

# Inspection of Skillcert Limited

Inspection dates:

28 June to 1 July 2022

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

|                                              |                             |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The quality of education                     | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Behaviour and attitudes                      | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Personal development                         | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Leadership and management                    | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Education programmes for young people        | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Adult learning programmes                    | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Apprenticeships                              | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected    |

## Information about this provider

Skillcert Limited is an independent learning provider based in Cardiff. The company was established in 2015. The company operates in most regions of England. In late February 2022, the business was acquired by its new owners.

At the time of the inspection, the company had 113 apprentices, of which most were adults. The apprenticeship curriculum includes a wide range of qualifications within the recycling, manufacturing and business sectors. Most apprentices are working toward standards-based apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3. The remaining apprentices are studying at level 4 and above or working towards framework-based qualifications. All apprenticeships are taught entirely in the workplace.

In addition, there were 181 trainees in learning, of which most are adults. Trainees work towards qualifications at levels 1 or 2 across a wider variety of vocational pathways, including animal care, hairdressing and beauty therapy, gym instruction, sports coaching and rail track maintenance. Learners on the traineeship programmes attend local training centres as part of their studies or learn online.

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

Learning is not planned consistently well, resulting in too many apprentices and trainees not making rapid progress from their individual starting points. Too many apprentices and trainees have gaps in their learning or are beyond their expected course completion dates.

Most apprentices and trainees do not routinely benefit from access to a curriculum that extends beyond the immediate requirements of their vocational qualification. In addition, the traineeship curriculum is not well aligned to meet learners' needs or interests.

Trainers place insufficient focus on the development of apprentices' and trainees' English and mathematics skills. In addition, trainers and leaders do not yet have an accurate view of the progress apprentices and trainees are making or of the impact that learning has on their wider skills development.

Apprentices and trainees do not have a secure understanding of the full range of career options available to them.

Apprentices develop good vocational skills which are valued by employers, and most trainees benefit from access to work placements that enable them to develop useful employment-related skills.

Recent changes in the leadership and management of the organisation have resulted in some well-considered initiatives to improve the planning and delivery of learning for apprentices and trainees, but it is too early to judge the impact of these actions on the quality of education for apprentices and trainees.

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

Trainers do not yet make consistently good use of the results gained from the assessment of starting points to plan learning that meets apprentices' and trainees' needs and capabilities. The targets set by training staff mainly focus on tasks to be completed, rather than on learning.

Trainers do not routinely provide all apprentices and trainees with detailed and precise feedback on their work and progress over time. As a result, a significant minority of apprentices and trainees do not have a clear understanding as to what they do well, or of those aspects of their learning that they need to improve upon. For example, trainers' feedback to apprentices on the level 2 waste resource operative standard and trainees on the level 2 animal care traineeship programme is often insufficiently detailed.

In too many instances, trainers' evaluation of apprentices' and trainees' progress is too heavily linked to qualification achievement and fails to consider fully wider behaviours and personal development skills needs. Leaders have recently introduced

new processes to monitor apprentices' and trainees' progress, but these are not yet used consistently well.

A few trainers place insufficient emphasis on helping apprentices and trainees improve their English and mathematics skills. Too often, apprentices and trainees do not remember what they have been told in these essential skills and so repeat the same errors. In addition, apprentices' and trainees' attendance is not consistently high at planned English and mathematics support sessions. Newly appointed functional skills staff are beginning to take appropriate steps to address these matters by resequencing the curriculum to ensure key literacy and numeracy skills are introduced much earlier into apprentices' and trainees' programmes.

Most trainers organise the knowledge element of the apprenticeship/traineeship curriculums logically. As a result, apprentices and trainees incrementally develop new vocational knowledge and skills over time. For example, apprentices on the level 4 improvement practitioner standard successfully apply problem-solving methods such as 'fishbones' and 'value stream mapping' to improve productivity and efficiency in the workplace. Similarly, level 1 trainees in hairdressing and beauty therapy learn how to wash clients' hair in line with industry standards before learning the skills of how to blow dry hair.

Most trainers have good vocational experience and subject knowledge that they use well to support trainees and apprentices in developing new knowledge, insight and understanding. However, apprentices on the level 2 waste resource operative and level 3 team leading standard and trainees on level 2 course in animal care provision are not routinely able to recall significant new learning because trainers do not provide regular opportunities to revisit key concepts. A few trainees do not display appropriate attitudes when learning is predominantly delivered online, such as in animal care.

Trainers do not regularly identify apprentices' and trainees' wider personal development needs at the start of learning. While trainers routinely discuss themes associated with life in modern Britain, including equality and diversity and well-being, during monthly progress review meetings, these topics are not consistently woven into the curriculum. As a result, too many apprentices and trainees are unable to recall with fluency learning around these topics. For example, apprentices and trainees have a general understanding of citizenship, such as individuals' right to make choices and how this links to individual liberty, but too many are unable to articulate how such matters impact their wider lives or in the workplace.

Apprentices and trainees do not routinely receive independent information, advice and guidance to help them make decisions about their next steps in training and/or employment. Although some apprentices receive useful information about the range of options available to them such as higher-level apprenticeships, this is neither consistent nor widespread. In addition, the majority of trainees move into employment, but only a few work in the occupational area in which they have studied. Newly appointed leaders have recently invested in a range of careers advice

and guidance resources to support apprentices and trainees better, but it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

Most apprentices and trainees develop self-confidence, extend their self-esteem and become more adept in their performance at work. They successfully apply the knowledge, skills and behaviours they learn in the workplace. For example, level 2 trainees in gym instruction and sports coaching develop confidence and become adept at developing health and fitness plans for clients. Level 3 apprentices in food technology closely follow employers' bio-security protocols when using food additives.

Most apprentices and trainees have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including having an appropriate understanding of risks associated with using social media and how to report any concerns they may have. However, although younger apprentices and trainees have an age-appropriate understanding of being safe online and of the importance of healthy sexual relationships, much of their knowledge on such matters is based on what they learned from previous educational settings.

Most apprentices and trainees benefit from a supportive learning environment where they feel respected by their tutors and workplace mentors. They feel able to ask for help and they enjoy their studies. For example, level 2 trainees in hairdressing and beauty therapy closely mirror the behaviour of their workplace mentors, who guide and support them, becoming valued team members and demonstrating professional attitudes to their learning, such as adhering to workplace dress codes.

Following the recent acquisition of the business by its new owners, the refreshed leadership team have quickly established a more incisive vision for the organisation. They plan to discontinue by the end of the current academic year provision which does not align with the revised curriculum strategy.

Leaders and managers are now rightly focusing their skills, expertise and attention on prioritising investment in additional resources, infrastructure and personnel to support improvement. For example, managers now make more informative use of apprentices' and trainees' feedback to target improvement actions, such as introducing additional online resources in English and mathematics and establishing a careers library to enrich the curriculum. In addition, leaders have developed a suitably challenging staff development plan to upskill and extend all trainers' teaching practice, so that they become more skilled, confident and accomplished in teaching impactful learning.

Leaders have recently introduced a new 'quality development review' process which provides a more rigorous and challenging basis for the evaluation of staff's performance and the identification of any professional development needs. Although it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this initiative, it is providing leaders with a more insightful understanding of the quality of provision.

A new advisory board has been established and the revised governing body now uses its extensive range of skills and experience effectively to develop an accurate and in-depth understanding of the challenges facing the organisation. Board members now provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders to support quality improvement and are aware of the improvements that are required.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established an appropriate range of safeguarding arrangements that have a clear focus on the welfare and support needs of learners and trainees. Leaders ensure that appropriate recruitment checks are carried out on all staff and contracted associates to assure their suitability to work with vulnerable trainees and apprentices.

Leaders ensure all staff receive training in safeguarding and child protection matters, and this is updated on an annual basis. Designated staff with responsibility for safeguarding understand clearly their responsibilities for safeguarding trainees and apprentices. When concerns are raised, staff take prompt action, provide good support and maintain detailed records of all incidents.

Leaders have established a suitably detailed 'Prevent' duty policy, risk assessment and action plan that they update regularly. However, leaders have yet to ensure this information is routinely communicated to apprentices and trainees, to enhance their knowledge and insight of issues in the localities where they live and work.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders must ensure trainers have a precise understanding of how to use information about the starting points of all apprentices and trainees when planning learning.
- Leaders should swiftly implement effective staff development to improve trainers' vocational practice in the sequencing of learning activities that enable all apprentices and trainees to remember more and to make assured progress.
- Leaders must ensure that all trainers routinely provide high-quality written feedback to apprentices and trainees so that they are clear about the standards of work expected of them, what they have achieved and what they need to do to achieve their potential.
- Leaders should quickly improve the quality of advice and guidance provided to apprentices and trainees so that they have a precise understanding of how their course fits their longer-term career aspirations.
- Leaders should develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to improve the teaching of English and mathematics to apprentices and trainees by trainers.

- Leaders should ensure that internal systems used to monitor, track and report on apprentices' and trainees' progress are fit for purpose, including identifying those at risk of not completing in the planned time.
- Governors should provide robust challenge to senior management to ensure rapid improvement in the quality of provision and to raise standards in underperforming subjects.

## Provider details

|                                    |                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>     | 1278682                                                               |
| <b>Address</b>                     | Office 9<br>Frazer Building<br>126 Bute Street<br>Cardiff<br>CF10 5LE |
| <b>Contact number</b>              | 07719058507                                                           |
| <b>Website</b>                     | <a href="http://www.skillcert.co.uk">www.skillcert.co.uk</a>          |
| <b>Principal/CEO</b>               | Phil McGeachy                                                         |
| <b>Provider type</b>               | Independent learning provider                                         |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | Not previously inspected                                              |
| <b>Main subcontractors</b>         | None                                                                  |

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of delivery, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous new provider monitoring visit 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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