

Inspection of City Skills Limited

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

City Skills Limited offers apprenticeships predominantly in the areas of human resources, learning and development, coaching, and business. The provider works mainly with employers in the healthcare, education, and housing sectors. At the time of the inspection, there were 278 apprentices studying standards-based apprenticeships from levels 3 to 6. In addition, there were 40 apprentices who were on a break in learning. Most of the apprentices enrolled at City Skills Limited are adults.

City Skills Limited teaches apprentices from across England online.

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

Most apprentices have a very positive learning experience. They rightly value the extensive knowledge and expertise of the training facilitators and development coaches. Apprentices appreciate the importance of what facilitators and coaches teach them and most attend well.

Apprentices benefit from helpful support from staff. Many adult apprentices have not studied for several years. Staff work with apprentices in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and get to know them well. Apprentices value the considerate approach staff take to guide them through the course and the focus staff have on apprentices' well-being. Staff have high expectations of learners to achieve high grades and professional recognition. For example, human resources (HR) apprentices become student members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Apprentices value the professional and respectful learning environment development coaches create, in which they feel comfortable sharing their experiences and knowledge. Apprentices feel safe when they attend their training and at work.

Apprentices increase their confidence in their work as they gain new knowledge. For example, HR apprentices learn why employment laws and regulations are in place, which helps them confidently handle workplace grievances. Staff teach useful team culture models, such as Schein's iceberg model, which apprentices use to help create a positive workplace culture. Staff teach learning and development apprentices neuroscience learning theories to help them build effective learning resources and training.

Apprentices in earlier cohorts experienced disruptions to their learning due to staff changes, particularly in the areas of English and mathematics functional skills. As a result, a small number of apprentices have not completed these qualifications. Apprentices who started more recently have clear development plans for English and mathematics and have started studying these subjects early in their course. Most apprentices who sit their functional skills examinations pass on their first attempt.

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

Leaders and managers have developed their curriculums with a clear purpose to meet skills shortages in people professionals. For example, the learning and development curriculum supports the development of practitioners and managers to design, deliver and evaluate training specific to a variety of organisations.

Development coaches and facilitators sequence the curriculums logically. For example, they teach insurance apprentices about the differences between consumer and non-consumer law before moving on to more complex content, such as the calculations for an innocent breach of insurance legislation. Development coaches later teach the strategic view insurers may take to keep a premium in place where there has been a fraudulent breach. As a result, apprentices develop their

knowledge and skills incrementally over time and learn how and when they need to apply their knowledge.

Staff teach apprentices valuable new knowledge, skills and behaviours, which apprentices apply effectively at work. For example, level 3 learning and development apprentices learn vital equality, diversity and inclusion legislation early in their course. They then apply these principles when designing training solutions for diverse groups of staff in their organisations. Employers highly value the new skills and knowledge that apprentices bring to their organisations and give them more responsibility to lead on key projects as a result.

Staff comprehensively check apprentices' starting points, including apprentices' prior knowledge. They involve employers when planning the training for each apprentice. Employers provide valuable input into apprentices' training. For example, employers arrange for apprentices to attend additional webinars or to take notes in HR investigations outside of their usual job role.

Facilitators and development coaches use a range of useful strategies to teach apprentices effectively. They use professional resources, case studies and skilfully generate discussions in breakout rooms, where apprentices thoughtfully reflect on and share ideas. Staff use questioning well and link topics effectively to gradually build up apprentices' knowledge. They use helpful quizzes and provide follow-up tasks to help apprentices commit information to memory. Staff record lessons for apprentices to catch up on any content they miss or revisit topics to revise. As a result, apprentices learn and remember what they have been taught.

Facilitators and coaches check apprentices' understanding of key concepts well in lessons. For example, staff use probing questions to check apprentices' understanding of complex training systems is secure. Staff provide further clarification or correct misconceptions where needed. As a result, staff help fill gaps in apprentices' knowledge.

Development coaches provide helpful feedback on apprentices' written work. They state clearly what apprentices have done well and what improvements they need to make. As a result, apprentices improve the quality of their work over time. However, development coaches do not consistently guide apprentices to improve their spelling and grammar.

Staff monitor most apprentices' progress effectively. In most cases, staff hold frequent reviews of apprentices' progress, where apprentices reflect thoroughly on the development of their knowledge, skills and behaviours. Staff take suitable action to help most apprentices, including the few who have additional learning needs and/or disabilities, to stay on track with their studies.

Although the vast majority of apprentices complete their training, too many leave their apprenticeship before they gain their overall qualification. Staff have not provided consistently high-quality support for apprentices to achieve their final assessments, particularly for assessor coach apprentices. Where apprentices do stay

to complete their final assessments, the majority achieve merits and distinctions on their first attempt.

Staff provide a wide range of useful resources on topics, such as fitness plans, health checks, healthy eating and healthy relationships. Managers also provide apprentices with an emergency telephone line direct to a trained counsellor. However, too few apprentices use these resources.

Staff do not provide consistently broad enough careers advice and guidance to apprentices. As a result, apprentices are not aware of the wide range of opportunities for further work and study available to them. Leaders have recently started to offer apprentices sessions to review their next steps earlier in their courses.

Leaders and managers have suitable governance arrangements in place. External board members help leaders to improve the quality of provision effectively. For example, leaders have recently introduced additional business lessons to offer useful training to apprentices beyond the requirements of the standard. Leaders have recently involved employers in interviews for prospective apprentices, which has made the level of commitment clearer to both apprentices and their managers. Leaders do not collate or analyse information about what apprentices go on to do on completion of their studies. As a result, they do not know the full impact the training has on apprentices.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Make sure that staff prepare and support apprentices well for their final assessments, so that apprentices achieve their apprenticeship.
- Make sure that staff teach apprentices, who need to achieve English and mathematics functional skills qualifications, the skills they need to achieve these qualifications and complete their apprenticeship in a timely manner.
- Make sure that apprentices are aware of the wide range of further career and study options available to them at the end of their apprenticeship, so that they can make informed decisions about their next steps.
- Make sure that leaders collect and analyse information about apprentices' next steps to measure the impact of the training on apprentices.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2577229
Address	Unit 59, Capital Business Centre 22 Carlton Road South Croydon CR2 0BS
Contact number	0203 870 4836
Website	city-skills.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Richard Holmden
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of quality, 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

Rebecca Jennings, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Maureen Gilmartin	Ofsted Inspector
Errol Ince	Ofsted Inspector

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