

Skillcert Limited

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Skillcert Limited was inspected in July 2022. 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.

At the time of the visit, the company had 159 apprentices, most of whom were adults. Apprentices are located across most regions of England and receive their training entirely in the workplace. Most apprentices work towards standards-based apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3. The remaining apprentices study at level 4 and above. The apprenticeship curriculum includes a wide range of qualifications in the recycling, manufacturing and business sectors. The company no longer provides traineeships.

Themes

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that tutors routinely make effective use of information on the starting points of apprentices to inform the planning of challenging learning, ensuring that both on- and off-the-job training are closely coordinated with employers, so that apprentices make strong progress against demanding learning targets?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, managers and staff have implemented a more rigorous approach to the identification and assessment of apprentices' vocational starting points, including their skills in both English and mathematics, to inform the planning and sequencing of learning.

Most tutors make effective use of the information acquired through initial and diagnostic assessments to determine the steps that apprentices need to take to develop and extend their vocational and technical skills. In learning sessions, tutors recap and revisit learning, which enables apprentices to consolidate what they have learned and to retain key technical concepts in their long-term memory. In addition, tutors now liaise more closely with most employers to plan and coordinate off-the-job training with that undertaken in the workplace. However, in a few instances, some employers do not provide their apprentices with sufficiently regular

opportunities to practise and repeat their newly developed skills in the workplace. As a result, these apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Most vocational tutors now set specific, individualised and incremental targets for apprentices to achieve and to support their skills development. These targets are jointly reviewed and updated each month by tutors with each apprentice. As a result, increasing numbers of apprentices now make more rapid and sustained progress in their learning and skills acquisition.

Leaders have implemented a revised apprenticeship tracking and monitoring system. This allows managers and tutors to identify apprentices who are not making the expected progress and to work alongside the employer and the apprentice in providing the necessary support and/or challenge to help them to catch up. Apprentices who have had a poor experience of training are more positive about the revised arrangements to support their learning and skills development.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices are routinely provided with high-quality feedback so that they have a precise understanding of what they need to do to achieve their potential, the values that underpin life in modern Britain and how the apprenticeship course meets their career aspirations?

Reasonable progress

Most tutors now routinely provide apprentices with helpful, developmental feedback that sets out what they have done well or how to improve their work. As a result, apprentices gain confidence and become more assured in their vocational skills development. In addition, tutors revisit learning, which enables apprentices to consolidate what they have learned. However, in a few instances, the feedback provided by tutors to apprentices who have the potential to achieve high grades is not specific enough to ensure that the standard of their work is fully reflective of the demands in their final assessment.

Leaders have ensured that tutors have received training on equality and diversity. This has extended their confidence in the planning and delivery of learning activities designed to expand apprentices' insight into, and understanding of, matters associated with life and work in multicultural Britain. Most apprentices now benefit from carefully considered learning activities during which tutors encourage them to discuss and reflect on a wide range of social and personal issues that help to extend their understanding of life in modern Britain. For example, they explore themes such as the importance of social inclusion, tolerance and celebrating cultural diversity.

Leaders have strengthened course information, advice and guidance arrangements. They now work closely with employers and their employees to ensure that recently recruited apprentices have a more precise understanding of the demands and

expectations associated with being on an apprenticeship. As a result, apprentices quickly value the training they receive and become more motivated to complete their apprenticeship. However, a small minority of apprentices who are close to completing their course are not provided with sufficient information about wider career possibilities that would help them to plan their future next steps.

What progress have leaders made to improve the rigour and consistency of quality improvement processes, including supporting tutors to develop the skills required to provide high-quality learning, including in the teaching of English and mathematics, so that apprentices benefit from a high-quality education and training experience?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have established a suitably detailed quality improvement strategy to raise standards and to improve the learning experience for apprentices. However, a few aspects of the quality improvement plan have not been completed on time.

Leaders have carried out a detailed audit of the skills and experience of all staff and how these align with the priorities set out in the curriculum plan. As a result, new staff have been recruited and a few tutors replaced. Leaders now ensure that the work of geographically dispersed tutors is subject to more robust and regular checks. Managers meet with tutors at monthly supervision meetings to challenge performance and to raise standards. Where areas for improvement are identified, this results in targeted staff development and/or adjustment to teaching.

Senior managers, with the support of the board, have strengthened the arrangements for monitoring the provision. This has included introducing additional resources to improve their ongoing oversight of the provision and to ensure that improvements are being sustained over time.

Leaders and managers have implemented a clear plan for improving the teaching of English and mathematics to apprentices. Prior to starting their course, all apprentices receive a suitable assessment of their English and mathematical skills development needs, the result of which are incorporated into their training plans. Managers now routinely provide targeted support for tutors in their planning for, and teaching of, literacy and numeracy training to apprentices. As a result, most apprentices now benefit from timely support that enables them to make progress towards their qualifications in English and mathematics. Increasing numbers of apprentices are now passing their functional skills examinations at the first attempt.

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