

C T Skills Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates 16–19 August 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Learners enjoy their training and a high proportion achieve their planned qualification and/or employment goals.
- Learners make good progress and develop their personal, social and employability skills well; apprentices make valuable contributions to the work of their employers.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are generally good and motivate learners to engage with learning and achieve further.
- Senior managers and governors have managed change very effectively and used robust performance management to improve rapidly the quality of delivery and outcomes for learners.
- Managers use productive partnership working well to meet local and national skills priorities and ensure that a good proportion of learners successfully gain sustained employment.
- Learners are well behaved, treat each other with mutual respect and feel safe while at the training centres or workplace.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- In a minority of cases, tutors do not effectively individualise learning, develop all learners' English and mathematics skills beyond their prior attainment or prepare apprentices effectively for examinations.
- Traineeship attendance rates for classroom-based sessions are low.
- Achievement rates for childcare and health and social care apprenticeships require improvement.
- Short-term targets are not consistently set so that they are both meaningful and fully useful to all learners.

Full report

Information about the provider

- C T Skills Limited is an independent learning provider serving the East Midlands. It has two training centres, one in Nottingham and the other in Derby. The company provides traineeships, apprenticeships and classroom-based programmes. Typically, two thirds of learners follow adult learning programmes, with the large majority of the remainder enrolled as apprentices. Five overarching training strands are offered: health and social care, services for business, logistics and the built environment, hairdressing and barbering, and employability skills development.
- At the time of the inspection, the company had 703 enrolled learners. A very small amount of the provision is subcontracted to one of three providers. In addition, the company provides training to employers on a full-cost basis, though this was not subject to inspection.
- Compared to other English regions, the East Midlands has a low rate of 16-year-old students achieving five GCSEs at A* to C. Unemployment in the East Midlands is below the national rate, though particularly within city areas the rate can be significantly higher.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that teaching staff routinely:
 - use the outcomes of learners' initial assessments and prior attainment to plan and deliver individualised learning programmes that fully meet each learner's development needs
 - set short-term targets that are detailed, challenging and measurable so that learners can easily assess their progress and know what further actions they must carry out to progress further
 - ensure that all learners develop their English and mathematics skills beyond their current level so they improve their employability and personal effectiveness
 - fully prepare apprentices for their examinations so they succeed at the first sitting
 - use personalised teaching, learning and assessment strategies to overcome obstacles to progress so that all childcare and health and social care apprentices achieve.
- Identify and address the individual reasons behind trainees' non-attendance at classroom-based sessions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers have taken strong and effective action to reverse the decline in outcomes for learners in 2014/15. They have introduced a highly effective performance management process that includes a revised learner-focused quality assurance of taught sessions. Managers make good use of clear, informative data reports on learners' progress, lesson observations and stakeholder views during their regular performance reviews with individual staff. An effective emphasis by managers on supporting staff to make sustained improvements in the quality of their teaching has been successful. In a few cases, managers have terminated staff employment where staff were unable or unwilling to make the required changes.
- Leaders promote the company's core values very effectively to all staff. The values place at the heart of the company the importance of meeting the needs of employers and learners, with priority given to learners with significant barriers to progression such as low prior attainment, self-esteem or underdeveloped employability skills. All staff have an excellent understanding of the values and the part they play in promoting them through their work with learners.
- Leaders and managers have developed well-established cooperative partnerships with employers, other providers and external bodies such as the local enterprise partnership (LEP) and Nottingham City Council. As a result, the provider offers a coherent curriculum and high-quality training that effectively addresses local priority skills needs and provides learners with good progression routes into employment. Staff recruit and carefully place learners into employment and work related placements that are right for them and offer realistic opportunities for continued training and employment.
- Where leaders work with subcontractors to offer specialist qualifications, they manage the relationship and delivery performance very effectively. Managers ensure that chosen subcontractors operate in line with the company's core values. They provide support where necessary to develop subcontractors' staff, for example to ensure that they understand and undertake their safeguarding roles in respect of learners. Managers robustly monitor learners' progress and achievement in regular meetings using the same approach and performance reports as for in-house staff reviews.
- Leaders have developed a clear strategy to support and inspire learners to develop their mathematics and English skills. They expect staff to encourage and support learners to achieve qualifications in these skills above the required level for their programme. However, despite the clear strategic importance given to English and mathematics, not all tutors confidently develop learners' skills within the context of particular job roles or to the highest possible standard.
- Leaders and managers know their provision well. Self-assessment is evaluative, highly self-critical and broadly accurate. The associated report's evaluation of adult programmes undervalues the significance of the good levels of confidence and enthusiasm to move into employment that adult learners develop.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board of directors and senior managers set and effectively monitor the implementation of the company's clear strategic direction. Directors have closely aligned strategic and operational objectives with local and regional priority needs while avoiding unnecessary or inefficient duplication.
 - The chair of governors knows the provider exceptionally well and provides rigorous challenge and scrutiny. Directors make good use of their network of contacts to compare their performance outcomes with other providers. Plans to strengthen further the governance arrangements, through the introduction of more governors, have not yet been realised.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Leaders and managers have established a strong culture of safeguarding. They have appropriately updated policies and procedures in line with the 'Prevent' duty. All staff participate in relevant training that allows them to effectively identify and deal with any causes of concern. Staff know who the vulnerable learners are and implement quick and appropriate remedial action where needed.
 - Leaders ensure that the company meets statutory requirements in safe recruitment and broader health and safety so learners are safe in lessons and on employers' premises. Designated safeguarding officers maintain meticulous records of safeguarding incidents and good links with outside agencies where onward referral is appropriate.
 - All learners complete online safeguarding training at the start of their programmes so that most have a sound understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, how fundamental British values and cultural diversity affect their lives and the importance of e-safety. Learners on the traineeship programme prepare a presentation on e-safety during their five-week induction that is particularly effective in developing their awareness of how to use the internet or social media safely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Tutors and trainers have good, up-to-date vocational knowledge and skills, which they use well to support and develop learning. They establish good working relationships with their learners and encourage them to extend their learning further; for example, by enabling them to work collaboratively during sessions and by helping them to develop their ability to work independently. As a result, learners rapidly increase in confidence, achieve valuable personal and employability skills and make good overall progress in achieving qualifications.
- Tutors often utilise a variety of interesting learning activities to directly engage learners and enable them to recognise the progress they are making. For example, in an English class for adult learners, the tutor used a simple and enjoyable game in which learners competed with each other to be the first to identify different types of verbal expression and write answers on the interactive whiteboard. Learners took part enthusiastically and praised each other's progress. As a result, they were able to reflect on how other people may interpret their use of language.
- Tutors and trainers use questioning well to check and extend learning, which challenges learners to achieve to a high level. In the better sessions, learners are encouraged to give detailed responses and critically evaluate how they can apply their learning to work related situations. In less effective classroom sessions, tutors do not sufficiently check that quieter learners are fully engaged in learning and making the expected progress.
- All learners benefit from thorough and frequent assessment that helps to motivate them and ensure that they have a good understanding of how well they are progressing. Trainers make good use of a variety of effective methods for recording the outcomes of assessment, for example digitalised recording of discussions that they upload into learners' electronic portfolio of evidence. Learners report that they value the opportunity to demonstrate competence using a variety of electronically recorded mediums, that they can review later as part of their independent learning to identify further development points.
- During classroom sessions, tutors place a strong emphasis on effectively raising learners' understanding of equality, diversity and British values. Tutors are particularly adept at drawing upon naturally occurring opportunities to highlight issues relating to these topics. For example, at the start of one session adult learners discussed the media coverage of the United Kingdom's success in the Olympic Games in terms of what it means to be British for them and their families.
- Classrooms at all centres are well equipped with information learning technology and offer pleasant learning environments. Wall displays provide good subject identity and vocational presence and help to celebrate learners' achievements. The appointment of a learning resources development manager, with a brief to assist the design and development of learning materials, has helped to ensure a consistently good quality of printed and visual media learning resources that tutors and trainers appropriately use to enhance learning.
- Employers support the planning and delivery of learning well. They are actively engaged in curriculum design and delivery and help to ensure that learners have good opportunities to develop their skills in the workplace.
- Staff assess learners' development and support needs comprehensively at the start of their programmes. They complete detailed individual learning plans for learners using the outcomes of effective diagnostic tests, including an assessment of learners' current levels of English and mathematics skills. However, not all tutors and trainers consistently use this information well enough to plan and subsequently review learners' learning needs.
- Tutors and trainers regularly and frequently monitor learners' progress and provide good verbal feedback that assists them to improve and consolidate their learning. However, written feedback is sometimes too cursory and learners struggle to identify what actions they need to complete so they can improve further. The associated short-term targets are not always precise and personalised enough to allow learners and teaching staff to monitor progress accurately.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics skills is effective overall. Adult learners, in particular, develop good listening and speaking skills, though this is less successful for those following vocational programmes. Apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills well, but not all trainers effectively assist them to achieve beyond the apprenticeships requirements. A minority of trainees do not make the planned progress in English and mathematics skills development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Staff have high expectations of all learners and effectively raise learners' aspirations to help them develop a productive attitude to learning. Learners talk enthusiastically about their learning programmes and usually apply themselves well to their studies. Tutors and learners work well together to ensure productive learning environments at the two training centres. They treat each other with mutual respect and tolerance.
- Learners of all ages receive good impartial careers information and advice when they first apply to join a programme. This ensures that they select the most appropriate programme to support their career aims. Advisers carefully manage the help so that prospective learners gain an understanding of available options beyond those offered by the provider. The subsequent guidance received by learners while on programme is helpful and allows them to make informed and realistic decisions on their future options.
- Many adults have not participated in learning for a considerable time and report major improvements in their motivation because of programme attendance. They take pride in completing classroom tasks and can identify enhanced personal self-confidence and esteem that enriches their lives. Tutors often act as role models to reinforce the benefits of undertaking personal development that encourages learners to continue with their studies. Adults develop a good understanding of the personal conduct, including acceptable attitudes to others, which they will need for employment. Tutors and trainers keep learners well informed as to employers' expectations of personal appearance, such as the acceptance or otherwise of tattoos and body piercing, which helps them target their future job applications.
- Learners produce a good standard of completed work alongside the development of a useful range of employability skills. Unemployed adult learners often overcome substantial obstacles to learning so that they can achieve their employment aims. For example, a long-term unemployed adult learner, requiring significant individual and childcare support, achieved relevant English, mathematics and vocational qualifications that have allowed her to pursue a chosen career in painting and decorating.
- Workplace-related vocational skill development for apprentices is good and effectively supports their career plans. They become more valued employees through the application of their newly acquired skills and knowledge within the workplace. For example, an apprentice's suggestion on changing the available office layout has resulted in enhanced staff communications and better use of storage space. Trainees demonstrate good personal and social skill development that helps them to secure and maintain employment on completion of their programme.
- All learners have an adequate or better understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They state that they feel safe and protected when participating in training in the centres, at their work experience placement or workplace. Learners know how to protect themselves from the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices' understanding is good. Adult learners' understanding of what constitutes fundamental British values is variable but generally appropriate. Trainees have a particularly good knowledge of both the values and how to apply them to their personal lives and work.
- Standards of behaviour at both training centres are high. Tutors appropriately challenge learners' poor punctuality that instils an appreciation of its importance in securing and sustaining a job. Attendance rates on adult programmes are acceptable but require improvement for classroom session attendance on the traineeship programme. Managers have recently improved their response to trainees' unplanned non-attendance, but this has yet to have a significant impact.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- The large majority of current learners are making good or better progress towards achieving their targets and qualifications. This is a substantial improvement from the decline seen in previous years and in part reflects the remedying of failings in the externally delivered testing arrangements. In addition, the rigorous application of robust performance management has also led to major improvements in learners' outcomes.
- A high proportion of adult learners on short programmes for the unemployed achieve their qualification and do so within their planned time. They enjoy their learning and exhibit good improvements in employability skills development when compared to their starting points. This is particularly the case within employability training tailored to address employers identified recruitment needs, which is valued by employers and very successful in helping unemployed adults gain work.

- The large majority of learners make good progress in developing their English and mathematics skills as compared to their starting points. Overall achievement of qualifications is good. A relatively high proportion of apprentices undertake and attain English, mathematics and/or ICT (information and communications technology) at a higher level than required by their framework. In addition, intermediate apprentices receive useful preparation for study at level 3. The proportion of apprentices who achieve a mathematics qualification at their first examination attempt is not high enough. Tutors do not sufficiently challenge all traineeship learners and adults on vocational programmes to develop their English and/or mathematics skills so that they attain to their full potential.
- Achievement for the significant majority of apprentices is good, though for childcare and health and social care apprenticeships it requires improvement. Apprentices make good gains in vocationally relevant skills and can articulate well the challenges they experience at work and how they can successfully deal with them. For example, an advanced early years childcare apprentice was able to explain in detail how an enhanced understanding of a child's specific learning difficulties allows her to provide effective support using a wide range of different communication strategies. A good proportion of apprentices sustain full-time employment or move to a higher-level apprenticeship.
- The large majority of traineeship learners attain a good level of skills and knowledge within classroom taught sessions. Trainees' success in achieving vocational qualifications is good. They rapidly move to challenging work-related activity external to the provider. For example, trainees quickly enhance their knowledge of health and safety and acquire relevant construction industry recognised qualifications. This successfully allows trainees, who usually have a very limited work history, to take up work experience places with specialist building companies. Overall, a majority of trainees progress into employment or apprenticeship training.
- Managers use data well to evaluate the performance of learner cohorts. There are no significant differences in the achievement and progress of different learner groups compared to their starting points. The current small number of advanced apprentices achieve at a much higher rate than those at the intermediate level. Managers identify learners who are looked after and those leaving care but do not collect and analyse data on this specific group.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

are good

- Currently, 246 adult learners are enrolled on short part-time employment programmes, mainly in health care, construction, customer service and business administration. Learners study additional specialist qualifications if they are seeking employment in specific sectors. For example, those wishing to work in the health care sector undertake a first aid certificate, while those wanting to work in catering can study for an appropriate level of food hygiene qualification.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the provision is relevant to the needs of local adults by establishing very productive working relationships with Jobcentre Plus and local employers. For example, during the inspection a major national retailer successfully used the provider for the training and recruitment of adults referred by Jobcentre Plus. Adults attending programmes such as these commented on how they were highly motivated by the guarantee of a job interview on successful completion of their programme.
- Learners significantly improve their communication skills and personal presentation; this is very effective in helping them in job interviews. In one session, learners conducted a role play of a mock job interview based on a real life job description and then assessed each other's performance. They demonstrated high levels of confidence, both as interviewers and as interviewees. Learners stated that they found the experience extremely helpful in preparing them for future employment interviews.
- Many learners have significant barriers to learning but feel well supported and develop confidence in their own abilities. Learners are comfortable in asking their tutors and peers for help. They work well in groups and provide good support for each other. As a result, they develop good communication and team working skills. For example, in a business administration lesson a learner lacking confidence in the use of computers mastered basic word processing techniques following help from other class members.
- Tutors create a good rapport with their learners. They encourage and inspire them to settle into their studies and make good progress. In most lessons, tutors plan teaching strategies well and use a variety of appropriate learning activities to interest learners and develop their employability and interpersonal skills. However, not all tutors fully exploit the available information on learners' starting points to plan a good enough level of challenge, especially for those adults who have relevant previous experience and knowledge.

- Vocational tutors have good subject knowledge and effectively promote learning by using industry-specific scenarios. They skilfully share their industrial experience and enthusiasm with learners and provide good verbal feedback to help them improve. The written feedback received by learners on completed work does not always provide sufficient detail to guide them in what they must do to achieve further. Too many vocational tutors do not sufficiently develop all learners' English and mathematics skills after they have started their programmes.

Apprenticeships

are good

- CT Skills Limited provides apprenticeships in business administration, customer service, accountancy, team leading, management, hairdressing and barbering, passenger carrying vehicle and warehousing, health and social care and early years educator. Currently, 383 apprentices are in training with the large majority being intermediate apprentices. In addition, a further eight apprentices, aged over 19 years, are following accountancy apprenticeships at level 4.
- Apprentices work diligently towards completing their qualifications – a result of the well-planned on- and off-the-job training, assessment sessions and the good support they receive from trainers and employers. Between assessments, apprentices regularly extend their learning through independent study using additional resources and research.
- Trainers plan training and assessments thoroughly. This is usually in conjunction with employers who supportively provide a wide range of work tasks for apprentices to complete, enabling them to apply theory to work place practice.
- Apprentices develop higher levels of competence appropriate to their work through their training and professional interaction with colleagues and customers. Health and social care and early years educator apprentices learn how to adeptly use different communication strategies to interest and stimulate children and young people. They develop good customer care skills that they utilise well to manage parents' and carers' expectations and sensitively deal with enquires. This contributes to apprentices successfully maintaining employment and progressing to more responsible job roles.
- Employers value the improved contribution that apprentices make in the workplace and confirm that the skills demonstrated enhance their employees' proficiency and job role effectiveness. For example, a business administration apprentice has become more confident in contributing to team meetings and been instrumental in making key decisions on the company's office relocation. Hairdressing apprentices routinely develop very good client liaison skills and are encouraged to build their own client base at the salon as soon as they are competent.
- Apprentices following English, mathematics and ICT functional skills programmes make steady progress in developing these skills and can effectively utilise them in the workplace. For example, hairdressing apprentices improve their mathematics skills by constructing discount and promotional offers and taking payment for hair services. Learners who already hold the required functional skills qualifications to complete their apprenticeship do not routinely improve these skills beyond their starting points. Trainers do not always adequately challenge apprentices to improve their skills so that they can better apply numbers and concepts in their job roles, improve their handwriting, spelling and use of written grammar.

Traineeships

are good

- Thirty-eight trainees attend one of the two training centres of which 28 are 16 to 18 years old and the remainder are aged 19 or older. Work placements are mainly in construction, retail, accountancy, childcare, hairdressing and barbering. Managers recruit most learners from areas of economic and social deprivation within the East Midlands.
- Trainees benefit from undertaking a well-designed employability programme that prepares them for work by effectively building their confidence and self-belief. Job interview practice helps trainees to develop appropriate interpersonal skills and an understanding of the effects of their body language on others' behaviour. Trainees complete a good range of self-directed learning projects specifically designed to allow them to research career aspects that are of interest to them.
- Trainees participate in high-quality work placements that allow them to develop good sector-specific skills. For example, four trainees are currently working with a company that specialises in building complex building foundations on major construction sites throughout the country. Managers and tutors make very effective use of pre-enrolment discussions with trainees about their preferred career path to arrange work placements that learners can attend as soon as they are work ready. The majority of trainees progress to their planned outcome that is usually an apprenticeship or employment.

- Employers work very flexibly with tutors so trainees can attend the hours and days that fit in with their individual programme and personal needs. For example, where a hairdressing and barbering trainee lacks confidence, tutors initially place them in a small salon before gradually introducing them to the demands of working in larger hairdressers. A large national retail employer offers weekend placement working so the trainees can experience and fully appreciate the demands of employment within the industry. Staff closely monitor trainees while on their placements, respond quickly to non-attendance and support them to ensure that they are able to complete their work placement.
- Trainees have a particularly good understanding of British values and talk confidently about the importance of accepting differences in others and the rule of law. They enthusiastically give examples of how this helps them to succeed at work and when learning in the classroom. In a session to develop persuasive language communication skills, learners considered British values as part of an exercise to discuss and debate the laws and culture they would want on their own island. This allowed them to reflect on the importance of what makes a society that they would feel comfortable living within.
- In the classroom, tutors effectively develop most trainees' English, mathematics and employability skills. They make good use of appropriately challenging questioning techniques and activities to develop successfully trainees' thinking and reasoning skills. A small minority of trainees are making slow progress in the development of their English and mathematics skills, mainly because they are not attending the classes. Not all trainees on work placements have enough opportunities to reinforce and adequately extend their English and mathematics classroom learning by practising their application within a vocational context. Tutors do not always set trainees sufficiently individualised short-term targets so they can track their success.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,969
Principal/CEO	Alex Ford
Website address	www.ctskills.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	9	206	19	40	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	96	179	32	75	1	8		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	28		10		38			
Number of learners aged 14–16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Grace-Leyland Education ■ First Intuition ■ The Development Fund 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Nigel Bragg, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Gadfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Philip Pullen	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Groves	Ofsted Inspector
Jean Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector

The internal quality assurance manager, as nominee, assisted the above 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 students 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.

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