studies and their attendance. Trainers and career development coaches complete reports that the coordinator can access to identify learners who are falling behind and need extra help. The coordinators also meet with learners each month to discuss the progress they are making on their programme and to agree targets. These changes are an improvement because they provide more collaboration between staff to support learners. However, the lines of reporting, roles and responsibilities, particularly for pastoral support, are still not always clear to staff or learners. This is because the coordinator who is the designated point of contact has the least amount of contact with learners.

Trainers track the progress that learners make by using both online portfolios and paper-based tracking systems. Learners do not always keep up to date with their online portfolios, which makes it more important for trainers to track their progress in other ways. This makes it more difficult for coordinators and managers to have an accurate overview of learners' progress. Trainers often offer additional support, such as one-to-one catch-up sessions, for learners who they identify are falling behind in their studies.

Leaders have introduced new attendance monitoring procedures to follow up on absences quickly, and to involve parents in strategies to improve learners'

attendance. Coordinators and managers have oversight of attendance and have noted an increase in attendance since these changes have been made.

**What progress have leaders made in improving the planning and teaching of the personal development curriculum to provide learners with the knowledge and skills they need? Reasonable progress**

Leaders have developed a suitable new personal development curriculum designed to prepare learners for employment, including apprenticeships, as well as developing learners' confidence and resilience. Leaders and managers structure the curriculum well and include relevant content to be explored with learners, such as British values, keeping safe in the wider world and healthy living. Coordinators and trainers contribute to adapting the curriculum to reflect current news or local issues. For example, coordinators have updated resources to explore transgender identity and terminology.

In the trade sectors such as carpentry, plastering and bricklaying, career development coaches teach learners this personal development curriculum alongside trainers. This enables the trainer to provide a vocational context to the themes taught. For example, trainers help learners to understand employment rights in the context of working on a construction site, in addition to the rule of law.

Learners take part in a practical project as part of their planned curriculum and reflect on the personal skills they develop. For example, bricklaying learners worked on a community rebuild project in Plymouth that made them proud of the positive impact they had within their community. Learners can articulate the skills they are supported to develop through their training. For example, trainers encourage learners to take on team leader responsibilities with their peer groups to support the development of their leadership skills. Trainers of hairdressing and childcare learners take a different approach to personal development and teach these sessions themselves. They plan the personal development topics to be taught in their vocational training sessions because they fit well within wider topics, and the trainers feel confident to explore these topics with learners.

Leaders' and managers' quality assurance processes are not yet developed sufficiently to ensure themselves that learners on all programmes develop the knowledge and skills they need. Leaders often use the achievement of a qualification related to personal development as their main measure of success. However, they do not check what learners know and understand, and they have not ensured that the programme includes all important elements of wider personal development. For example, the planning of the specific teaching on healthy relationships and peer-on-peer abuse is limited.

**What progress has been made to ensure learners receive impartial careers information, advice and guidance that enable them to know about the full range of options available to them?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders have developed a useful partnership with external careers advisers, who now visit weekly. Careers advisers provide hour-long careers advice and guidance sessions for individual learners and produce actions for learners to follow up. These action plans are shared with the study programme manager and coordinators. Leaders are not yet clear about how the actions from these meetings are used to inform future discussions and provide support for learners.

Leaders have provided training for key staff to update their knowledge of careers information, advice and guidance. All coordinators, career development coaches, members of the sales team and a selection of trade staff have completed level 2 information, advice and guidance courses to improve their knowledge of how to support learners. Leaders plan for coordinators to study level 4 qualifications, and these are about to begin.

At the time of the visit, most learners were new to their programmes. Learners had received appropriate information and advice from staff before joining their courses. Learners know what they are expected to learn on their courses, and how this will support them in their next steps. They are keen to follow careers in their chosen vocations. Learners who were new to their course did not yet know how to access additional careers advice and guidance. However, leaders had produced posters that informed learners how to book a careers appointment.

Leaders have improved the focus on employability in the curriculum designed specifically for learners with high needs. Leaders provide learners with work placements and work experience and discuss employment options during visits to the community. Leaders have introduced learners to external speakers who share opportunities for internships with them. Recently, one learner was motivated by this and has been supported by their trainer throughout their application to gain an internship with the local hospital.

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