

Skillcert Limited

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

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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Skillcert Limited was inspected in July 2024. 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.

Skillcert Limited is an independent learning provider located in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. They operate across England, offering apprenticeships in business, management, property maintenance, and financial services. Most apprentices are taught online. At the time of the visit, there were 265 apprentices in learning. Of these, five were under the age of 18. The largest number of apprentices study level 7 senior leader, level 2 property maintenance operative, level 4 financial advisor and level 3 team leader apprenticeships.

Themes

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices have access to a planned personal development programme that includes careers education, information, advice, and guidance?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that apprentices have access to a broader range of online personal development resources, linked to key topics. They give tutors the flexibility to decide on what order to teach the topics and whether to teach them through independent learning or through contextualised discussion with apprentices. Apprentices develop a better understanding of personal development topics as a result.

Tutors tailor the personal development curriculum to the needs of the apprentice and the apprenticeship. They alter the order of teaching to prioritise those topics most critical to the apprentice's workplace, such as equality, diversity and inclusion and unconscious bias for those apprentices working in leadership roles. Apprentices value the discussions they have with tutors around these topics. For example, level 4 financial planning apprentices discuss how to recognise signs of financial abuse when working with clients.

Most apprentices have accessed online resources that support their career development. Most apprentices have worthwhile discussions with tutors about their personal career goals to ensure that they have the right support in place to progress following their apprenticeship. However, this is not yet systematic enough. A small number of apprentices are not able to confidently discuss the broader options, such as further or higher study, available to them following their apprenticeship.

Apprentices access a range of topics which cover key areas such as personal well-being, modern slavery and growth mindset. Tutors provide younger learners with an extended curriculum that allows them to develop their understanding of topics relevant for their age and level of vulnerability, for example healthy relationships, sextortion and consent. However, leaders and tutors have not checked that apprentices have accessed the resources. A small number of apprentices have not benefited from this learning.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills from their starting points? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have recruited additional specialist staff to teach of English and mathematics. They have improved the use of initial diagnostic assessments of English and mathematics in order that tutors can identify any gaps in apprentices' knowledge that might affect their learning.

Leaders provide apprentices who are studying qualifications in English and mathematics with support to achieve them early on in their apprenticeship. Apprentices receive frequent individual and small-group teaching sessions from specialist tutors that allow them to focus on the topics they find most challenging. Consequently, apprentices quickly develop their knowledge, skills and confidence in English and mathematics.

Leaders have provided tutors with training to support the development and contextualisation of English and mathematics in vocational subjects. This allows tutors to identify key aspects of English and/or mathematics needed in the curriculums. For example, tutors now teach level 4 financial planning apprentices to write high-quality professional reports and level 2 property maintenance operative apprentices to understand budgets and calculate material requirements for construction projects.

Tutors direct apprentices to a range of resources to practise their English and mathematics to help fill any gaps in their knowledge. However, tutors do not check that apprentices have used the resources, or the impact on their learning. In a small number of cases, apprentices do not experience enough directed support to the develop the English and mathematics skills they need to be successful in their future careers.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that tutors provide feedback to apprentices that helps them develop the quality of their work? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have established more frequent opportunities for tutors to work with apprentices to reflect on their learning and their assessed work. Apprentices have monthly review sessions where tutors provide comprehensive oral feedback. This helps apprentices identify areas for improvement, make meaningful corrections to their work and to develop their workplace skills.

Tutors provide apprentices with feedback that helps build their confidence and improve their final grades. For example, level 4 financial planning tutors use mock tests effectively to identify gaps in apprentices' knowledge. Tutors then provide extra teaching to help apprentices master the knowledge they need. Apprentices feel well-prepared for final assessments and most apprentices pass on the first attempt.

Tutors provide clear feedback that outlines what apprentices need to do to meet assessment requirements. This enables apprentices to make improvements to their work that helps them to achieve their qualification. However, tutors do not give apprentices feedback that tells them what they need to do to achieve merit or distinction grades. In too many cases, apprentices do not know how they can improve the quality of their work to enable them to achieve the highest grades at end-point assessment.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that quality improvement processes track and monitor improvements effectively?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have restructured the quality improvement process to give more precision and accountability to the actions they must complete to achieve improvements. They break down actions into clearly measurable tasks and ensure that they measure the impact of these actions accurately.

Leaders have increased their scrutiny on the quality process through a quality board that meets frequently to scrutinise elements of the process, including the actions in the quality improvement plan. The board challenges the speed of progress and the actions taken to swiftly achieve improvements.

Leaders have used their provider network to add additional external scrutiny to the quality process. External advisers scrutinise apprentices' work, observe lessons and make phone calls to apprentices to discuss key elements of their studies and support. Leaders receive clear reports from these activities, which identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Leaders are confident in the impact of their actions, and they can identify developing areas of improvement rapidly.

Leaders link outcomes of observations of teaching and learning with training opportunities for tutors. Leaders have trained staff in new processes for feedback, on the contents of the personal development curriculum and embedding English and mathematics in the curriculums. Tutors are developing their skills in using new strategies and techniques.

Leaders have recently put in place systems to track apprentices' progress. However, this tracking is not yet accurate enough to identify emerging areas of concern, such as lack of engagement with personal development and English and mathematics resources. Leaders have plans in place to continue to develop their tracking, but it is too soon to see the full impact of this work.

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