

Inspection of The Skills Network Limited

Inspection dates: 20 to 23 February 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

The Skills Network Limited is an independent learning provider based in Selby, North Yorkshire which provides online courses to adult learners. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,170 learners on health, care and digital courses, mostly working at level 2 with a few on level 1 courses. There were 484 learners on skills bootcamps at level 3, predominantly in the digital sector.

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

Learners have positive attitudes to their learning. They are clear about the expectations and behaviours set by tutors in online sessions, including on skills bootcamps courses. Learners ensure that they switch on their cameras and focus on learning. They are respectful to each other and use the on-screen chat function to ensure that they can all take turns to answer questions and share their opinions and personal experiences.

Most learners are well motivated to complete their courses. Learners studying independently know how to navigate their online course and make contact with their assessors if they need to. They respond well to the developmental feedback that assessors provide. Learners take pride in their work and most produce work of a high standard. Too often, though, learners require extensions to the expected deadlines for completion of their assignments and, as result, do not complete their courses within the planned time. Staff support these learners well and, in most cases, learners eventually achieve their qualifications.

Tutors place a strong focus on developing learners' employability skills. They provide activities for learners to research job opportunities, complete application forms, improve their curriculum vitae and record useful reflections in career journals. Learners gain in confidence throughout their courses and are ready for future job roles.

Tutors and assessors create a culture where learners feel safe. They frequently revisit safeguarding information and processes with learners. As a result, learners can talk confidently about how to report concerns should they arise, including when out of working hours. Learners are confident that staff would deal swiftly with any issues, including bullying or harassment.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for the courses that they provide for adults who might not access more traditional education providers. They have designed an effective learner-centred curriculum and high-quality resources that enable learners to study at a time that suits them. Leaders and managers have planned the skills bootcamp sessions flexibly to meet learners' and employers' needs. They provide these courses during the day, in the evening and at weekends to ensure that learners can access them around their personal commitments.

Leaders and managers work well with a range of stakeholders to ensure that the curriculum is relevant in meeting skills needs nationally. They use labour market intelligence from local skills improvement plans, mayoral combined authorities and employers to identify skills gaps and trends. For example, leaders provide skills bootcamp courses, such as level 3 cyber security and level 3 data analyst, to meet the demands of the digital sector. Leaders have worked closely with a company to

review the content of these courses to ensure that they meets industry needs. This has resulted in additions such as guidance on constraints and making compromises when working in the industry. Leaders have responded to the high demand from employers to train staff in existing roles in mental health awareness. They have provided a level 2 certificate in mental health first aider and mental health advocacy in the workplace to meet this need.

Tutors plan and teach the curriculum in a logical order to enable learners to build their knowledge progressively and consolidate it. On the level 3 cyber security course, tutors ensure that learners develop their understanding of technical terms and how they relate to industry before moving on to learning about potential risks and how to protect against them. On the level 2 certificate in counselling skills course, learners benefit from useful resources that help them to develop their listening skills before acquiring the skills of paraphrasing and summarising.

Leaders and managers recruit tutors who are experts in their subjects and have extensive sector experience. Tutors use their expertise and specialist knowledge well when teaching and provide clear explanations when introducing new topics. They use online breakout rooms for learners to develop their understanding by completing activities in small groups. As a result, most learners can recall professional and technical terminology well. However, in a few cases, tutors do not explain technical language sufficiently for learners to develop a full understanding.

Tutors use an effective range of assessment methods to check learning and understanding. They carry out discussions and ask questions to ensure that learners understand. Assessors provide helpful feedback to learners and explain what they need to do to improve their work. On the level 2 mental health first aider and mental health advocate in the workplace courses, learners revisit the course content and expand their answers to reinforce key knowledge and understanding. In a small number of cases, including on level 3 data analyst course, feedback is not as useful.

Leaders have recognised that too many learners did not progress to job interviews at the end of their skills bootcamp course. They have invested in dedicated staff to work with employers and learners to improve this aspect of their provision. Leaders have established an employer engagement team and a recruitment and careers team to ensure that more learners have access to interviews at the end of their courses. They now work closely with employers to develop courses that fully meet the needs of industry. It is, however, too early to see the impact of these actions.

Staff ensure that most learners benefit from relevant careers information, advice and guidance during their courses. Most learners on level 2 courses progress to positive destinations in line with their original intentions when they began their course. Learners develop the knowledge and skills needed to take up voluntary roles and improve their personal lives. For example, on the level 2 certificate in improving personal exercise health and nutrition, learners improved their diet and lost weight as a result of what they learned. On the level 2 certificate understanding children's and young people's mental health, learners gained knowledge to help support their own children with mental health issues.

Staff provide most learners with useful information at the start of their course. Learners complete a welcome pack that includes topics such as mental health awareness and the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism. However, on a few level 2 courses, learners are not provided with sufficient information initially about the course content to understand fully the expectations of the courses and the commitment required.

Staff successfully integrate discussion about fundamental British values into the content of the courses. On the level 2 understanding counselling course, assessors link the concept of individual liberty to client choices, the rule of law to legislation, and respect and tolerance to treating clients fairly and abiding by confidentiality rules. On the level 3 data analyst course, tutors ensure that learners have the opportunity to debate sensitive topics such as digital governance and securing personal information in line with data protection regulations. However, staff do not do enough to check learners' understanding of how to protect themselves from the risk of radicalisation and extremism.

Leaders and managers plan appropriate staff development for tutors and assessors throughout the year to develop their vocational skills and knowledge. However, they do not use quality assurance processes, such as lesson visits, well enough to identify specific actions for tutors to enhance their teaching practice.

Members of the small board of governors are well qualified and experienced to carry out their roles effectively. They have significant experience in working in senior roles in educational funding or are shareholders with extensive experience of the business. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weakness of the provision. Leaders provide the governance board with clear information prior to monthly meetings.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that staff revisit the topic of extremism and radicalisation frequently enough to help learners transfer knowledge to long-term memory.
- Ensure that learners receive sufficient initial advice and guidance to ensure that they understand the expectations of the course and the commitment required.
- Ensure that learners on skills bootcamps are provided with job interviews on completion of their course.
- Provide tutors with high-quality training and development to enhance their teaching practice in meeting learners' individual needs.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1220396
Address	10–16 Abbey Court Benedict Drive Selby North Yorkshire YO8 8RY
Contact number	01757 210022
Website	www.theskillsnetwork.co.uk
CEO	Mark Dawe
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Dates of previous inspection	1 to 4 May 2018
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the executive director of curriculum and 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

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