

Inspection of British Army

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 September 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	Good

Information about this provider

The British Army (the Army) is one of the largest employer providers of apprenticeships in the UK. At the time of the inspection, there were around 15,500 apprentices in training. About 95% of new entrants to the Army are enrolled on an apprenticeship in the early stages of their employment with about 6,000 apprentices enrolled each year.

The Army offers 38 apprenticeship standards from level 2 to level 4. These range from the level 2 His Majesty's forces serviceperson (protective services) standard, which has around 5,000 enrolments, to more specialist provision in intelligence analysis, engineering and custody and detention, which have much lower numbers of enrolments. Apprenticeships form part of a wider education and training offer for Army personnel that includes non-accredited learning, courses that lead to qualifications and higher education. Half of the Army's apprentices are studying at level 2, about a third study at level 3, with the remainder at level 4.

Most of the apprentices complete the preliminary training for their apprenticeship in one of the initial trade training units. They are then deployed to their field Army units where they continue to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they were taught initially. The Army has apprentices in over 130 locations in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as deployed abroad.

The Army's apprenticeship provision is led from the Army's headquarters near Andover in Hampshire, with the day-to-day leadership and management of apprenticeships devolved to 14 cap badges. The different cap badges are

responsible for identifying the trade training needs of their soldiers and developing apprenticeship training programmes to meet those needs. About 40% of apprentices need to achieve one or more functional skills qualification as part of their apprenticeship.

The Army works with four subcontractors to assist with the enrolment, training and administration of the apprenticeship provision.

A little over a quarter of apprentices are under 18 years of age.

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

Respectful and inclusive behaviour is consistently evident among apprentices, who speak passionately about its importance. No matter what base or location they work at, apprentices get a good experience. Staff have established a positive and respectful culture between staff and apprentices, with a strict code of conduct and a focus on developing apprentices' behaviours for future Army roles and eventually, civilian life.

Apprentices are polite, courteous and display a wide range of personal attributes relevant to their various job roles. Level 2 express delivery operative apprentices talk confidently about how their on-the-job training in their respective roles provides them with opportunities to interact with more senior personnel in different contexts. As a result, they are becoming more confident and assured in their conduct.

Apprentices have a highly professional and strong work ethic. They are aware of risks relevant to themselves and their work roles. They work effectively to minimize them. Trainers set clear standards and expectations for behaviour, conduct, and the 'Army' way, which apprentices proudly aspire to achieve. Apprentices support and motivate each other, resulting in them developing self-awareness and empathy through working and living in such a close community with their peers.

Army staff value highly the contributions of their apprentices, trusting them with important responsibilities. This trust leads to apprentices feeling valued and being proud of the significant amount of progress that they have made in their training. For example, level 2 supply chain operative apprentices who are tasked with medicines and blood deliveries talk enthusiastically about how much progress they have made to be able to undertake this type of task.

Apprentices benefit from and appreciate the opportunity to undertake a range of additional training to provide them with the best possible opportunity to succeed in the wider aspects of their roles. The level 4 non-Home Office police officer apprentices can complete voluntary attachments to complementary services, such as the British Transport Police. Apprentices value highly these opportunities and use them to develop confidence in managing high pressure civilian policing scenarios. Similarly, level 2 production chef and level 3 senior production chef apprentices take responsibility for feeding large numbers of troops, including when on exercise. Consequently, apprentices gain markedly in confidence from how much progress they have made, often in challenging and demanding job roles.

Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe and healthy and they know how to recognise any concerning signs in their peers because leaders and managers have implemented a wide range of welfare and support services. Apprentices feel safe in their work and living environments and are well informed about how to keep themselves and others safe from the potential threats from those with extreme or radical views.

Coupled with the career opportunities in the wider Army, most apprentices understand the range of roles and deployments that are available to them because leaders and managers have devised suitable progression routes for most apprenticeships they offer. They know how to develop their careers and achieve promotions once they complete their apprenticeship. Most apprentices are aware of the transferability of an apprenticeship to job roles in civilian life. A few apprentices have not had opportunities to understand the value of what they learn beyond their military careers.

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

Senior officers are passionate about and committed to the Army's apprenticeship programme. They are ambitious for their apprentices. They are unequivocal about how apprenticeships support the Army to build capacity and provide the skills needed in the workforce. Senior officers make sure that apprenticeships are used effectively so that apprentices make a good start in their jobs, serve the Army well and have skills that will be useful to them in later civilian life. Just over three quarters of apprentices achieve their apprenticeship.

Apprentices are taught a challenging curriculum that is highly relevant to their qualification, chosen career and future aspirations in the Army. Trainers have extensive experience of their job role or trade in the Army. They use this skilfully to plan and teach the different topics in each apprenticeship.

Apprentices make good progress in gaining and consolidating the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to be successful in their chosen trade. For example, on the level 2 His Majesty's forces service person apprenticeship, trainers are highly experienced infantry service personnel. Through the use of carefully chosen training and coaching techniques, trainers ensure that apprentices learn the importance of how to perform effectively in the nine military skills. Trainers make sure that apprentices have time to practise and repeat these skills until they have mastered them. Consequently, apprentices are prepared well to meet the expectations of field Army unit commanders.

Trainers use specialist equipment and training facilities very effectively to help apprentices learn new skills and practise them until they can do them without further guidance or coaching. Level 3 senior healthcare apprentices practise and develop their knowledge and skills in simulated medical facilities with programmable mannequins before applying these on patients on medical wards. Level 2 animal care and welfare apprentices work with high-quality horses and equipment. Level 2 engineering operative apprentices and level 3 military engineering construction technician apprentices practise their skills in well-equipped training and assessment centres and realistic training areas using vehicles, machines and equipment that they will be required to operate when posted to their field Army units and on deployments.

On most apprenticeships, Army and subcontractor trainers use assessment effectively to confirm that apprentices have understood key areas of knowledge and that they develop and master the right trade specific skills and behaviours. Staff provide helpful feedback to apprentices to clarify misunderstandings so that they know how they can improve their work. On the level 2 large goods vehicle driver apprenticeship, trainers constantly check that apprentices have a secure knowledge of the underpinning theory. Trainers teach a series of well-designed theory lessons prior to each practical element to make sure that apprentices know how to drive safely and, for example, how to move hazardous materials appropriately. Trainers carefully question apprentices to check their knowledge before they attempt online tests and move on to the next phase of practical training. On the level 3 data technician apprenticeship, trainers use frequent tests between blocks of training to check apprentices' understanding. They use the outcomes from these assessments effectively to plan apprentices' next training steps. Apprentices appreciate the swift assessment feedback which helps them to improve promptly.

In a very small minority of cases in a range of apprenticeships, trainers do not take account of the prior experiences or qualifications of individual apprentices thoroughly enough. Apprentices can be required to learn basic knowledge in the use of IT systems when they have already achieved IT qualifications at level 3 prior to joining the Army.

On a small minority of apprenticeships, assessment practice is not effective. On the level 3 engineering technician apprenticeship, the subcontractor's staff have been too slow to assess apprentices' submitted work. On the level 2 animal care standard, staff have not marked the portfolio work completed during the off-the-job training aspect of the apprenticeship. In both cases, apprentices are not clear about their progress or what they need to do to correct misconceptions and improve their work.

Due to the need to cover for staff on deployment, apprentices on a small minority of apprenticeships do not spend enough time on jobs related to their training. They are unable to practise and master the skills they are taught. For example, a few level 3 military engineering construction technician apprentices at Catterick spend large amounts of time driving and in other operationally related roles. The on- and off-the-job training for level 3 business administrator apprentices at Bulford and Larkhill is poorly coordinated. Apprentices gain most of the knowledge and skills they need for their operational roles from non-commissioned officers and peers, rather than training staff. Due to the operational demands of their roles, apprentices lack sufficient off-the-job training time to undertake research and complete assignments. As a result, they complete much of this work in their leisure time.

Trainers adapt their teaching effectively to support the needs of apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that they can participate fully in training activities, make progress and achieve. On the level 2 express delivery operative apprenticeship, trainers establish apprentices' individual support needs and take steps, such as providing handouts on coloured paper or providing extra one-to-one training, to meet their needs. On the level 3 data technician apprenticeship, trainers develop specific individual support plans for apprentices for whom these

would be helpful, detailing strategies to assist them in their training and to make progress.

Most records of reviews of apprentices' progress carried out by subcontractor staff record concise summaries of what learning has been covered and what still needs to be done in preparation for final external assessments. However, their records of reviews often lack specific and measurable targets for apprentices to reflect on and work towards. On a minority of apprenticeships, apprentices' military supervisors do not participate in the progress review process. On the level 3 military engineer construction technician apprenticeship, and often on the level 2 His Majesty's forces serviceperson apprenticeship, subcontractor staff complete reviews in isolation from Army staff. The Army staff who work with apprentices in the Field Army are unaware of what is, or is not agreed, during these sessions. Consequently, they are not involved enough at the point where they could intervene and make arrangements to make sure that apprentices continue to use and develop their skills in their jobs.

Senior officers make good use of a range of data and performance management tools to monitor the progress of apprentices. They have taken effective action to reduce the numbers of apprentices who are on breaks in learning or who have passed their planned end date. Most apprentices who are in this position have either had their training interrupted by deployments or because they have not passed their functional skills qualifications. Senior officers have effective oversight of this and have implemented actions to reduce these numbers. They have been successful in achieving this in several cap badges, such as the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, where the proportion of apprentices who have passed their planned end date had reduced and the proportion who achieve their apprenticeship is now high. Senior officers recognise they still have much work to do to reduce further the proportion of apprentices who are past their planned end date.

Senior officers have a good oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship provision. They have accurately identified the weakness in the teaching and assessment of functional skills and how this affects the motivation of apprentices to continue to work towards achieving these and increases the proportion of apprentices who have passed their planned end date. They have recently put in place more intense activity to make improvements to the teaching and assessment of functional skills. On the level 3 military engineering and construction technical apprenticeship, senior officers recognise that apprentices need additional training space to hone their practical trade skills. They have recently started construction of internal workshops and training environments at Catterick so that all trades can practise their skills.

The Army's senior officers for apprenticeships select subcontractors through a thorough procurement process. Most of the work subcontractors do with apprentices is on the non-technical parts of the apprenticeship, such as enrolments, functional skills teaching and progress reviews. Leaders and managers manage all subcontractors effectively. They use performance data well to identify quickly underperformance with subcontractors and put appropriate actions in place to make improvements.

The Army has appropriate and effective governance. The members of the apprenticeship board have the right skills and expertise to offer support and challenge the apprenticeship management team. They intervene, when necessary, for example, putting the Defence Medical School in 'special measures' because of poor performance. They provided intense scrutiny to improve the quality of education. Board members receive a wide range of useful data reports and information that helps them identify and prioritise their actions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure those apprentices who have prior knowledge and experience of the subject they are learning have a suitably challenging training programme or alternative qualifications to study.
- Ensure that apprentices who need to achieve functional skills qualifications understand the value of these and can achieve them in the planned timescale for their training.
- For the small minority of apprenticeships where it is not yet effective, improve the quality and precision of feedback on apprentices' work so that they and their supervisors know what it is they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that the quality of training and support is consistently high on all apprenticeships.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54805
Address	Education Branch Army Personnel Services Group, Ramillies Building Marlborough Lines Andover SP11 8HJ
Contact number	03001533422
Website	www.army.mod.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Colonel Craig Terblanche
Provider type	Employer
Date of previous inspection	26 July 2017
Main subcontractors	TQ Education and Training Limited The Colleges' Partnership Limited Babcock Training Limited The Royal Artillery Centre for Personal Development The Army Catering Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the senior officer for the Army apprenticeships programme, 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

Richard Pemble, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jane Hughes	His Majesty's Inspector
Malcolm Fraser	His Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Houghton	His Majesty's Inspector
Glenise Burrell	His Majesty's Inspector
Nick Crombie	His Majesty's Inspector
Ian Frear	His Majesty's Inspector
Ian Higgins	His Majesty's Inspector
Alastair Mollon	His Majesty's Inspector
Emma Barrett-Peel	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Deane	Ofsted Inspector
Jackie Shopland-Reed	Ofsted Inspector
Linnia Khemdoudi	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Nirosha Holton	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Caunter	Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Conibear	Ofsted Inspector
Lois Knight	Ofsted Inspector
Oliver Symons	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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