

# The Tess Group

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

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Russ Henry, His Majesty's Inspector
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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

The Tess Group was inspected in February 2023. 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.

The Tess Group currently provides training to around 250 apprentices, with the largest number being level 5 coaching professionals, level 3 team leaders/supervisors, level 5 operations/departmental managers, and level 4 associate project managers. Apprentices complete almost all of their training online. Most apprentices are adults, with around 10% who are under 19 years of age.

### Themes

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from a well-planned curriculum that is focused on the development of significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have reduced the number of apprenticeships that they offer and have focused their efforts on improving the courses for which they have the greatest expertise.

Leaders and managers have introduced a new course planning process and have reviewed and revised all their courses. They have reorganised course content so that it is taught in a suitable sequence. In most cases, they have worked with employers to identify the precise knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices should develop. However, this work is not yet complete for every course. For example, plans for the level 3 business administrator apprenticeship include a detailed breakdown of what organisational skills apprentices will learn. However, plans also include an introduction to cybersecurity, and managers have not yet identified the specific aspects of this broad topic to be included in the curriculum.

Managers and skills coaches make sure that apprentices fully grasp topics. They use questioning in lessons to check apprentices' understanding. They have introduced formal checkpoints that periodically allow apprentices to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and to revisit key topics. However, these checkpoints are not frequent enough for apprentices to practise their skills to the point of fluency.

Managers have introduced a new approach to marking apprentices' work. They have set out clearly the aspects of apprentices' work that skills coaches should comment on. This not only gives skills coaches a clear structure to work to, but it also helps managers to judge the quality of the feedback given more accurately. As a result, the quality of feedback has improved, and this in turn has led to an improvement in the quality of apprentices' written work.

**What progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that staff provide an effective functional skills curriculum?**

**Reasonable progress**

Managers have made several changes to the way in which they provide tuition and support for those apprentices who need to gain functional skills qualifications.

Managers have developed new teaching plans for English and mathematics. Most elements in these plans indicate the specific things that apprentices should know and be able to do. However, in a few cases, planning is less precise. Subject matter is mostly organised appropriately. However, occasionally, themes are introduced in an order that means apprentices learn about a topic for which they have not yet gained the prerequisite knowledge. Tutors have not yet adopted these curriculum plans for all apprentices.

Managers are keen to ensure that, where appropriate, vocational skills coaches help apprentices to develop their English and mathematical skills and to prepare for functional skills examinations. Skills coaches are themselves completing the revised functional skills qualifications to help them understand the needs of their apprentices. They have developed tasks that encourage apprentices to apply their English and mathematical learning in their work context. However, they have not yet linked these tasks explicitly with functional skills topics. Consequently, although these activities may be broadly helpful for apprentices, they do not make a substantial contribution to the functional skills curriculum.

Managers have invested in online materials to support the teaching of English and mathematics. The functional skills tutor directs apprentices to specific sections of these resources to help them practise the things that they find difficult. Apprentices report that they find these resources helpful.

**What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices receive high-quality and impartial careers information, advice and guidance so that they develop a well-informed understanding of their career options?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have ensured that all apprentices participate in discussions about their future career and study options. Skills coaches are prompted to have these discussions during apprentices' progress reviews and during meetings to prepare learners for their final assessments. As a result, apprentices develop a

general understanding of the options available to them. However, in a few cases, these discussions lack detail, focus more on future study than on career options, and do not provide apprentices with enough information about opportunities in their current workplace and how to access them. Leaders and managers recognise these limitations and are working with employers to resolve them.

Curriculum plans include activities that focus on careers and progression. Apprentices frequently complete tasks to reflect on how the learning they complete can support their wider careers development. As a result, most apprentices gain an appreciation of the usefulness of the skills that they gain.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in their use of quality assurance processes and information to accurately identify areas of underperformance and improve the quality of education that they provide?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have made a number of changes to working practices and quality assurance processes. As a result, they are now better able to monitor quality and take timely and appropriate actions to address weaknesses.

Managers have worked to improve the reporting of key data related to the performance of apprentices, skills coaches and courses as a whole. Monthly reports contain a wide range of information. For example, they provide data about in-year achievement rates and the proportion of apprentices who achieve high grades. They show apprentices' attendance, the number who have withdrawn from programmes and details about those who are beyond their planned end dates. Functional skills reports show the proportion of apprentices who pass functional skills qualifications overall and at the first attempt.

This data allows managers to identify areas for concern and take appropriate remedial action in a timely way. In a few cases, managers have not considered the most helpful ways to present data. For example, data shows the number of apprentices who achieve high grades on each course but not the total number of apprentices on those courses. As a result, managers must conduct further investigations to determine whether the data represents a positive or negative picture.

Managers continue to make effective use of lesson observations and work scrutiny to assess the standard of teaching. They use standardisation meetings to consider any areas for improvement, provide guidance for staff and share good practice.

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