

Somerset Skills & Learning CIC

Independent training provider

Inspection dates

27–30 June 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have highly productive partnerships with a large number of local and regional stakeholders. As a result, the curriculum meets the needs of learners, local communities and local enterprise partnerships well.
- The vast majority of learners make good progress and complete their courses.
- Most teachers plan interesting and purposeful activities in lessons, which support and challenge learners to work hard and make good progress.
- Managers and employers work well together to match apprentices' skills and ambitions with business needs, resulting in sustained employment.
- Teachers know their learners very well and support them effectively to overcome barriers to learning.
- Adult learners benefit from highly positive and transformative learning experiences which improve their health and well-being.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance throughout their courses and a high proportion progress to higher levels of learning.
- In a small minority of sessions, teachers do not challenge learners sufficiently well to make the progress of which they are capable.
- While the attendance of learners has improved, it is not yet high enough.
- Despite managers' focus on the 'Prevent' duty, not enough learners are aware of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Somerset Skills and Learning (SSL), which has recently become a new community interest company (CIC) after operating as part of Somerset County Council, delivers a wide range of education services to young people and adults across Somerset. It operates from 11 dedicated training centres across the county, as well as providing workplace learning with employers.
- Around 10,000 learners participate in community and family learning and external qualification courses across Somerset and in neighbouring counties. In addition, SSL runs apprenticeships in childcare, supporting teaching and learning in schools, health and social care and business administration, and accountancy, hair and beauty and construction through subcontractors, as well as a very small number of traineeships.
- Somerset is predominantly a rural county; while it is generally prosperous, some pockets of significant deprivation exist. Although the proportion of unemployed people is low, attracting jobs and apprenticeships remains a priority for the county.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the small minority of weaker lessons by ensuring that teachers include activities in lessons which challenge learners to extend their skills and knowledge further.
- Collate and analyse attendance data rigorously to identify why some learners do not attend. Devise effective, targeted strategies to improve the attendance of these learners.
- Make learners fully aware of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism by improving the range and quality of activities used to increase learners' understanding of these risks.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders are passionate about raising the aspirations of learners and are determined that this is realised. Leaders know their company well, have high expectations of learners and staff, and are clear about the majority of strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. During the recent formation of SSL as a CIC, they have successfully maintained and improved the quality of the provision so that the vast majority of learners succeed in their studies.
- Partnership working is strong. Leaders have forged close bonds with a large number of partners to ensure that they meet local and regional priorities and work closely with local enterprise partnerships to develop the curriculum. For example, links with a nearby training association have led to the development of English for speakers of other languages courses for local workers, enabling them to become more effective in their jobs. A digital awareness project with Jobcentre Plus helps learners to gain technology skills that help them to move into employment. The delivery of technology and employability courses with a local housing provider supports unemployed tenants' return to work.
- Leaders and managers have established a community learning partnership which effectively supports progression, widens participation and focuses on new learning opportunities for county residents who are disadvantaged.
- Leaders and managers manage subcontractors well and provide good support through a wide programme of staff development and rigorous monitoring of learners' progress. Links with employers are very strong, and managers and employers work closely together. Employers are overwhelmingly positive about the flexibility of company staff and the highly personalised support they receive. Communication with stakeholders is effective and employers use and appreciate the online systems for monitoring learners' progress.
- Managers who observe learning accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and use the outcomes of their observations to organise effective training. Staff development is extensive, has a clear impact and results in teachers improving their skills.
- Managers do not make effective use of all available data. A lack of focus on timely achievement rates does not help managers to fully assess the strengths of the apprenticeship provision. Staff do not calculate attendance figures correctly and, as a consequence, managers and directors lack a clear picture of learner attendance trends.
- Performance management processes do not focus sufficiently on identifying improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Managers do not link appraisals of teachers to learners' outcomes or set specific targets to improve teaching, and as a result, managers are unable to monitor implementation and impact.

The governance of the provider

- Directors know the organisation well, share in the creation of its mission, vision and direction, and hold leaders and managers to account effectively. They receive regular informative reports on the progress of learners and understand what improvements are

required. Meetings focus strongly on the effectiveness of actions that managers are taking to improve the quality of provision, and directors support and challenge leaders and managers well.

- Suitably qualified and experienced directors bring different and pertinent strengths to the organisation. Directors are clear about the strategic direction of SSL and help leaders to shape this. They are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and learning and work with senior leaders to take appropriate action when quality becomes poor.
- Directors do not always receive accurate data within reports, which inhibits their effectiveness and challenge to leaders around some areas of quality improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Learners are safe at all sites, and feel safe. All learners receive useful safeguarding information during induction and know how to report concerns. Staff manage and monitor learners' access to the internet carefully to minimise their chances of being exposed to inappropriate material, and filtering systems are in place to safely manage computer systems.
- Managers conduct all necessary recruitment checks for new staff, and effective safe recruitment policies and practices are in place. All staff, including directors, have completed relevant training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Safeguarding officers have strong links to relevant external agencies and use these well when needed. Directors receive regular reports about safeguarding and 'Prevent' concerns.
- Managers oversee safeguarding arrangements at sub-contractors and employers, and these are effective. Employees of partnership organisations undertake safeguarding training with SSL if required. Employers and sub-contractors value the focus that SSL puts on safeguarding, and the support that they get if there are any safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that learners have a basic understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks of radicalisation and extremism but need to provide further support and guidance to develop learners' confidence further.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and assessors have high expectations of learners and set high standards. Learners benefit from well-qualified teachers and assessors who are highly experienced and knowledgeable in their subject and have vocational expertise. Teachers use this occupational knowledge well to inspire and motivate learners. As a result, the vast majority of learners make at least the progress expected of them and are well prepared for their next steps in learning and employment.
- The vast majority of teachers and assessors plan interesting and purposeful lessons which support and challenge learners to work hard and make progress. For example, in a lesson on speech and communications, learners on a childcare course presented their research on using simple games, rhymes and songs to develop children's diction. The learners took these strategies back to their workplaces and put them into practice when working with children.

- Teachers and assessors support learners well. Learners value the individual attention that they get from their teachers, and online resources help them to work independently, both in the home and the workplace. As a result, learners who fall ill or behind with their work easily catch up. Apprentices with significant disabilities have longer timescales to complete their courses.
- Most teachers and assessors manage lessons well to ensure that learners enjoy their learning, are challenged and make progress. Learners develop helpful computer skills, often for the first time, which support their learning well. Teachers integrate effectively aspects such as English, mathematics and technology skills, and diversity, relating these closely to the respective subject. For example, in bakery classes, learners interpret recipes and use weights, measures and proportions to produce different breads from around the world.
- Teachers and assessors provide informative feedback to learners that shows what they have done well and what still needs further practice, and reinforce this with clear explanations of how to improve work. For example, in painting classes, learners critique each other's work closely, enabling them to evaluate their technique and progress very well.
- Most teachers and assessors use a good variety of methods to check learners' understanding. They use homework, peer assessment, questioning and discussion skilfully to explore learners' understanding of a topic and to reflect on what they have learned and the new skills and techniques that they are developing.
- In a small minority of sessions, tasks set by teachers are not interesting enough to engage all learners. Teachers do not check learning well enough and feedback does not give sufficiently detailed guidance on how learners can improve their work further. Target-setting is vague and not focused sufficiently on improving learners' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners improve their employment prospects through the development of skills and knowledge that also better prepare them to make a strong contribution to living in modern Britain. They develop good skills and knowledge, and improve their confidence and sense of worth. Learners surprise themselves with what they can achieve, often from very low starting points. Learners describe teaching and learning as transformative and say that learning helps to relieve stress.
- Learners enjoy their learning and are more independent and self-assured as a result of their studies. Parents value the benefits of being able to help their children with homework through improvements in their English and mathematics skills. Learners benefit from increased social interaction, and enjoy developing new skills and taking on new challenges. The vast majority of learners benefit emotionally from broadening their social circle beyond their usual family and friends, particularly those who live in isolated rural communities.
- In all centres, learners are polite and considerate, and demonstrate respect to each other and their teachers. The inclusive environment reinforces and celebrates diversity; learners enjoy their studies and work well together, respecting differences in culture and ethnic heritage. For example, apprentices in health and social care develop good care skills, treating clients with dignity and respect. However, a small minority of learners are not

encouraged to develop their understanding of cultures and communities beyond their own immediate experience.

- Teachers help learners to develop good study habits and skills by encouraging independent research, wider reading and skills practice in the home and the workplace. Adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities develop high levels of confidence and good skills for independent living. Learners arrive well-prepared for learning and follow the teacher's instructions closely. As a result, most lessons move at a brisk pace and learners progress quickly.
- Learners receive good information, advice and guidance throughout their courses. As a result, retention for younger learners has improved and the proportion of learners who leave their courses early has reduced. Learners, many of whom have been away from education for a long time, start their studies with low expectations but quickly gain the enthusiasm to study further. Most learners on traineeships and apprenticeships have a very clear idea of how they want their career to progress, and those achieving apprenticeships at advanced level often receive pay rises and gain additional responsibility or promotion on completion.
- Learners on traineeships benefit from relevant and valuable work experience or employment-related activities. The appointment of a placement officer has helped them to obtain additional placement days to build their confidence and develop their communication skills. These opportunities support their learning and personal goals, and help most to progress successfully to an apprenticeship or employment. Learners gain valuable experience in real work environments. This experience increases their understanding of the vocational choices they have, and helps them to make informed decisions about their future.
- Most learners develop their English skills well within classes. Teachers use speaking and listening activities effectively to improve learners' verbal communication. Most teachers reinforce correct grammar and spelling to improve learners' written work. They provide helpful advice such as proofreading to help with sentence structure and punctuation.
- Teachers develop learners' mathematics skills well by using everyday employment or life settings. For example, in lessons, learners calculate credit scores or pension payments. Teachers ensure that learners understand the correct language and conventions of mathematics, and help them work through any incorrect calculations to enable them to see where they have made mistakes.
- Learners feel safe and know how to stay safe. Teachers and assessors reinforce good and safe working practices during classes and take learners' welfare seriously. Apprentices in social care and supporting teaching and learning in schools understand how to keep their clients and children safe.
- Although learners have a basic understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks of radicalisation and extremism, teachers and assessors do not help sufficient learners gain a deeper understanding of how to protect themselves and others. Learners receive guidance at induction but teachers do not sufficiently develop these themes in class or the workplace. The learner handbook introduces all learners to information about safeguarding and 'Prevent' but does not give learners sufficiently clear guidance about the actions that they can take if they have concerns about extremism or radicalisation.
- Learners' attendance, particularly of apprentices, is not yet high enough to ensure that all

make the progress that they are capable of. However, attendance has improved over the past year and managers are now more able to track this with the introduction of new electronic recording software.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners, who make up the bulk of provision, is high and above the rate for similar providers. The vast majority of learners following community and family learning programmes achieve their personal goals and targets, and most progress to further learning or employment. Staff successfully reintroduce learners to study, a large proportion of whom have had a poor experience of, or limited success at, school. Most enjoy their learning and complete their courses.
- Achievement rates for apprentices are high and are well above national rates and those for similar providers. The vast majority of apprentices at all levels and in all age groups complete their programmes in the time they were allocated. Employers value the skills that apprentices gain from the apprenticeship programme.
- Most learners following a traineeship programme progress to an apprenticeship or employment and a high proportion of apprentices progress to higher qualifications. For example, apprentices at a local children's nursery progressed from intermediate to advanced level and are now on undergraduate courses, having become senior staff in their organisation.
- Learners who start their studies without a GCSE at grade C or above in English or mathematics take courses which are well suited to their starting points, and most achieve their qualifications. Over half of those who take GCSE courses achieve A* to C grades, which is well above national rates. The large majority of those who take functional skills qualifications in English or mathematics achieve their qualifications.
- Managers have a good overview of the achievement of different groups of learners and take a systematic approach to monitoring this throughout all subcontractors. As a result, the large majority of male and female learners achieve as well as each other, and most of the very small numbers of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as White British learners. Where managers identify gaps in achievement, such as with the performance of a small number of older male apprentices, they act quickly to rectify negative trends.
- Most learners and apprentices make good progress from their starting points and develop their skills and knowledge well. They produce work of a good standard and gain skills that will allow them to move into further learning or employment. For example, in art, learners showcase their work in local and regional exhibitions, and in music, learners audition for local bands and groups.
- Managers are not fully aware of the destinations of a small minority of their learners, and as a result, they are not able to analyse how well courses suit these learners' needs or career aspirations. They track the destinations of learners on community learning partnership projects very well but do not analyse the next steps of learners on other programmes in as much detail.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Good

- Around 800 adult learners take qualifications, mainly at levels 1 and 2, which include functional skills, and GCSE English and mathematics. SSL works with around 40 different community organisations to deliver community and family learning courses, which take place in 11 training centres throughout the county and at a range of external venues within communities across Somerset.
- Learners develop social and study skills very effectively. This includes many who have not previously participated in education or training since leaving school. Learning helps them to relieve stress and improve their well-being. It gives them pride in what they are doing and improves their job prospects.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that adult learning programmes prepare learners well for progression to further learning, qualifications or employment. Managers work well with local community organisations to respond to the needs of learners, engaging those who are disadvantaged and improving their digital skills, financial literacy and communication skills. Learners value the wide variety of courses available.
- Learners benefit from dedicated, caring teachers who are highly skilled and have good subject knowledge. They receive good individual help from teachers within well-planned lessons.
- Teachers help to remove barriers to learning, enabling learners to progress well. As a result, learners enjoy lessons, are keen to learn and recognise the benefits related to learning. They develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem.
- Most teachers use probing questions to check learning, and provide challenging tasks to ensure that learners achieve their potential. For example, one learner in a dough-making class successfully baked a five-plait loaf, and a student in a mathematics class calculated a perimeter by adding up complex fractions without using a calculator.
- Learners develop effective independent learning skills and are encouraged to think for themselves before seeking help. For example, adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in a practical cookery class read recipes using words, pictures and widgets, and then proceeded to successfully weigh out the ingredients on their own.
- Most teachers constantly reinforce, consolidate and check learning so that learners retain what they have been studying. Teachers encourage learners to work out why they have made mistakes, which helps them to solve problems and consolidate learning. Detailed target and feedback sheets ensure that learners know what to do to improve.
- Learners work well together and respect each other. They benefit from an inclusive learning environment that promotes mutual respect. They feel safe and are willing to share not only tips and ideas in order to improve their studies, but also their concerns about work.
- In a small minority of sessions, activities are insufficiently challenging and learners do not make adequate progress. In these sessions, teachers do not have high enough expectations of learners.

Apprenticeships

Good

- SSL provides intermediate, advanced and higher apprenticeships to approximately 340 apprentices in childcare, health and social care, business administration and supporting teaching and learning in schools, and, through subcontractors, accountancy, hair and beauty and construction. The vast majority of apprentices train at intermediate or advanced levels, with a small number working at higher level. The provision meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Managers and highly supportive employers have developed a growing range of high-quality workplace opportunities for apprentices, which effectively match apprentices' ambitions with the needs of the business. This results in sustained employment, more responsible roles and career progression for apprentices.
- Apprentices benefit from effective initial guidance and support which identifies the most suitable programme for their needs. Good careers advice and guidance throughout the programme results in high levels of employment and progression to higher levels of training. Teachers use their industry experience well to ensure that apprentices develop the skills they need for employment or progression to higher study. For example, a business administration apprentice started on a traineeship and progressed to a level 2 apprenticeship and full employment, as well as an employer-funded level 3 qualification.
- Apprentices develop their vocational and personal skills well. They develop good independent learning skills which allow them to take responsibility for their own progress. Many take additional qualifications which help to broaden their experience and develop specific competencies required for their work. As a result, they develop confidence in their job roles and better leadership skills, which employers value.
- Apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills well and understand how to apply these skills in the workplace. Employers value their improved knowledge.
- Apprentices value the effective, individual support that they receive from assessors and enjoy seeing the progress that they are making. This supports their learning, engages them well and keeps them on the course.
- Apprentices feel safe and know how to report concerns. They work in safe environments and know how to keep themselves safe in the workplace. They understand how equality impacts on their working environment and discuss how to work effectively with those of different cultures and religions, as well as safe working practices. For example, a workshop for apprentices working in the early years sector discussed the emotional strain of explaining recent terrorist incidents to young children, and identified play with animals to provide emotional comfort.
- Managers do not monitor the progress of individual apprentices closely enough to identify and support the small minority who are making slower than expected progress.
- A minority of teachers do not question apprentices effectively enough to challenge and extend learning or to encourage apprentices to reflect on their own learning, work

practices and progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1220982
Type of provider	Independent training provider (CIC)
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	10,000
Principal/CEO	Susie Simon-Norris
Telephone number	01823 663000
Website	www.sslcourses.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	3	590	12	191	0	46	0	9
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	80	101	34	96	1	29		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	6		1		7			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Accountancy Learning Ltd L&F Inspired Hair Academy Ltd Accountancy Learning Ltd Channel Training Ltd Strode College Train4All Ltd Reminiscence Learning Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership Somerset County Council							

Feed Avalon CIC
Autism Community Network CIC
Somerset Care and Repair Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of curriculum and business development, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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

Andy Fitt, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Tracey Griffin	Ofsted Inspector
Deborah Summers	Ofsted Inspector
Terri Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Gemma Baker	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017