

SSP (Select Service Partner)

Employer

Inspection dates		25–28 March 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate-4
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Inadequate-4
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is inadequate because:

- The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their qualification is too low.
- Too many apprentices are making slow progress and few complete their programme by the planned end date.
- The system of accepting employees onto apprenticeships lacks rigour; a high turnover of staff means that nearly half of those who fail to get their qualification do so because they leave Select Service Partner's (SSP's) employment.
- Teaching, learning and assessment support vocational training well, but other aspects of the apprenticeship programme, such as extending the knowledge of the better apprentices, require improvement.
- Inadequate reviewing and action planning for apprentices contribute to slow progress.
- The systems for helping apprentices develop their English and mathematics require further development.
- Quality assurance and improvement systems for ensuring a good level of performance have not, until very recently, been embedded in routine operations.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Apprentices develop good job-related skills.
- Apprenticeship programmes are carefully designed to closely link with normal working practices, which help apprentices and their managers understand and implement the programmes effectively.
- A well-structured training strategy gives employees good opportunities to progress in their learning, advance in the company and gain qualifications ranging from intermediate apprenticeships to foundation degree-level qualifications.
- Support from managers, training managers and specialist support assessors for the apprentices, and for the aims of the scheme and its expansion, is good.

Full report

What does SSP need to do to improve further?

- When recruitment to the apprenticeship scheme is restarted ensure that policies relating to the selection of apprentices are more rigorous in identifying those with real commitment and understanding of the process, and apply such policies consistently across the company.
- Ensure that tracking and monitoring systems fully enable managers and apprentices to understand the overall progress apprentices are making throughout their programme so they complete within the timeframes expected; make managers even more responsible for the success of their employees, not just for the numbers recruited.
- Ensure that routine discussions between assessors and apprentices on progress look at the whole of the programme so that all are clear about what has been achieved, what elements such as English and mathematics skills have to be achieved, and by when, and what skills apprentices still need to develop.
- Revise how apprentices are assessed at the start of their programmes in order to find out more accurately their abilities, particularly in relation to English and mathematics skills; make better use of that information to plan and set targets for learning and assessment which provide apprentices with appropriate support or challenge.
- Implement a more consistent approach in allowing time for employees to have off-the-job training and access to online records and training material.
- Improve support for the development of learners' English and mathematics skills, including more effective use of online resources, and ensure that English and mathematics teaching relates more closely to the subject matter of the relevant apprenticeship programmes.
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of trainers and assessors so that, when working with apprentices, they are more effective in promoting an understanding of those with diverse needs.
- Refine the action plan produced to deal with poor outcomes by determining more specific actions, with clear responsibilities, success indicators and timescales; ensure this plan is implemented in all aspects promptly, and is critically and routinely reviewed at a senior level within SSP.
- Fully implement a quality assurance system so that managers are more promptly made aware of success and failure, and take swift action to remedy any concerns.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
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- The proportion of apprentices who successfully completed their qualification in 2012/13 was inadequate. The rate was nearly half that achieved by other providers of similar apprenticeships. This follows a satisfactory small-scale trial of apprenticeships in 2010/11, then an enlarged programme in 2011/12 when rates declined to an unsatisfactory level. Just under half of those who leave the apprenticeship programme do so because they leave the company's employment.
- Far too few apprentices complete their qualification within their planned timescale. This is particularly the case in the relatively new management programme, where only 2% of apprentices finished by their planned end date in 2012/13. The progress of current apprentices is too slow, with about a third being behind their expected place in the programme.
- In the current year the proportion of apprentices successfully completing their programme has improved, although the rate is still too low.
- Apprentices who remain in employment and on their programme develop job-related skills well. Initial training, job aids such as 'how to' cards, workbooks and close support from managers

assist catering and hospitality apprentices to achieve good standards of service. Management apprentices benefit from supportive training in the workplace and from a helpful range of specialist training courses.

- Apprentices develop their personal and social skills well. In part this is a result of their employment in busy locations where interaction with a range of demanding customers is the norm, but it also reflects the routine emphasis by SSP managers on the need for good customer service. Competitions and other initiatives, such as running charity schemes, help all staff, including apprentices, to develop wider skills and confidence.
- The apprenticeship scheme is integrated very well with the company's own good training and development programme that gives employees the potential to progress from company qualifications, or intermediate apprenticeships, right through to foundation degree-level qualifications. Apprentices, particularly those taking the management qualifications, are increasingly successful in gaining promotion in SSP.
- The only significant gap in performance between different groups of apprentices is the regular underperformance of males when compared to female apprentices. Although SSP has not investigated this fully, it may reflect the slightly higher proportion of males who leave employment early compared to females.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning, and assessment require improvement and this contributes to the inadequate success rates across the organisation, although those success rates are also affected by an SSP strategy of offering apprenticeships too widely. The apprentices particularly enjoy and benefit from the vocational elements of their training, but aspects of planning, progress reviews, and the teaching of English and mathematics skills are not good enough.
- The apprenticeship programme is embedded well into the routine work of the company and provides vocational training which meets the requirements of the industry. SSP staff have developed good training materials and well-structured workshops which are part of the core training and induction for all new team members. Apprentices benefit from the strong health and safety focus which directly relates to their workplace. The company has also implemented an online portfolio for vocational training with appropriate supporting training materials; however, the access to and use of these resources are inconsistent across the organisation.
- Vocational training in the workplace is generally of a good standard and effectively supports the development of apprentices' skills and knowledge. Apprentices work in a wide variety of restaurants, cafés, bars, and bakery units where they gain good skills in, for example, food and drink service and customer service. Assessors make good use of their own occupational and vocational knowledge and skills to enhance the learning experience of apprentices. A few stores have too few managers and assessors to deal effectively with the number of apprentices.
- Apprentices understand the importance of the skills they are learning and the relevance to their work roles and progression. The best assessors are enthusiastic and encourage their apprentices well. A number of advanced apprentices derive satisfaction from researching and discovering knowledge for themselves; however, not all apprentices are encouraged to take enough responsibility for their own learning and assessments.
- Initial assessment provides a basic screening of apprentices' starting points and previous qualifications and experience. However, trainers and assessors do not always plan programmes for individuals which effectively use this information to provide challenge for the more able apprentices or take account of individual support needs.
- Assessment plans are very flexible to fit in with shift and workflow patterns. Assessment of apprentices' work generally meets the expected standards. Verbal feedback to apprentices is satisfactory; however, written feedback is not always clear on how apprentices can further develop their skills and knowledge. Workplace assessments are not always frequent enough to ensure apprentices make good progress.

- Action planning and target setting do not always help apprentices make the required progress. A small minority of apprentices' line managers are not always sufficiently involved in following up lack of progress. For many apprentices the non-completion of English and mathematics qualifications is a key factor in their failing to complete their programme by the planned end date.
- Quality assurance and improvement activities have not yet been effective in raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to a good level. Training and development to enable all staff to be fully effective in their roles as trainers and assessors has been insufficient.
- The training for apprentices who need additional help with English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Assessors and trainers do not routinely promote high standards of English and mathematics or reinforce the need for these skills within their vocational areas. Apprentices do not receive sufficient direction on how to use the good online resources for English and mathematics skills that are available. SSP training managers are working to improve this aspect of the training.
- Apprentices have a basic understanding of equality and diversity. However, trainers and assessors do not discuss the topic when opportunities naturally arise. Diversity themes are not always embedded into workshops, sessions or progress reviews to ensure apprentices' knowledge and understanding are fully extended.

Hospitality and catering

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement; outcomes reflect both this and current recruiting strategies mean that too many apprentices leave SSP before they have time to complete their qualification.
- Apprentices' practical work is good and meets the high standards set by SSP and its franchise partners. Apprentices' personal appearance is of a high standard and apprentices demonstrate good hygiene and health and safety when working.
- Apprentices provide good customer service and focus on providing high quality products, such as different types of coffees. They are enthusiastic, gain confidence from undertaking apprenticeships, improve their skills and value the opportunity to gain qualifications whilst at work.
- Assessors and managers are good role models for apprentices. They treat apprentices with respect and value them as important members of their team. Managers at all levels within SSP are very positive about the benefits apprenticeships bring to their business. Apprentices are well supported by frequent and effective contact with their assessor, including face-to-face meetings, email and telephone contact. This is particularly effective when the assessor and apprentice work at the same unit. Apprentices can approach or get help from other managers and team leaders who are very supportive.
- Insufficiently detailed planning of learning detracts from apprentices' ability to prepare themselves for future elements of their programme or accelerate their progress. For instance, individual learning plans have a single completion target date for all units and do not reflect the ability of learners, the job roles they undertake or any additional learning needs they may have; there is limited reinforcement of what is involved in Employees' Rights and Responsibilities, Personal Learning and Thinking Skills or English and mathematics skills. A small minority of apprentices have difficulties accessing their online plans. Opportunities are missed to alert an apprentice to when training or coaching might take place, reducing their ability to prepare, think and research appropriate learning resources in advance of the session.
- Ineffective use is made of information gleaned from initial assessment when planning programmes. Apprentices with relevant GCSE passes may still be required to repeat English and mathematics qualifications at the same level as their previous qualification. Small numbers of

apprentices find the work easy, but have no extension activities set. Others complete their initial assessment for English and mathematics skills but delayed feedback results in slow progress in starting their qualifications..

- Assessment of practical work is good. Verbal feedback is constructive and helps apprentices improve. The online portfolios are effectively used in most cases, but not all apprentices have sufficient understanding of these and a few rely too much on their assessor to direct them in their studies.
- The development of English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Recent changes encouraging apprentices to work towards achieving English and mathematics skills earlier in their programme have the potential to improve this aspect. However, there are limited arrangements to help apprentices develop weaker areas of their skills other than a general reference to online resources. Assessors do not effectively use opportunities to develop, or correct, written English and mathematics in the vocational context.
- Apprentices receive good information, advice and guidance which help them ensure the programmes matches their interests and ability. Good progression routes to higher-level learning are available for apprentices and these are well promoted within SSP. The support arrangements for apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities require improvement.
- Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily for apprentices. Apprentices respect each other's differences and SSP provides a welcoming environment for all employees, including creating opportunities for young people from difficult backgrounds. However, discussions on the everyday work of serving a wide range of customers do not always reinforce how to meet their diverse needs.

Business management Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Improvements needed in the teaching, learning and assessment of business management have been partly responsible for the fact that too many apprentices have failed to complete their qualification, although inappropriate recruitment to apprenticeship programmes has also had a significant impact on success rates. Advanced-level management apprentices are making significantly better progress in their programme and have far clearer ideas on how their course will help their advancement in the company than those on intermediate-level team-leading courses.
- Assessors are competent and highly experienced managers and they use their industry knowledge and expertise well to train and assess apprentices. For example, they stimulate professional discussions that encourage apprentices to reflect on how they can improve the quality of service they provide. As a result, apprentices produce creative materials such as a 'mastering the 5 steps in customer service' poster, which demonstrates the importance of building relationships with customers so that they feel motivated to return.
- All apprentices are producing work at a standard that meets the requirements of the course. Interesting and stimulating resources, for example 'How to' fact sheets, are directly relevant to the workplace so apprentices find them useful. All apprentices have access to online resources created by SSP to support their learning. However, advanced-level apprentices make better use of these resources as they more often have access to a computer at work, whereas this is not always so for intermediate-level apprentices.
- Assessors use coaching strategies well to help apprentices develop business skills to a higher standard. For example, apprentices analyse and learn from business strategies used by their company's competitors. However, not all apprentices have appropriately challenging individual learning plans based on their starting points and aspirations or are challenged to develop a wider range of transferrable employability skills.
- Apprentices receive very frequent, appropriate and timely information to support their learning. All apprentices see their manager/assessor at least once a week and most meet them daily to

ask questions to support their development. Excellent teamwork between assessors means that apprentices benefit from having access to several assessors; if one is away another is always available so the apprentice is able to progress without interruption.

- Apprentices do not receive enough support to develop their spelling and grammar, and many apprentices, lacking confidence in their English and mathematics skills, choose to leave this aspect of the course until the end which delays the completion of the programme. Several apprentices with dyslexia are not receiving the specialist support that would enable them to become independent apprentices and rely on a manager or assessors to proof read their written work or help them to spell words that they often confuse.
- Apprentices receive appropriate support to help them complete their course if they fall behind due to unexpected circumstances. Action planning includes, where appropriate, planned pauses in programmes until an apprentice is better placed to continue with their studies.
- Promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Apprentices are often unable to describe the needs of a diverse range of customers or demonstrate a deep understanding of how to ensure fairness and equality in the workplace, for example when scheduling work rotas or integrating a new member of staff into an existing team. Apprentices realise the importance of warning customers against ingredients that may cause allergic reactions, but they are less aware of the dietary needs of people from a diverse range of cultures, for example their Muslim colleagues fasting during Ramadan.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have shown ambitious vision in introducing a wide-ranging apprenticeship provision within SSP. Specialist training staff and operational managers at all levels have devoted a great deal of time and effort to make the apprenticeship programme a potentially very useful process for business and personal development. The opportunities for progression, building on the qualifications and skills gained, are very good. SSP has committed significant funds of its own to the programme to ensure that the offer is open to all employees, not just those who qualify for government funding. The turnover of apprentices is less than the turnover of other employees and this is an important feature for SSP.
- SSP staff have worked effectively with a qualification awarding body to ensure that the apprentice programme is closely linked with SSP's routine training and working procedures and managers and staff understand the relevance of the programme to their employment. The use of managers as assessors and coaches has great potential; in the best cases it helps apprentices well, but there is too much variation in the quality of this support. SSP has recently introduced specialist training for managers in their assessor role; coaching is already covered in routine company management development.
- Apprentices' managers have enthusiastically supported the aims of the programme and have been keen to achieve targets for the recruitment of apprentices from amongst their employees. However, SSP now recognises that this very open approach to recruiting has probably resulted in too many employees starting the programme who do not have the necessary commitment or ability to complete. This is now changing with a more rigorous selection system, and recruitment has rightly been suspended while performance is improved.
- SSP's directors have fully supported the aims of the scheme, providing the resources for its introduction and enlargement. Directors have provided appropriate scrutiny and challenge to the initial work, but it is only very recently that they and senior managers have also begun to examine the outcomes of the scheme. Directors and training staff are now properly reviewing the costs and benefits of a strategy that offers a year-long qualification to all employees in a sector where, traditionally, a high proportion of staff leave every year.
- The recent extension of apprenticeships into SSP's logistics areas has built well on the better features of the company's strategy. That programme has a more realistic approach in terms of numbers and support arrangements.

- Most aspects of the routine monitoring and development of the apprenticeship programme require improvement. Managers have belatedly realised that performance was not given sufficient attention during the scheme's expansion and are rapidly implementing changes to redress this, but the changes have not yet impacted significantly on the success rates or progress of apprentices.
- Until recently, data have not been used well enough to assess performance, including performance by different groups of apprentices; this has now changed. Specifically, more accurate and comprehensive information is used to identify individual apprentices' progress and highlight anomalies, leading, in most cases, to appropriate action to redress poor performance. Too much reliance is placed on reviewing progress against planned completion of the vocational programme, rather than also considering time on programme or significant elements, such as English and mathematics skills, that still need to be completed.
- An annual self-assessment exercise lacks rigour and does not lead to effective action planning for improvement. However, improvement is subject to normal SSP working practices, including very regular discussions and meetings between staff that critically review the workings of the apprenticeship scheme. Managers very regularly quality assure the working practices of their staff, including apprentices. These processes, and an increasing use of targets, are changing from a focus on implementation and expansion to reviewing and improving performance. A rescue action plan to deal with the inadequate outcomes produced in early 2014 requires further refinement of detail and dates, but it has the potential to ensure improvement.
- Routine performance management of staff is carried out effectively through the company's standard procedures. Insufficient attention is given to formally observing learning and developing staff in their specific role of supporting apprentices. Specialist support staff are an effective resource in providing regular help and advice to managers working with apprentices, although each member of staff has, at present, too high a case load.
- SSP's policies, values and staff behaviours are effective in ensuring equality and respect are a matter of routine in the workplace. For instance, a confidential helpline is readily available for those who feel they may have suffered abuse or witnessed malpractice. Where employees have personal challenges, such as health or mobility problems, reasonable adjustments are routinely made to ensure they can continue to work.
- SSP meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding apprentices. In addition, rigorous attention to health, hygiene, safety and security ensure that apprentices, along with all other employees, work in as safe an environment as possible.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

SSP (UK) Ltd

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-
Outcomes for learners	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Hospitality and catering	3
Business management	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Employer							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: N/A							
	Part-time: 218							
CEO	Kate Swann							
Date of previous inspection	March 2012							
Website address	http://www.sspcareers.com/uk/apprenticeships/							
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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Part-time	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	9	303	1	100	0	0	0	0
Number of learners aged 14-16	-							
Full-time	-							
Part-time	-							
Number of community learners	-							
Number of employability learners	-							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Contextual information

SSP is an operator of food and beverage outlets, under a variety of names and arrangements, in travel locations such as airports and train stations. They are an international concern; in the UK SSP has around 10,000 employees working in almost 400 units. Nearly all apprentices work in the units at travel locations, with a very small number elsewhere. Apprentices are usually supported by their immediate manager or assistant manager who also acts as a competently experienced assessor. A central team of six 'support assessors' provides guidance and support to those managers, to other senior managers and directors, and where necessary direct support to apprentices. The central team also provides management of the scheme, administrative, quality assurance and improvement support.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Andy Harris HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by SSP's National Apprenticeship Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on apprentices' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and managers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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