

The Education and Skills Partnership Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

13 to 16 August 2019

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

- Directors and managers have acted swiftly and decisively to deal with the weaknesses identified at the monitoring visit.
- The board of directors provides a clear focus and direction for the organisation, and it effectively challenges managers to raise standards.
- Directors and managers maintain productive relationships with a wide range of key partners and employers to the benefit of the apprentices and adult learners.
- Directors ensure that staff are well qualified. Staff maintain up-to-date industry knowledge and expertise, which gives them credibility with employers.
- Tutors and learning and skills coaches plan and teach sessions that motivate and interest apprentices and adult learners.
- Apprentices greatly benefit from improved support and monitoring by learning and skills coaches. As a result, the large majority make good progress.
- Adult learners benefit from comprehensive aftercare support and guidance when they finish their courses.
- Adult learners and apprentices benefit from good impartial careers advice and guidance.
- The large majority of adult learners move into employment or further training.
- A high proportion of adult learners and apprentices achieve their qualifications in English and mathematics.
- The vast majority of adult learners and apprentices develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours that prepare them well for their next steps.
- Tutors do not always advise adult learners clearly enough about what they need to do to improve their English skills, particularly where they make errors in written work.
- Not all tutors and learning and skills coaches set learning goals that are specific enough to stretch learners and apprentices to their full potential.
- A very small number of employers are not fully engaged in all aspects of the apprenticeship programme.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Education and Skills Partnership Ltd (ESP), founded in 2015, originally provided adult education under subcontracting arrangements from several further education colleges. In 2017, ESP received public funding directly and was listed on the register of recognised apprenticeship training providers. ESP operates from several locations in England, including Ashford, London and Newark. Thirty-nine adults are currently enrolled, mainly studying short courses of up to two weeks in work skills and construction at level 1. The significant majority are referred to ESP courses by Jobcentre Plus, the National Careers Service, The Prince's Trust and the National Probation Service.
- Some 94 apprentices are studying at levels 2 to 5, primarily in leadership and management, team leading, retail management, customer service, and business administration. Around three quarters take courses based on the new apprenticeship standards, while the remainder follow framework-based programmes. ESP works closely with several high-profile employers. The number of apprentices who remain on programme has dropped following the collapse of several large employers and the transfer of some apprentices to another training provider, after the monitoring visit in July 2018.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Directors and managers should ensure that all employers are fully committed and involved in all aspects of the apprenticeship programme and particularly in the provision of off-the-job training.
- Tutors should provide clearer feedback to adult learners, with more specific guidance about how to improve their written English.
- Managers should share and disseminate best practice to all learning and skills coaches and tutors about how to set effective learning targets for individual learners. Targets should be consistently specific, demanding and ambitious enough to enable all apprentices and adult learners to reach their full potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders are ambitious for the organisation and have successfully pursued high standards. Directors and managers communicate their clear vision and values effectively across the organisation. Learners and apprentices, as a result, are keen to achieve and do well, and most succeed in meeting their goals.
- Directors and managers have responded swiftly to the areas for improvement identified during the monitoring visit. As a result, they have achieved substantial improvements, and the provision for apprentices and adult learners is good.
- Senior leaders are highly effective in evaluating and improving the work of staff, and in assuring the quality of provision. Directors have made significant investment in staffing and resources, which have assisted the improvements in staff performance. Managers make effective use of the thorough processes used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They provide insightful feedback to the learning and skills coaches on apprenticeship programmes to help them improve their practice. Additional training is provided to staff where required.
- Senior leaders understand their provision well and what they need to do to continue improvement. Based on effective self-assessment processes, managers' reports are self-critical and accurate. They make good use of learners' feedback to monitor the provision effectively. For example, they gather learners' feedback from each workshop, analyse it and use it to monitor the performance of individual learning and skills coaches.
- Directors and managers have improved the English and mathematics elements of the apprenticeship programme. They have developed and implemented a new English and mathematics strategy and have ensured that learning and skills coaches have updated their skills in these areas where necessary. As a result, significantly more students now achieve their functional skills qualifications, including at their first attempt. However, managers have not ensured that tutors are improving adult learners' English skills consistently well.
- Senior leaders monitor carefully the progress of different groups of learners. They clearly identify differences in achievement between various groups and have implemented effective strategies to close these gaps. For example, a retail course for female learners has been redesigned to meet the needs of women with childcare responsibilities more effectively.
- Managers have developed good operational links with employers in order to plan learning programmes that meet their needs. Managers have provided useful guidance to employers on the implementation of the new levy arrangements. Learning and skills coaches work closely with employers to plan and provide training, coaching and assessment. For example, they have developed an effective apprenticeship programme with a well-known supplier of beauty products, which is tailored to meet the company's business needs well. As a result, apprentices have developed skills in financial management and cost control, visual merchandising, commercial leadership, and improved their skills in team motivation. Managers have planned training well for adult learners to meet the employment requirements of a large local retail outlet.

- Directors and managers respond quickly and flexibly to requests for courses from Jobcentre Plus for adult learners who require training to seek employment. They establish 'pop-up' classrooms in a range of venues, including local hotels, conference centres and sports clubs. This responsiveness helps to ensure that the provision is located precisely where demand exists. Jobcentre Plus advisers value the ESP courses highly because they meet the needs of employers and learners well. As a result, attendance rates, achievement rates and rates of progression to employment are high from ESP courses.
- Managers ensure that careers advisers provide effective support to apprentices and adult learners for progression on to their next steps. For example, advisers supporting adult learners on the level 1 construction course ensure that they are well informed about the opportunities for progression into employment, and they guide these learners effectively.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is effective. The board of directors provides focused strategic direction for both the adult learning and apprenticeship provision. Directors are kept well informed about the performance of the business and the progress that apprentices and adult learners are making, through the detailed reports managers produce. These reports are scrutinised during the monthly board meetings, and directors challenge heads of department about the progress they have made.
- Directors have good links with employers and local job centres to meet the needs of learners and employers, as well as local and regional priorities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. They know how to report safeguarding concerns and who to contact. Learners know how to keep themselves safe at work, and they benefit from additional training to ensure their use of safe working practices.
- Directors have established comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures for apprentices and adult learners, which are implemented effectively. They have formed links with safeguarding organisations in the locations where training is provided, to ensure that they are kept well informed about regional safeguarding issues. Managers ensure that the required pre-employment checks are in place for newly recruited staff, and they follow appropriate safer recruitment practices.
- Staff are suitably trained in safeguarding. They have a good understanding of the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. Staff training is frequent.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Apprentices and adult learners enjoy their learning. For apprentices, the learning is highly relevant to their workplaces and job roles, while for adults it prepares them well to find employment. Learning and skills coaches have qualifications in teaching and assessment, and also extensive industry experience. They use these attributes well to plan and conduct sessions that motivate and interest apprentices. Tutors are appropriately qualified, and they provide good support to help adults learn. This good teaching,

learning and assessment are reflected in the high achievement rates for adults and the significantly improved progress of apprentices.

- Apprentices benefit from frequent visits and communication from their learning and skills coaches. In particular, they value their coaches' highly flexible approach to meeting individuals' needs and circumstances. Coaches provide support through good-quality work-place teaching, assessment and progress review visits. They also use high-quality online tutorials, including the opportunity for apprentices to share their experiences, very effectively, to support apprentices' learning. Adult learners receive good support from their tutors during their short vocational courses. They also benefit from follow-on support to help them refine their CVs and letters of application.
- Learning and skills coaches monitor apprentices' progress rigorously. They set appropriate timescales and mostly effective targets for apprentices to develop relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours and to complete their assignments. As a result of managers' close monitoring and support for coaches, the large majority set comprehensive learning targets for apprentices to achieve. The best of these identify what actions an apprentice needs to take to improve their knowledge, skills and workplace behaviours. Most of these targets are achievable and appropriately challenging. However, a minority of coaches do not yet support their strong oral feedback with sufficiently detailed written feedback so that their apprentices can review and tackle areas for improvement. As a result, a minority of apprentices do not make as much progress as they should.
- Apprentices produce work that meets or exceeds the requirements of the relevant industry and/or qualification; a significant proportion of their work is good. Business administration apprentices achieved excellent standards during professional discussions, gaining the first distinctions in the apprenticeship standard offered by one awarding body.
- Learning and skills coaches and tutors use a wide range of themes to enable learners to understand equality and diversity well. For example, during good induction training, apprentices cover the importance of British values, the right to learn and work without fear of bullying and harassment, and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. These themes are then woven throughout programmes and courses, and reminders are provided through a range of themed, pocket-sized cards.
- Staff assess apprentices' and adult learners' English and mathematical skills at the start of their programmes or short courses. Managers use this information well to plan learning for apprentices who need to take functional skills examinations. As a result, a good proportion pass these examinations at their first attempts. However, support for adult learners is not sufficiently well developed. Tutors do not use the results of assessments of their existing skills effectively in order to help adult learners identify appropriate targets for improving these skills. In addition, tutors do not always provide adult learners with enough written feedback to help them improve their English skills, where they make errors in marked work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices and adult learners have positive attitudes to their learning and are proud of their work. Apprentices are highly professional, confident, self-assured, courteous and respectful. Adult learners effectively develop their confidence and communication skills, and this improvement enables them to be successful learners and progress into

employment.

- Apprentices receive appropriate initial and ongoing impartial careers advice and guidance. As a result, the vast majority are able to make informed choices about the next stage in their career. Subsequently a significant proportion of apprentices know what options are open to them and have a clear career pathway.
- Adult learners benefit from comprehensive careers advice and guidance by qualified internal and independent external advisers. They are well prepared for their next steps and benefit from opportunities to undertake mock interviews and visits to employers' premises and building sites to experience the world of work. The aftercare activity provided by ESP is extensive and supports the learners into employment for up to six months following completion of their qualification.
- Tutors strongly promote and develop skills for employability in adults; this work underpins much of the activity within the vocational programmes. Through good relationships and liaison with employers and other partners, for example the national careers service, staff are enabled to identify and develop appropriate and relevant skills for employment, such as good attendance and punctuality. Adult learners attend well.
- Apprentices and adult learners have a good understanding of areas related to equality and diversity and British values and know how they relate to their work environment. For example, on construction courses, adult learners discussed local terms of endearment such as 'love' and 'duck' and how these might be perceived. They have also discussed sensitive topics such as mental health in men and in the construction industry.
- Tutors, learning and skills coaches and managers give high priority to effective health and safety practices. Apprentices and adult learners are well versed in the specific health and safety requirements of the industry within which they work, or are preparing to work, because of the good relationships ESP has established with employers.
- Adult learners with additional learning support needs benefit from good learning support. Experienced learning support staff help them to develop their skills to prepare them for moving into employment. Managers use a discretionary support fund effectively in order to provide support to learners who are disadvantaged, for example where they might struggle with transport or childcare costs.
- Not all adult learners develop or extend their English skills or appreciate the importance of these in developing their career. They do not always learn how to apply their skills in the context of the workplace.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The vast majority of adult learners make consistently good progress and achieve their vocational qualifications. A high proportion of adult learners who take qualifications in English and mathematics achieve them.
- The proportion of apprentices who are on target to complete within their planned timeframe has significantly improved, and the large majority of apprentices are now making good progress. Following highly effective actions by directors and managers, apprentices who had not finished on time are now making significantly accelerated progress.
- The vast majority of apprentices develop secure and substantial new skills, knowledge

and behaviours that enable them to be more successful at work, for example gaining promotion or taking on additional responsibility. The majority of apprentices produce work that meets or exceeds the standards expected.

- Adult learners are prepared well for the world of work and a high proportion of them benefit from gaining additional qualifications, for example the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card. This significantly enhances their opportunity to gain employment within the construction industry. The proportion of adult learners who enter employment or progress to further training is high, particularly for those learners in Kent.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Good

- Directors and managers have developed consistently robust and productive, localised partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, the National Careers Service, The Prince's Trust, the National Probation Service and employers in the areas where they deliver training. These relationships allow for responsive curriculum planning that enables adult learners access to localised employment opportunities.
- Managers design and deliver high quality, employment-focused programmes for adult learners. Many learners have been out of employment for considerable periods of time. ESP successfully gives them vocational, employability and licence to practice qualifications. As a result, their access to employment or further learning is significantly improved.
- Tutors use their skills and expertise effectively to plan a range of interesting and contextualised teaching and learning activities that stimulate and engage learners. For example, learners enrolled on a retail course visit local shopping outlets where they carry out 'mystery shopper' activities, examine floor layouts, window displays, signage and health and safety. As a result, they produce well-informed assignments and develop a good understanding of the vocational sectors they want to work in.
- Visiting employers give talks that raise learners' aspirations and motivation to be successful in their studies and ambitions to gain employment. Learners also develop a range of skills essential for their future employment, such as good attitudes to work, the ability to think through problems, and improved levels of confidence and social skills.
- Tutors and support staff monitor the progress of learners very closely and put in place swift intervention to support learners who are at risk of falling behind. They provide learners with one-to-one mentoring and support outside of the classroom to catch up, especially when they are facing personal challenges affecting learning. Consequently, most learners are motivated to catch up and complete their programmes.
- Teaching, learning and assessment resources are good. The modern business environment for the short course in construction, and the high-quality resources and materials, professionalises and adds value to the programme. For example, learners benefit from high-quality workbooks, have good access to information technology and specialist 'apps' which prepare them well for the CITB CSCS licence to practice assessment.
- Learners benefit from frequent oral and written feedback. However, this is not sufficiently

challenging for many learners, particularly those who already have experience of working in construction or those who need to improve their written skills. Tutors do not routinely correct errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, or sentence structure. As a result, learners do not understand what they could do better and where they need to improve their English skills.

- The standard of learners' work is appropriate to the type and level of qualifications they take. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of vocational and employability skills in their written assignments and discussions. They enjoy their courses and take pride in their achievements, valuing the useful skills that they develop. However, target setting is focused solely on the completion of units and tests, rather than on opportunities to develop further where appropriate. Tutors do not use learners' starting points in English and mathematics sufficiently well to set targets to improve these skills.

Apprenticeships

Good

- Directors and managers have improved the apprentice recruitment and induction process since the monitoring visit, and these are now good. Staff are now better able to ensure that applicants are appropriate for their courses. Initial and diagnostic assessments in mathematics and English are now introduced earlier, and they accurately identify applicants' areas for improvement. These assessments now take place prior to full enrolment to assist with early and improved target setting. Managers have also introduced an effective starting point assessment process to determine apprentices' skills and behaviours prior to undertaking any learning.
- Managers have strengthened their processes to ensure that new employers fully engage and commit to providing apprentices with their off-the-job training entitlement. Most apprentices benefit from a broad range of off-the-job training. Managers and learning and skills coaches have worked hard to ensure that employers provide enough working time for their apprentices to learn. Managers and coaches work closely with employers to ensure that they implement this requirement. Where employers are unwilling to recognise this requirement, they have been advised that ESP are no longer willing to take on their apprentices.
- Most coaches use the recently introduced e-portfolio effectively, to track apprentices' progress, so that a higher proportion are making at least expected progress compared to those sampled at the monitoring visit. Coaches set tasks in between workshops and visits, a change which successfully maintains the apprentices' momentum on the programme.
- Coaches provide intensive coaching to apprentices who are not making the progress they should be. They focus on specific areas of learning, making tasks manageable for apprentices who have high pressured jobs. They are flexible in arranging tasks around the apprentices' work.
- Most apprentices and their employers are well informed of, and prepared for, their end-point assessments, which are explained to them in the induction at the start of their programme. Many of the retail apprentices are designing innovative project proposals and are aiming for the highest grade at EPA.
- Employers are kept well informed about apprentices' progress through informal drop-in visits and more formal regular meetings and reports. Employers value the service provided by ESP. Employers fully recognise the skills their apprentices have developed.

For example, they recognise that apprentices are able to take better minutes at meetings, have increased confidence and are able to be challenged and extended more in their workplace.

- The vast majority of apprentices demonstrate the good skills and behaviours they have developed through their learning. As a result, they are better at their jobs and are ready for promotion or to take on more responsibility. For example, apprentices are more assertive when chairing meetings and managing potentially disruptive participants by using a range of problem-solving and decision-making tools. Apprentices can explain how they have changed the management of their teams from a directive to a coaching approach, with good results. They understand how to present themselves better to customers to increase business opportunities.
- Learning and skills coaches place a strong focus on developing apprentices' English and mathematical skills, even for those who qualify for exemptions but find their current working level is too low. For example, where an apprentice, with a level 2 certificate in mathematics, tests at a much lower level on their initial assessment, coaches will support such an apprentice to regain their skills to level 1 and on to level 2.
- Managers and learning and skills coaches have made significant improvements to the way they set learning targets. Apprentices are now making better progress because targets now seek to develop skills and behaviours rather than knowledge alone. However, managers recognise that not all coaches are yet using such targets effectively in order to develop these attributes in apprentices. A small number of coaches roll forward targets from one month to the next or paste and duplicate them.
- Learning and skills coaches give apprentices oral feedback on their work, which is generally detailed and precise. A small number of coaches give written feedback that does not give apprentices clear points for development or support them to work towards the higher grades of which they are capable.
- A small number of employers in older partnerships are not sufficiently involved in the planning, review and carrying out of off-the-job training. They rely too heavily on the workshops led by ESP. Directors and managers have recently put in place more robust agreements with employers and will stop working with them if they do not abide by these.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1270929
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1243
Managing director	Jason Hargreaves
Telephone number	01233 632 111
Website	www.esp-ac.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)	0	39	0	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+		
	0	18	3	42	0	31		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Information about this inspection

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

Judy Lye-Forster, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Shackleton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector
Pamela Wallace	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 2019