

Inspection of Skillnet Limited

Inspection dates:

15 to 18 August 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Apprenticeships

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Skillnet Limited (Skillnet) is a national training provider. It provides apprenticeship training within the automotive and engineering sectors. Skillnet mainly works with a small number of large national employers.

Skillnet offers apprenticeships from levels 2 to 7. Most apprentices study the level 3 motor vehicle service and maintenance technician (light vehicle service technician) or the level 3 heavy vehicle service and maintenance technician standards (heavy vehicle service technician). Other apprentices follow a range of other motor vehicle and engineering standards. The remainder is on business standards, such as customer service, business administration or senior leader. At the time of the inspection, the provider had 1,124 apprentices in learning. Twenty apprentices were on a break in learning, and 384 apprentices were aged 16 to 18. No apprentices received high needs funding.

Skillnet works with six subcontractors. When provision is subcontracted, Skillnet continues to provide the work-based elements of the apprenticeship.

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

Apprentices enjoy studying with Skillnet. Apprentices benefit from high-quality learning environments. They work with high-quality industry-standard equipment, often received from the employers the provider works with.

Staff set clear expectations for apprentices' behaviour and conduct. As a result, apprentices are well behaved in classrooms, workshops and virtual sessions. Apprentices are polite, courteous and respectful in learning settings and communal areas. Apprentices develop good behaviours for work and study. They support and work purposefully with their peers during learning sessions. Apprentices attend their training sessions and are punctual. The provider has acted appropriately to intervene to improve the poor behaviour of a few apprentices in their hotel accommodation.

Apprentices acquire valuable professional skills. Consequently, they become valued members of staff. Light vehicle service technician apprentices receive experience of working in teams. They become more confident when talking to customers. Apprentices understand the importance of treating their colleagues and customers with mutual respect. Apprentices become more confident in their technical ability. They can diagnose faults without seeking guidance from more experienced staff.

Many apprentices take part in activities within their local communities. Level 6 product design and development engineer apprentices visit local schools as STEM ambassadors. They take part in charity events, such as charity soap box races. Apprentices on light and heavy vehicle service technician apprenticeships compete in world skills competitions. Several have achieved gold medals, motivating other apprentices to achieve similar high standards.

Apprentices value the caring and inclusive approach at Skillnet. Apprentices feel safe while in their workplaces, while attending training and while staying in their accommodation. Apprentices know who to contact if they have safeguarding or other concerns. Apprentices understand the dangers of radicalisation and extremist views. However, too few apprentices are aware of the local safeguarding risks in the areas in which they live, work and study.

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

Leaders work highly effectively with their large employers to design courses that meet their needs. Light vehicle service technician apprentices undertake additional electric vehicle training. For one large employer, pre-delivery vehicle inspection training is a part of the programme. Leaders have produced a tailored customer service programme for service and parts advisors. As a result, courses are skilfully designed to meet the skills gaps within the automotive and engineering sectors.

Managers have put in place well-sequenced curriculums that build on apprentices' prior knowledge. Apprentices on the light vehicle service technician apprenticeship start by learning about fabrication, tools and elements of health and safety. Apprentices then move on to more complex content, such as learning about advanced chassis or transmission systems. On the level 2 customer service practitioner standard, apprentices first learn about their role and responsibilities. Apprentices then learn about the customer experience. This helps the apprentices to understand the impact of their actions and communications on their customers.

Tutors and skills coaches are appropriately experienced and qualified. Many have extensive experience in the automotive and engineering sectors. Most tutors and skills coaches undertake helpful industry-specific training to keep their technical skills up to date. Staff undertake specialist training provided by the employers they work with. As a result, tutors and skills coaches can provide apprentices with real-life scenarios. These help apprentices to understand complex concepts, such as the advantages and efficiency gained from epicyclical gears on heavy vehicles.

Most tutors and skills coaches use questioning skilfully to check that apprentices have learned and can remember concepts. Skills coaches on the level 2 customer service practitioner standard use questioning effectively to check apprentices' understanding of concepts. Skills coaches clarify apprentices' misconceptions. As a result, apprentices can correctly explain the meaning of terms such as empathy. However, in the light vehicle service technician apprenticeship, tutors and skills coaches do not ensure that they check that apprentices have understood concepts during theory sessions.

Tutors and skills coaches ensure that apprentices practise applying the theory and skills they have learned. Light vehicle service technician apprentices practise applying the theory they have learned during their practical sessions and in their workplaces. Apprentices can explain clearly the practical tasks that they are performing, such as removing a gearbox. As a result, apprentices become confident in what they do. They work more independently but understand when they need to seek advice.

Most tutors and skills coaches provide apprentices with helpful feedback on their work. Most tutors and skills coaches identify areas for improvement, so apprentices know what they need to do to improve. However, on level 6 product design and development engineer apprenticeships, apprentices do not always benefit from effective feedback on their written assignments. Tutors too often feedback in a generic way, which does not help apprentices to understand clearly what they need to do to improve.

Apprentices develop significant new knowledge and skills during their apprenticeships. Level 3 engineering technician apprentices know how to use lathes and mills in the workshop. They know how to use turning machines. Level 3 business administration apprentices know about the importance of data protection regulations when managing data. As a result, employers value the contribution that apprentices make to their workforce. On completion of their apprenticeships, most

remain in their job roles with their existing employer. Many apprentices take on extra responsibilities at work.

Leaders and managers have not previously ensured that apprentices are prepared effectively for their final assessments. Too few apprentices in light vehicle service technician, heavy vehicle service technician and level 3 improvement technician apprenticeships achieve their assessment at the first attempt. More recently, leaders have improved how staff prepare apprentices, and more are achieving their final assessments.

Apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills effectively while on their apprenticeships. Skills coaches on level 2 customer service practitioner apprenticeships correct spelling and grammar effectively when marking and providing feedback. Level 3 engineering technician apprentices rearrange complex formulae, including logarithmic and trigonometric functions.

Tutors and skills coaches support apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities effectively. Staff make appropriate adjustments for apprentices. They provide additional one-to-one support sessions and extend deadlines appropriately. As a result, apprentices make progress in line with their peers.

Most apprentices are well informed about their career options within the automotive sector. Leaders provide useful resources on automotive careers and higher-level study options. Staff frequently discuss apprentices' career ambitions with them. However, too few apprentices receive planned, independent, unbiased careers advice throughout their programme. As a result, too few apprentices are aware of the wider career opportunities available to them on completion of their apprenticeship.

Leaders have clear and high expectations for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment sessions. Leaders and managers frequently observe tutors and skills coaches. Consequently, leaders have a good understanding of the quality of their provision and the areas for improvement. As a result, tutors and skills coaches have helpful personal development plans in place. These plans help skills coaches to improve their teaching practice.

Governors have the appropriate experience and expertise to bring value to the organisation and provide external challenge. Governors are aware of the provider's main strengths and areas for improvement. However, the governing body is new. It is too early to judge its effectiveness.

Leaders have a clear and effective strategy for managing their subcontracted provision. Leaders have reduced the number of subcontractors and now prioritise areas that add value to their own provision. Leaders have stopped working with partners where they have had concerns with the quality of their training. Leaders oversee the quality of their heavy motor vehicle provision effectively. They work closely with this subcontractor to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the quality of the training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained. Leaders have ensured that they have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place. Safeguarding referral procedures are clear to staff and apprentices. Leaders learn from safeguarding incidents. They amend their practice and policies to take account of areas for improvement following these incidents.

Most apprentices complete specific e-learning modules to develop their understanding of healthy relationships. However, a few younger apprentices cannot articulate their understanding of consent or coercion within relationships.

Leaders have ensured that they have appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place to support apprentices within their hotel and homestay accommodation.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Tutors and skills coaches on level 6 product design and development engineer apprenticeships must ensure that they provide apprentices with feedback that clearly identifies what they need to do to improve their work.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that apprentices have access to high-quality, ongoing, independent careers advice and guidance. Leaders must ensure that apprentices are aware of the wider career options available to them within the engineering and automotive sectors.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that apprentices are aware of the local safeguarding risks in the areas in which they live, study and work.

Provider details

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|------------------------------|---|
| Unique reference number | 54402 |
| Address | 4 Woodshots Meadow Watford WD18 8YS |
| Contact number | 01923 630800 |
| Website | www.skillnet.org.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Eugene Lowry |
| Provider type | Independent learning provider |
| Date of previous inspection | 20 to 23 February 2018 |
| Main subcontractors | City of Bristol College University of Greenwich The Open University University of Nottingham University of Hull Warwickshire College |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality and innovation director, 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

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