

# Inspection of Skern Lodge Limited (trading as Skern Training and Skills)

Inspection dates:

17 to 20 July 2023

**Overall effectiveness****Good**

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Apprenticeships

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

**Information about this provider**

Skern Training and Skills (STS) is the training subsidiary of Skern Lodge Limited, an outdoor activity and development training centre. STS has been providing directly funded apprenticeships for just over two years. At the time of this inspection, around 150 apprentices were studying standard-based apprenticeships. Just over two thirds were studying the level 3 outdoor activity instructor apprenticeship, one apprentice was studying the level 5 outdoor learning specialist, nineteen the agriculture apprenticeship mostly at level 3, seventeen the leadership and management apprenticeship mostly at level 5, seven were studying hospitality apprenticeship at levels 2, 3 and 4 and ten the early years apprenticeship at levels 3 and 5. Apprentices work at locations throughout England.

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

Apprentices value highly the apprenticeships they study because the expert training specialists at STS capture their interests well. Consequently, apprentices enjoy their studies, are inspired to succeed, and most successfully move on to their next step in training and/or employment. Apprentices use effectively the knowledge and skills they gain by working in their industry settings. For example, outdoor activities instructor apprentices scan the body language of young people before they undertake high rope activities and know when to offer them support and guidance.

Apprentices take part in an excellent range of competitions and community events, which helps them to develop their confidence, maintain their motivation and build their resilience. For example, agriculture apprentices judge livestock at county shows and outdoor activities instructor apprentices take part in community litter picking events and lead events, such as quizzes during young people's residential stays at the outdoor activity centres. Consequently, apprentices develop into well-rounded individuals, who collaborate well with staff and their peers and learn to work effectively with diverse groups of people.

Apprentices contribute positively to a healthy culture within their workplaces. They feel listened to and work in inclusive environments. Apprentices act with respect towards staff, their peers and those they work with. Apprentices are well prepared for current and future employment.

Apprentices feel safe when training and at work.

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

Leaders collaborate highly effectively with employers and external stakeholders to ensure that the curriculum content taught to apprentices is relevant, up to date and meets the needs of industry. This means that apprentices develop their sector-relevant knowledge and skills and apply them effectively in the workplace. Employers value apprentices' contribution greatly because they bring new ideas and the latest techniques to their work, improving the output of the businesses they work in. For example, level 2 farm worker apprentices learn about new feeding techniques when training at STS and have effected a change in the feed mix for cattle to improve the quality of milk production.

Leaders have appointed appropriately qualified and experienced trainers to ensure that apprentices get the support they need to develop their English and mathematics skills further. Apprentices attend functional skills lessons in small groups from the start of their apprenticeship. They understand the value of achieving their qualifications and know when and how to use their skills at work. For example, level 2 farm worker apprentices calculate the number of days to parturition in livestock to enable time to prepare the area. As a result, most apprentices make good progress in learning new knowledge, know how to improve their skills and achieve their qualifications.

STS training vocational specialists are well qualified and are experts in their sectors. They use this expertise intelligently to ensure apprentices learn the skills they need to be safe and successful in their chosen careers. Apprentices are supported well by staff to help them meet their training needs and to achieve their qualifications in the expected timescales. Training specialists use effective teaching techniques, such as the recall of previous learning, before developing and deepening the knowledge of topics further. They skilfully break concepts down into bitesize chunks, so that apprentices understand and secure powerful knowledge. As a result, apprentices can recall previous learning and build on this over time.

Most training specialists use a range of assessment strategies effectively to check apprentices' understanding. For example, they ask targeted questions, use quizzes and mark learners' written work promptly and accurately. They provide apprentices with very helpful feedback on what and how to improve their vocational knowledge and skills. Apprentices act on the feedback positively and make clear improvements to their work. However, training specialists do not always support the development of apprentices written English skills well enough. For example, they do not consistently identify mistakes and opportunities to improve punctuation and grammar in written assignments. As a result, apprentices miss out on opportunities to continually improve these skills.

Leaders plan and order apprentices' training at STS and at work highly effectively. They use a combination of blocks of face-to-face training, online learning and training modules developed with employers to implement apprentices' training plans well. For example, outdoor activity instructor apprentices attend a series of residential training blocks to learn the knowledge and skills they need to use in the next part of their workplace training. Apprentices frequently shadow other members of staff at work to help them to understand new learning in context before being supported to carry out tasks themselves. Consequently, apprentices build their knowledge and develop mastery at a pace that suits their training needs, many of whom having no or very limited prior experiences.

Employers and STS staff set clear and high expectations for apprentices' behaviour and conduct. Apprentices fulfil these expectations professionally in their interactions with work colleagues. Apprentices demonstrate consistently the sought after behaviours and standards that employers demand and expect. They take pride in their work and appearance. For example, outdoor activities instructor apprentices wear company branded uniform and work well with groups of children who take part in outdoor activities led by apprentices. Level 2 general farm worker apprentices are respectful, polite and courteous. Hospitality apprentices know that inappropriate language will not be tolerated in training or at work.

Most apprentices stay and complete their apprenticeship in the expected timescale. Of these, the large majority move into sector related employment or take on additional responsibilities at their place of work. Training specialists prepare apprentices well for their final assessments. For example, more than two thirds of outdoor activities instructor apprentices achieve distinction grades for their

assessments at the end of their training. However, a small minority of apprentices do not stay and complete their apprenticeships. Leaders recognise this and have improved the initial advice and guidance they give to potential apprentices and employers to help to reduce the risk of apprentices leaving their programmes early. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these changes.

Training specialists meet with apprentices and their employers frequently to review the progress they are making in learning new skills and knowledge. However, training specialists do not always use these meetings well enough to set ambitious targets that identify clearly what the apprentices need to do to develop their knowledge further. For example, hospitality apprentices are unclear about what they need to do to improve their skills at work. For a few outdoor activity instructor apprentices, communication between their employer and provider staff about the sequence of training is not effective. As a result, these apprentices do not improve their skills at the expected pace.

Training specialists ensure that apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well. Leaders ensure that apprentices discuss their support needs with staff at the beginning of their programme fully and receive timely, helpful ongoing support. For example, staff provide apprentices with additional one-to-one support, encourage use of a text dictation programme, and arrange for 25% extra time allowance in assessments. Leaders have implemented a robust programme of training activities that help staff to have a full understanding of apprentices' learning difficulties. Detailed conversations take place between staff and apprentices to select and agree the support needed to help them to achieve their qualifications.

Leaders provide apprentices with relevant and useful information about the career options and opportunities open to them. For example, leaders use a wide range of expert external speakers to talk about their experiences in industry. This enthuses and motivates apprentices to consider studying valuable additional qualifications and/or taking part in extra activities. As a result, many apprentices learn new skills and achieve qualifications that increase their knowledge and improve employment options at the end of their apprenticeship. For example, outdoor activities instructor apprentices complete paddle sport, national ropes, and emergency first-aid qualifications and hospitality apprentices complete a wine and spirit trust accreditation.

Leaders and managers take a comprehensive approach to the quality assurance of the apprenticeships. They utilise both internal and external scrutiny to support their strong focus on continual improvement. The governing board provide support and challenge to leaders and managers particularly well. They understand in detail the provider's strengths and weaknesses and take their responsibilities seriously. As a result, the governing board strengthen the provider's leadership.

Leaders set high expectations for their staff in maintaining both their industry currency and continually developing their pedagogical skills. They provide a robust programme of professional development, both in-house and using external

providers. Leaders identify training needs thoroughly and use these purposefully to inform future development events that staff value highly.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff responsible for safeguarding are well qualified and suitably experienced. They use their knowledge and experience well to ensure that apprentices and staff receive appropriate training. For example, staff undertake training to recognise the signs of abuse, identify the dangers of peer-on-peer abuse, and take seriously sexual harassment and related issues. Leaders ensure that apprentices are taught about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and know how to spot the signs online and in others. In relevant sectors, such as outdoor activities and early years, apprentices gain the level 3 safeguarding and first-aid qualifications as part of their apprenticeship. Staff and apprentices regularly report any potential safeguarding concerns, that are thoroughly and promptly investigated and resolved by leaders.

Leaders ensure that staff who work with apprentices are recruited appropriately with the correct recruitment checks in place. Leaders carry out appropriate risk assessments for apprentices' workplaces to help to mitigate the risks associated with their work environments.

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

- Ensure that all apprentices receive meaningful, challenging and ambitious targets that match the knowledge and skills they need to develop.
- Ensure that all training specialists provide apprentices with ongoing feedback on what and how to improve their written English skills.
- Ensure that more apprentices stay and achieve their apprenticeship qualifications.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	2654142
<b>Address</b>	Watertown Appledore Bideford EX39 1NG
<b>Contact number</b>	02030584517
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.skerntestingandskills.com">www.skerntestingandskills.com</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Alex Coyle
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent training provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of education and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit 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

Sarah Alexander, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jackie Rossa	Ofsted Inspector
Sharron Mansell	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Hillman	His Majesty's Inspector
Matt Hann	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2023