

Inspection of Smart Training and Recruitment Limited

Inspection dates:

17 to 20 July 2023

Overall effectiveness**Good**

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| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Education programmes for young people | Good |
| Adult learning programmes | Good |
| Apprenticeships | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Information about this provider

Smart Training and Recruitment Limited (Smart) is an independent learning provider based in Newport, on the Isle of Wight. Smart provides apprenticeships, adult learning programmes and traineeships across England. Smart's previous inspection was on 13 to 16 June 2017, when inspectors judged all areas of the provision to be good.

At the time of the inspection, there were 694 apprentices receiving training, including 37 who were on a break in learning. Apprentices study a very broad range of programmes from level 2 to 5. Programmes with larger numbers of apprentices include level 2 adult care worker, level 3 payroll, level 3 business administrator and level 5 operational or department manager. Most apprentices were aged over 19 years. There were 38 adult learners studying hair and beauty programmes at a salon in Eastbourne. There were 10 learners aged 16 to 18 studying traineeships, mostly in the Liverpool area. This programme is soon to end. There were no learners in receipt of high needs funding.

Smart does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners are highly motivated and committed to their learning. They rightly value the supportive and positive relationships they have with each other and staff. As a result, learners feel able to share their ideas, debate concepts and express their opinions, which helps them to develop professionally and enrich their characters.

Learners grow in confidence during their time with Smart, and they rightly take pride in their achievements. They enjoy the varied range of interesting techniques that tutors use in online and face-to-face lessons to explain concepts successfully. For example, tutors on the business administrator apprenticeship use examples from industry that enable apprentices to readily understand total quality management concepts. As a result, learners apply theoretical learning to working practice quickly, helping them to understand and remember key concepts.

Learners and their employers value the useful and relevant skills and knowledge they are successfully developing. For example, level 2 adult care worker apprentices learn about caring for clients with dementia when starting work in specialist facilities. Learners benefit from the enthusiasm of staff for their subject, illustrating key points from their experience. Consequently, most learners find their vocational lessons interesting, and their attendance is high. However, too many apprentices do not attend their English and mathematics lessons. As a result, they make slow progress in these subjects, which leads to them taking longer than planned to complete their apprenticeship.

Most learners understand their next steps in learning or work. Staff discuss with them the most apparent pathways open to them and provide helpful advice that supports their decision-making effectively. Consequently, learners are well prepared to progress and most move on to work or further study successfully. However, too often, learners do not have access to impartial careers advice throughout their programme. As such, they do not understand the full range of opportunities available to them.

Learners are well supported by caring staff, who understand their aspirations and needs well. Learners justifiably appreciate the inclusive and respectful behaviours staff exemplify, quickly adopting these values themselves. Consequently, most learners develop and grow as individuals, which enables them to play a fuller role in the workplace and wider society.

Learners feel safe at work, online and in lessons. They know how to identify potential signs of concern and are comfortable discussing them with staff. They confidently apply safe working practices relevant to their area of study. For example, adult learners on beauty programmes recognise the importance of a trusted individual knowing their location when visiting clients at home.

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

Leaders work closely with employers and other stakeholders to understand their skills requirements thoroughly. Leaders use this knowledge effectively to inform the content of the curriculum so that learners acquire the skills, knowledge and behaviours valued by employers. For instance, operations or departmental manager apprentices complete a management qualification valued by employers, which is beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship. Leaders carefully plan the order in which the curriculum is taught. This helps to ensure that learners acquire increasingly complex knowledge and skills over time. For example, human resource apprentices learn about employment law and then consider its application when managing staff grievances in the workplace.

Well-qualified and suitably experienced tutors explain concepts to learners thoroughly. They use a range of appropriate methods, such as showing video clips, directing learners to complete research activities and demonstrating practical activities clearly. For example, on the level 3 diploma in nail technology, tutors explain each stage in applying ambre nails methodically and clearly so that learners can then confidently apply the technique. As a result, most learners quickly acquire substantial new knowledge and skills and successfully complete their programme.

Staff use information they gather about what learners know and can do to tailor programmes to meet learners' needs well. For example, staff plan individualised work placements for trainees that enable them to develop their confidence in verbal communication. Staff have a detailed understanding of the additional needs of learners. They give effective support, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, they provide helpful one-to-one support for learners with dyspraxia. As a result, all learners, including those with SEND, participate in learning fully and achieve well.

Most tutors check learners' understanding thoroughly before moving on to the next topic. They ask probing questions, testing learners' understanding and helping them to commit newly acquired knowledge to their long-term memory. For instance, tutors check adult care worker apprentices' understanding of safeguarding by asking challenging questions about safer recruitment and whistle-blowing practices. Where tutors identify gaps in learners' understanding, they take prompt action to address them. For example, while observing level 3 beauty learners, the tutor reminded them that artificial lashes should be applied on top of the natural lash.

Leaders and staff work closely with employers to coordinate apprentices' learning successfully. Most apprentices are supported well by work-based mentors or managers, who provide them with valuable opportunities to apply and reinforce their learning at work. For example, payroll apprentices learn to use specialist software at work, while their tutors teach them the underpinning theory. Consequently, apprentices apply their learning in their job roles and quickly become valued members of the workforce. Tutors support apprentices very effectively by providing regular reviews and tutorials. Where apprentices fall behind, most tutors work

closely with employers to agree personalised plans that enable them to catch up quickly.

Tutors give learners helpful feedback that leads to improvements in the quality of their work over time. For example, tutors provide assessor coach apprentices with useful comments that help them to enhance their use of written and spoken English. Tutors also provide learners with helpful feedback to enable them to quickly consolidate their use of technical terms and academic theory. For example, tutors give team leader apprentices valuable feedback on how to apply theories of change management in the workplace. As a result, learners' work is to the expected standard, and they become increasingly fluent in their use of appropriate technical terms and theories.

Tutors help learners to prepare for their final assessments thoroughly. They plan learning activities thoughtfully to give learners the opportunity to develop and practise the skills and knowledge they will need in their assessments. For example, operational or departmental manager apprentices practise giving presentations online. This experience, together with the feedback they receive, prepares them well for their final online assessment. Tutors also ensure that learners understand precisely what they need to do to achieve higher grades. As a result, nearly all pass their final assessments, often at the first attempt, with many achieving high grades.

Leaders work closely with partners to create an ambitious curriculum for trainees, who often face disadvantage. Tutors tailor programmes to meet trainees' needs closely. They have high aspirations for trainees, which are frequently fulfilled. For example, trainees are respectful and professional when attending their work placement. If they are unavoidably delayed, they contact their mentor to let them know. As a result, trainees quickly acquire the attitudes and display the conduct valued by employers.

Leaders have created a clearly defined, high-quality adult learning curriculum, which enables learners to acquire the skills needed to work in the beauty industry. Leaders target funding purposefully to enable learners to access learning who may otherwise not do so due to financial, work or caring responsibilities. Tutors provide very effective tuition and support, which enables learners to quickly acquire the technical and personal skills needed to succeed in the beauty industry. As a result, nearly all adult learners pass their qualification and move on to further work or study successfully, with many becoming self-employed beauty technicians.

Staff use a range of effective techniques to successfully incorporate British values into the curriculum so that learners clearly understand their relevance. For example, when learning about data protection, team leader apprentices discuss the role and impact of legislation. Leaders skilfully promote a culture where mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and where successes are celebrated. Consequently, learners grow in confidence, develop their resilience to deal with setbacks and enhance their characters. Members of staff care about learners and frequently talk to them about the importance of physical health and mental well-being. For example, adult learners complete food diaries to help them reflect and make positive lifestyle choices.

However, leaders have not put in place a planned programme to ensure that all learners have access to opportunities to explore their interests and talents beyond the technical content of the programme they are studying.

Leaders communicate their high aspirations to staff effectively, and nearly all employees feel valued and are passionate about prioritising learners' development. Leaders ensure that staff benefit from a wide range of relevant training activities to maintain and develop their vocational and teaching skills well. For example, tutors on the level 3 payroll apprenticeship participate in regular training to inform their understanding of national insurance and tax regulations. As a result, teachers ensure that learners acquire the contemporary knowledge and skills required in industry.

Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and mostly take prompt action to rectify issues successfully. However, leaders have been too slow to address the limited progress of apprentices who need to achieve a qualification in English and mathematics. They rightly recognise the problem and have recently taken decisive action to adapt the curriculum and employ additional specialist staff. These measures have only just been applied, and it is too early to assess their impact.

Leaders have put in place effective arrangements for oversight. Board members have a suitable range of knowledge and skills. They receive relevant and useful information to aid their decision-making, and this enables them to ask searching and challenging questions, holding leaders to account effectively. For example, they challenged leaders regarding forecast learner recruitment numbers, leading to more realistic business planning. As a result, they support leaders successfully to sustain further improvements in the quality of training learners receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders place a high priority on safeguarding. Members of staff talk to learners about safeguarding during their induction and throughout their programme. Consequently, nearly all learners know the potential signs of concern and who to speak to for help.

Well-trained and suitably experienced designated safeguarding officers ensure that staff can identify where learners may need support. They take swift and appropriate action to promote and protect learners' welfare.

Leaders take sensible action to protect learners from the risks of radicalisation and extremism. However, too many learners do not understand the issues in their local area, which limits their ability to be vigilant for possible risks.

Leaders ensure that staff are suitable to work with learners prior to them commencing employment.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that apprentices attend their English and mathematics lessons and pass their qualifications within the expected time.
- Ensure that all learners have access to impartial careers advice and guidance so that they understand the full range of options open to them upon completion of their programme.
- Ensure that all learners have access to opportunities to extend their development beyond the technical content of their programme, including their understanding of the risks relating to radicalisation and extremism in the areas in which they live and work.

Provider details

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Unique reference number | 54434 |
| Address | Dinson House, 39-40 Quay Street Newport Isle of Wight PO30 5BA |
| Contact number | 01983 475006 |
| Website | www.smarttar.co.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Jan Hopkinson |
| Provider type | Independent learning provider |
| Date of previous inspection | 13 to 16 June 2017 |
| Main subcontractors | None |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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| Roland White, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Jo-Ann Henderson | His Majesty's Inspector |
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