

Skills Training UK Limited (STUK)

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

14–17 February 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Traineeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have a strong commitment to provide training opportunities to trainees with low educational attainment and from areas of deprivation.
- Trainees successfully move into sustained employment, further training and apprenticeships.
- Apprentices develop high levels of practical skills and behaviours and make valuable contributions to their employers.
- Partnership working with employers and local authorities ensures that the provision meets local, regional and national needs and priorities very well.
- The planning of training is highly effective in providing flexible programmes that meet the needs of employers, trainees and apprentices.
- Support for trainees and apprentices is highly effective and provides trainees with confidence and ensures that apprentices gain skills and make good progress.
- Trainees and apprentices benefit from good resources in training centres and use online materials that help them develop their independent learning skills well.
- Trainees and apprentices are respectful of each other and staff, enjoy their learning and display positive attitudes and behaviours.
- The feedback on trainees' and apprentices' written work does not make it clear what they need to do to improve.
- Targets set for apprentices focus on unit completion and not on the skills they need to develop to make good progress.
- For a small minority of apprentices, their understanding of modern British values and awareness of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism are not consistently strong.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Skills Training UK Ltd (STUK) is a national provider of traineeships and apprenticeships with its head office in Wembley, west London. It provides apprenticeships across a range of sectors throughout England. All apprentices are employed and training is undertaken on employers' premises. The traineeship programme delivery centres are in Ealing, Hounslow, Brent, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Brighton.
- The majority of apprentices are adults and approximately half of all apprentices and trainees are female. The large majority of apprentices and trainees are from a White British ethnic heritage. Of the 2,139 apprentices on programme, the large majority study business improvement techniques at level 2. Of the 671 trainees on programme, the large majority are in retail and business administration. Two subcontractors provide training for 95 apprentices mainly in food and drink and hospitality. A study programme for 16 learners prepares them for traineeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that targets set for apprentices focus on the skills they need to develop in the workplace in order to pass individual units and to make good progress.
- Ensure that all tutors' and trainer assessors' written feedback clearly identifies what trainees and apprentices need to do to improve.
- Ensure that all apprentices have a good understanding of modern British values and of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have a very clear vision and ambition for the business and are determined to ensure that this is realised. The senior team has created a culture of demanding excellence from all employees and they ensure that high expectations permeate throughout the organisation. They carefully consider the strategic direction of STUK and implement development plans effectively. For example, to achieve their commitment to working with a range of hard-to-reach young people, the senior team has developed its traineeship programmes and ensures that trainees have access to several well-resourced study centres across the country.
- Senior leaders have carefully designed training programmes to meet the needs of trainees, apprentices and employers very well. Senior leaders have established effective partnerships with local authorities, Jobcentre Plus and a large range of employers to ensure that they meet local and national needs and priorities.
- Senior leaders, governors and staff promote a highly inclusive ethos where trainees and apprentices behave responsibly and learn in a culture of tolerance and respect for others.
- Links with employers are particularly strong. Senior leaders are heavily involved in the planning of learning programmes to meet the needs of local communities and businesses. For example, the 'fast-track' traineeship on offer in the Wolverhampton centre ensures that trainees who want to work in the digital industries can prepare for apprenticeships. Leaders have recognised the need to develop a study programme for those who are not ready for a traineeship. As a result, senior leaders are in the process of developing a course in collaboration with local schools to meet this need. However, it is too early to judge its effectiveness.
- The management of the traineeship and apprenticeship programmes is good. Managers provide staff and subcontractors with detailed reports that ensure that they have a clear understanding of the performance of programmes on a monthly basis.
- Staff track the progress of trainees and apprentices effectively. As a result, trainees, apprentices and employers have a good understanding of the activities needed in the workplace to make good progress and improve their vocational skills and knowledge. Good practice is particularly evident for apprentices in business improvement, where they apply project management techniques to monitor their own progress and development.
- Most staff who observe lessons provide reliable and accurate judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In joint observations, most observers can identify the key strengths and key areas to improve. However, in a small minority of observation records, the written feedback does not match the grade. This means that the associated action plans are not precise in identifying improvements. Despite this, performance management is effective in identifying suitable support and development for the large majority of staff.

- Careers education and information, advice and guidance are good. Specialist staff ensure that all trainees and apprentices are aware of the options available to them and support them in making well-informed choices about their next steps. As a result, the majority of trainees progress positively and apprentices have a good understanding of the career paths available to them.
- Arrangements to manage subcontracted provision are effective. Managers have good oversight of the quality of subcontracted provision. They provide support to subcontractors to develop both delivery and quality improvement practices. As a result, the quality of provision within subcontractors is good.
- The self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of the provision and includes the views of staff, employers, apprentices, trainees and subcontractors. A comprehensive improvement plan provides senior leaders with a good understanding of the key areas for improvement. Staff use this effectively during regular training sessions.

The governance of the provider

- Two experienced, external, non-executive directors challenge the senior leaders. They are effective in holding senior leaders to account about the performance of the provider.
- Governors are highly supportive of the social and ethical vision of the leaders and are proud of the positive impacts that result from the work that the provider is completing.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Managers maintain an accurate and up-to-date single central record of the checks made during the recruitment of new staff. Safe recruitment policies and practice ensure that risks to learners are minimised. Designated safeguarding officers have had appropriate training and ensure that all staff have introductory and refresher training on safeguarding. All members of staff have completed appropriate training on the 'Prevent' duty.
- The majority of trainees and apprentices understand the risks of extremism, how to spot the indicators of radicalisation and whom to speak to should they feel unsafe. Apprentices and trainees receive useful safeguarding information during induction and posters in training centres inform learners about whom to contact should they have any safeguarding concerns.
- Health and safety have a very high priority for both apprentices and trainees. Business improvement apprentices, when considering changes to practices and processes in the workplace, regularly discuss implications for health and safety. Trainees on work experience know how to keep themselves safe, wear appropriate protective clothing and demonstrate safe working practices. Suitably qualified staff check the health and safety of workplaces and work placements systematically.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors and trainer assessors are appropriately qualified and use their vocational knowledge and experience well to plan learning that is relevant and interesting. As a result, the vast majority of apprentices and trainees make at least the progress expected of them and are prepared well for their next steps in learning or work.
- The vast majority of trainer assessors use learning activities with apprentices to develop their learning and skills effectively. For example, they use questioning techniques skilfully to initially assess apprentices' understanding of various management styles and use further probing questions to obtain more detailed responses. As a result, management apprentices could explain how an autocratic management style was not effective as it restricted collaborative thinking and working.
- Trainees and apprentices enjoy learning and the large majority are keen to learn new skills and apply them in their workplace or work placement. For example, apprentices on digital marketing programmes enjoy using their skills to create high-quality, eye-catching images and use social media platforms well to promote new products.
- Trainees and apprentices use a good range of resources in training centres and in the workplace to develop their skills. For example, information and communication technology (ICT) apprentices use virtual space on computer servers to develop their networking skills. Apprentices and trainees benefit from using online learning resources to support their independent learning. They broaden their awareness of job-search activities, performance management, rights and responsibilities, and management techniques.
- Staff provide highly effective support for individuals, both inside and outside the classroom. For example, trainees who have dyslexia use coloured overlays to help them in classroom activities, and individual coaching sessions support trainees who require one-to-one tuition. Tutors on traineeship programmes use a range of challenging learning activities that help to develop and consolidate English and mathematical skills which are vital for employment and everyday life.
- Tutors and trainer assessors develop apprentices' and trainees' understanding of equality and diversity effectively. Tutors develop trainees' awareness of gender stereotypes well as part of their human values work.
- The good initial assessment of trainees and apprentices ensures that they are on the right programme at the right level and have appropriate support. However, in a few instances, tutors do not make sufficient use of the information to plan individual learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Trainees and apprentices are well prepared for learning, and are punctual and highly motivated. Trainees and apprentices demonstrate a positive attitude to learning. They take pride in their work, are well behaved and demonstrate respect for both their tutors and their peers. High levels of tolerance are evident at learning centres throughout the country.

- Trainees and apprentices become more confident and articulate during their programmes through the good support they receive from their tutors and trainer assessors. They enjoy their work. For example, business improvement apprentices clearly and succinctly put forward their ideas for improving the shuttling of furniture between six different manufacturing plants to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Trainees learn how to answer interview questions with assurance and confidence.
- Trainees and apprentices are knowledgeable about equality and diversity and demonstrate their increased awareness of equal opportunities legislation when working with customers or with colleagues from a range of cultural and religious groups. For example, apprentices can explain the importance of respecting the views of others and have an informed awareness of the need to accommodate cultural and religious practices when dealing with customers.
- The vast majority of trainees participate in high-quality work placements. They demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety and know how to stay safe at work and the importance of wearing protective clothing. They are confident about whom to contact at the centre to report any concerns. They have developed an increased awareness of how to stay safe on the internet through their thorough induction to the programme and reinforcement by staff during learning sessions.
- Trainees and apprentices enhance their skills and increase their employment prospects. For example, team-leading apprentices are ambitious and keen to progress within their organisations and to develop their managerial skills. Trainees enjoy their work placements and look forward to the prospect of sustained employment. As a result, apprentices take on more responsibility in the workplace and trainees are keen to impress employers.
- Trainees benefit from purposeful, work-related learning activities, including work experience in a range of sectors. Managers have established bespoke programmes with local employers that enable trainees to develop their understanding of the types of roles and employment prospects available to them. As a consequence, a significant number of trainees have gained employment.
- A range of personal and specialist support provides trainees with useful help for their health and well-being. As a result, they develop a greater understanding of healthy eating, drug- and alcohol-related issues and sexual health.
- Trainees and apprentices benefit from good information, advice and guidance and have sufficient access to impartial and independent careers guidance to support them in making informed decisions about their careers and future progression.
- Most trainees and apprentices can explain the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation and what they have learned from cases reported in the media. However, a small minority of apprentices have an insufficient understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and of British values, which affects their ability to contact staff at the organisation should they have concerns in relation to their own and client safety in the workplace.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The achievement rates for the vast majority of apprenticeship programmes in 2015/16 are good. The achievement rate for apprentices completing within agreed timescales improved significantly in 2014/15 but has declined in 2015/16. Current apprentices make good progress.
- Outcomes for trainees have improved since the introduction of the programme in 2014/15. The programme targets areas of economic decline, mainly in London and the South East and the Midlands. A significant majority of trainees progress into sustained employment, further training or an apprenticeship, often from starting points that include low educational attainment, and low self-esteem and confidence.
- The achievement rate for level 3 apprentices undertaking level 2 functional skills in ICT is low due to the variability of apprentices' knowledge and understanding. Staff recognise this and extra support is now available to ensure individual progress. Data provided by managers indicates that this is now having a positive impact on achievement rates.
- The large majority of apprentices and trainees produce work of a high standard. Employers often use projects undertaken by apprentices to improve their business processes and production methods. Most trainees and apprentices pass their functional skills test in English and mathematics at the first attempt.
- The vast majority of tutors and trainer assessors make good use of initial assessment to plan learning sessions. Consequently, the vast majority of apprentices and trainees make good progress from their starting points. The very large majority of apprentices remain in employment at the completion of their apprenticeship.
- The monitoring of achievement of groups by gender, ethnicity, disability and age is systematic. Currently, there are no significant variations in the achievement of different groups of apprentices.

Apprenticeships

Good

- STUK provides intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in: improving operational performance (business improvement techniques); improving quality of operations; management; team leading; social media and digital marketing; information technology; software; web and telecoms professional; hospitality; and business administration. The vast majority of apprentices train at intermediate level in improving operational performance. Apprentices in subcontracted provision train in the food and drink and hospitality sectors. The provision meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- The vast majority of apprentices receive good on- and off-the-job training. They receive their training in classrooms located on their employer's premises and undertake highly relevant tasks designed to teach valuable techniques and processes that they can apply in the workplace. For example, they assess work processes and tasks using manufacturing principles and techniques to be more efficient and to eliminate waste. As a result, apprentices enjoy their learning and appreciate the up-to-date training they receive. Employers value the contributions that apprentices make to their business.

- Partnership working with employers is very good. Employers are involved effectively in planning training required to deliver apprenticeship programmes. Trainer assessors work flexibly with apprentices to meet their individual needs and work patterns. As a result, employers gain well-skilled and knowledgeable staff who become valued employees that contribute effectively to business performance. For example, an employer could detail the cost-benefits to their organisation as a result of changes introduced by apprentices to production processes.
- Trainer assessors have high expectations of each apprentice. Consequently, apprentices produce a good standard of work and the vast majority make at least the progress expected of them. Most apprentices become more confident and articulate during their programmes. For example, apprentices on business improvement techniques programmes present their projects and discuss the outcomes with senior managers in their businesses. As a result, significant numbers of apprentices have progressed to supervisory and managerial positions.
- All apprentices benefit from the very good support given during frequent and comprehensive visits by their trainer assessors. Useful contact between visits provides additional support to help apprentices improve and make progress. Apprentices develop a range of work-related skills during off-the-job training that meet industry standards very well. The tracking of apprentices' progress is generally good and is particularly good for business improvement apprentices who are monitored effectively using techniques they apply in the workplace.
- The focus of target-setting, for a minority of apprentices, is on completing units and, as a result, apprentices and employers do not have a clear understanding of the personal skills needed to make effective progress. The majority of trainer assessors provide good verbal feedback to apprentices and give clear guidance on how apprentices can improve their performance.
- The support for apprentices' functional skills development in English and mathematics is good for those who do not have an appropriate GCSE at grades A*–C. As a result, the achievement rate for apprentices who achieve their functional skills at the first attempt is good. However, there is insufficient challenge for a minority of apprentices to develop their English and mathematical skills outside these functional skills sessions.
- Apprentices work in high-quality, safe working environments, demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety, and work safely. They have a sound understanding of equality and diversity. For example, during a discussion about working effectively with employees from different cultures and religions, apprentices could explain the importance of respecting the views of others and the need to accommodate these differences in their daily lives and in the workplace.

Traineeships

Good

- Trainees receive basic employability training, are encouraged to develop their English and mathematical skills and undertake work placements. Most placements are of high quality and are in transport, warehousing, retail and business administration.

- Planning and management of the key requirements of the traineeship are good. Programmes are personalised and appropriately structured to meet the needs of trainees, many of whom have had disrupted education and come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The majority of trainees make at least the progress expected of them and a significant minority make good progress. Most move into sustained employment or further learning and a few begin an apprenticeship programme.
- Teaching and learning are good and as a result, the large majority of trainees produce good standards of work. Tutors are well qualified and have high expectations of trainees. They deliver sessions that challenge trainees to develop employability skills, such as time management and how to work effectively with others. For example, trainees could demonstrate enhanced communication skills through the use of positive body language.
- Effective partnerships with a range of local employers provide high-quality work placements for the majority of trainees. This helps trainees to develop a range of relevant skills and competencies. For example, trainees on the retail programme develop their employability skills in a range of local businesses and national retailers. Employers value the contribution that they make during their work placements and, as a result, most trainees progress into full-time employment.
- Assessment of learning is generally good. Tutors use a range of relevant assessment methods, including directed questioning, observation of practice and peer assessment to check understanding and gauge the progress of trainees. Verbal feedback is constructive and encouraging, which helps to reinforce key aspects of learning and develop trainees' confidence. For example, in an ICT session, the more competent trainees provided detailed explanations to their peers on how to write various spreadsheet formulas.
- Staff provide useful information, advice and guidance to trainees who benefit from detailed careers advice that prepares them well to make job applications and attend interviews with prospective employers.
- During functional skills sessions, most trainees develop and improve aspects of their English and mathematical skills well. As a result, the majority make the progress expected of them. Tutors use a range of innovative and mostly challenging learning activities, including online learning, which helps to develop and consolidate the skills that trainees need in both employment and everyday life. For example, they are able to calculate the cost of sale items using percentages and many are able to write formal letters to potential employers.
- Rigorous assessment of trainees at the start of their programme is effective in identifying individuals' additional needs and the support required in the classroom and in their work placements. Consequently, support for trainees is very good. Systems for tracking and monitoring trainees' progress are robust. All staff ensure that trainees identified as 'at risk' of not achieving receive the appropriate support to enable them to continue with their learning.
- Most trainees have a good understanding of equality and diversity and British values. In employability lessons, they can explain the importance of being able to respect the views of others, and the need to adhere to rules and regulations, both at work and in society in general. For example, during a discussion, trainees could explain the importance of showing tolerance and respect to people of other faiths and cultures, and how employers need to accommodate employees' religious practices, particularly during prayer times.

- All trainees have a good awareness of safeguarding. They know what to do if they have any concerns and demonstrate an awareness of the potential risks associated with using social media, cyber bullying and posting personal information online. Most trainees are aware of the dangers posed by extremism and radicalisation. For example, trainees could explain a recent incident where a local man was radicalised through accessing extremist material online.
- In a few instances, targets set by tutors do not focus on learning objectives and skills that trainees need to develop. Written feedback to trainees does not identify spelling and grammatical errors, and consequently, trainees do not routinely develop their English skills from their submitted work. As a result, a minority of trainees do not fully understand the progress they are making.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54414
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,088
CEO	Martin Dunford
Telephone number	020 8903 4274
Website	www.skillstraininguk.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	12	1,677	34	416	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	317		354		671			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	NCAL Ltd Phoenix4Training							

Information about this inspection

The director of continuous improvement and compliance, as nominee, assisted the inspection team. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Bob Hamp, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ken Merry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ian Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Kanwaljit Dhillon	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Aslett	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Clark	Ofsted Inspector

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