



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
Seetec Outsource Training and Skills
Limited

Report of an Inspection
in December 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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1. Context

Seetec Outsource Training and Skills Limited (Seetec) was founded in 1984 and operates from its head office in Essex in the United Kingdom (UK)¹. It offers a range of training programmes across the skills, employment, justice and health sectors in the UK and Ireland; the organisation has delivered apprenticeship programmes across the UK for a number of years.

Since September 2017, Seetec² has been funded by the Department for the Economy (Department) to deliver the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in the greater Belfast area of Northern Ireland (NI). The NI provision is managed by a full-time operations manager and an administrator, who are supported by the senior management team based in the UK. All of the apprenticeship training is delivered in the workplace by one full-time and one part-time tutor. A service level agreement is in place with another work-based learning provider for the delivery of the essential skills.

At the time of the inspection, 26 apprentices were registered across the professional and technical areas of aviation operations on the ground, logistics operations, social media and digital marketing, supply chain management and warehousing and storage. Seetec is also contracted to deliver driving goods vehicles and traffic office at levels 2 and 3, although no apprentices were registered in these professional and technical areas at the time of the inspection. Since the beginning of the delivery of the apprenticeship contract in 2017, the number of enrolments has remained low with only 56 apprentices registered, in total, across the range of professional and technical areas.

Most (77%) of the apprentices entered their programme with 4 or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics; most (88%) of the apprentices had attained GCSE English and mathematics at Grades A* to C. At the time of the inspection, the organisation reported that none of the apprentices were identified as having significant barriers to learning or were availing of additional learning support.

2. Views of apprentices

As part of the evaluation of the arrangements for care, guidance and support and for safeguarding young people and adults at risk, a significant minority of the apprentices took the opportunity to complete a confidential online questionnaire prior to the inspection; a small number of them provided additional written comments. The returns show that the apprentices found the induction to their programme useful, they have good access to learning resources and are given good feedback on how to improve. All of those who responded report that they are well supported and guided and feel safe and secure in the workplace.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for learners;
- quality of provision; and
- effectiveness of the leadership and management.

¹ The organisation has recently been restructured following the acquisition and subsequent amalgamation with another training company in 2017 and is now called Seetec Outsource Training and Skills Ltd.

² Programme registration data provided by the organisation at the time of the inspection is included in the Appendix of this report.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.
Outcomes for learners	Good
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Good

KEY FINDINGS

Strengths

- The outstanding retention (100%) and achievement rates (100%), in 2017/18.
- The mostly very good standards of work and occupational skills attained by the apprentices.
- The very good quality of the learning, teaching and training in the sessions observed.
- The effective links and partnerships developed with employers, schools, industry specialists and other key stakeholders, and the mostly positive feedback received from the employers interviewed about the quality of the training provided for their apprentices.
- The high levels of support including the pre-entry advice and guidance in place for the apprentices.
- The commitment by senior management, at both national and local level, to the ongoing development, growth and delivery of the apprenticeship programme.
- The robust management information systems in place to track and monitor the progress the apprentices are making in their learning and training.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the persistently low level of recruitment to the apprenticeship programme across all of the professional and technical areas.
- Continue to support the progression of apprentices onto the next stage of their learning and training.
- Monitor closely the retention rate of the current apprentices which is showing a downward trend, particularly at level 2.

5. Outcomes for learners

Across the professional and technical areas inspected, the standards of work and vocational skills attained and demonstrated by the apprentices are mostly very good. They display a good understanding of the knowledge required to allow them to progress in their learning and assessment. The standards of their written work are also very good. The apprentices observed in the workplace are able to complete documentation, use information and communication technology (ICT) to complete often complex tasks and process relevant information to a high standard; they are making good progress in their learning and development, relative to their prior levels of attainment.

In international trade logistics operations, a specialised apprenticeship pathway developed within supply chain management, the apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of the movement of goods, modes of transport, freight types and import requirements. They engage well in developing their understanding of freight forward and supply chain management activities in the workplace and are developing well their knowledge of international trade. As part of their engagement in the training the apprentices are provided with good industry networking opportunities within the freight forwarding network.

The apprentices in warehousing and storage provide effective customer service and competently carry out a range of warehousing and stock control activities. They have a good working knowledge of health and safety processes, particularly when handling hazardous materials.

In digital marketing, the apprentices develop well their ICT skills to engage effectively in creative website development. They can demonstrate clearly the development and application of digital skills along with innovative marketing techniques and research tools in order to build bespoke and optimised websites that support and promote well the business aims. In social media, the apprentices also develop well their ICT skills to use digital techniques and tools to build effective social media platforms that can impact across the business sector.

The retention rate for those apprentices who started their programme in 2017/18 is outstanding (100%). There is a need, however, to monitor the retention rate of the current group of apprentices which is showing a downward trend, particularly at level 2. The achievement rate for those apprentices who have completed, to date, is also outstanding (100%). The low level of recruitment to the apprenticeship programmes from the outset of training, however, is an area for improvement going forward. In addition, the rate of progression by apprentices from level 2 to level 3 apprenticeship training is too low and needs to be closely monitored.

Over the same period, only a small number of apprentices have needed to undertake essential skills training in literacy, numeracy and ICT; all those who completed achieved at level 2. A small number of the current apprentices require essential skills and are also completing them at level 2.

Employers interviewed reported positively that almost all of the apprentices are developing well their wider skills and dispositions and demonstrate positive work-related behaviours and attitudes in their job roles. The visits to the workplaces confirm that all of the apprentices demonstrate good levels of confidence, show initiative, can take direction well and are able to complete complex tasks independently. A small number of apprentices would benefit from further support in the development of these work-related skills.

6. Quality of provision

The curriculum offer includes a specialist range of apprenticeship programmes at levels 2 and 3 which are aligned mainly to the needs of the transport and distribution sector, as well as a social media and digital marketing programme at level 3. The employers interviewed report that the training programmes are learner-focused and well-planned and that the units are tailored well to match the apprentices' job roles.

Training sessions take place on a regular basis with good working relationships and channels of communication developed between the tutors, apprentices and their employers. The quality of the learning, teaching and training in the sessions observed was very good. The delivery of the training sessions was well underpinned with relevant and innovative curriculum resources, and characterised by: positive and supportive relationships; high levels of engagement and enthusiasm by the apprentices; effective, tailored planning linked to the needs of the apprentices and relevant to their work roles; effective use of reflection and questioning; and very good use of well-targeted technology enhanced learning to enhance effective learning and training. The apprentices are appropriately stretched and challenged to achieve high standards and, at times, are encouraged to undertake additional units to further develop their skills and knowledge relevant to their job role.

A robust lesson observation process has also been put in place to support the tutors to develop their pedagogical practice and improve the quality of learning, teaching and training; this includes the effective use of constructive and informative feedback. The process is aligned well to the organisation's internal teaching and learning observation and support policy.

The personal training planning process is well-developed and the plans are effective working documents. They are individualised and updated regularly to reflect the apprentices' ongoing progress and achievements. The monitoring and review process is also very good and works well. The reviews are carried out regularly in the workplace and include detailed employer input, as well as appropriate short-term target-setting for the apprentices along with a review of progress made by them against the targets set.

The care and welfare impacts positively on the learning, teaching and outcomes for the apprentices. An effective induction process is in place and the apprentices are well-informed of a range of services and external support agencies that are available to support them to overcome any personal, social or emotional issues or challenges. Appropriate arrangements have also been put in place to help them overcome any identified barriers to learning, including regular contact between the apprenticeship development coaches/tutors, the apprentices and their employers. A range of surveys, including a care and welfare and safeguarding survey, are carried out on a regular basis by the organisation to gather feedback from the apprentices, employers and other key stakeholders in relation to their experiences of the programmes, to identify any issues arising and to put remedial actions in place, if required.

The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) for the apprentices is delivered mainly by the apprenticeship development coaches/tutors through their regular contact with the apprentices and employers. A key consideration during the recruitment of apprentices is the 'best-fit' principle, where the organisation, in consultation with employers, ensures that potential apprentices are well advised about the job role, the skills and attributes needed to carry it out effectively, and the possible career options and progression pathways that are available to them on completion. The evidence shows that the apprentices are well-supported and mentored within the employing companies and provided with industry relevant continuing professional development to further enhance their skills and knowledge. In one workplace, for example, the apprentice has been supported to complete his driving licence as it was a requirement of the job role, and in another the apprentice will be undertaking a tailored qualification in customs procedures alongside other staff in the workplace.

7. Leadership and management

The strategic leadership and management of the organisation is very effective. Good channels of communication have been established between the local operations manager and senior managers and staff in the UK who provide high levels of advice, guidance and support on a range of matters. The organisation-wide senior managers are kept well-informed and have a good overview of the quality and impact of the apprenticeship provision, including the key strengths and areas for development. Effective management processes are also in place at local level to support staff, with roles and responsibilities being clearly defined.

While a key issue is the low level of recruitment of apprentices across the programmes and the potential longer-term sustainability and viability of the provision, senior management remain highly committed to the ongoing growth, development and investment in the apprenticeship programme in Northern Ireland. The evidence shows clearly that they have worked tirelessly to increase recruitment given the geographical restrictions of the contract area. There is, however, a need to continue to address recruitment as a high priority.

Effective links have been established with a wide range of employers, sector bodies and industry representatives at both national and local level. The organisation also engages with a range of post-primary schools to raise the profile and support the ongoing development and delivery of the apprenticeship programme. The organisation has, for example, been proactive in working with a key sector body in the freight industry to develop a new qualification pathway within the supply chain apprenticeship framework, which is more appropriate in meeting local industry needs.

Robust management information systems are in place and are used well by management and staff to track and monitor overall programme performance and the progress the apprentices are making in their learning and training. This includes an e-portfolio system which the apprenticeship development coaches/tutors and apprentices use well to access learning resources, upload completed work and identify any gaps or requirements that need to be addressed further. This system is also used effectively to support the quality assurance processes across the professional and technical areas.

The apprenticeship programmes are effectively co-ordinated by the apprenticeship development coaches/tutors who are well-supported in the delivery of their programmes by the lead sector specialists within the wider organisation's quality and excellence directorate. The apprenticeship development coaches/tutors are experienced in the delivery of training programmes and are provided with good opportunities to undertake relevant continuing professional development.

Appropriate self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are in place. The self-evaluation report identifies accurately key strengths and areas for development in the provision; as a result, the quality improvement plan includes key actions to support ongoing improvement, as well as short and long-term targets against which progress can be measured. The feedback from key stakeholders is used well to inform the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process.

8. Safeguarding

On the basis of the evidence provided during the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding young people and adults at risk reflect current legislation and practice.

9. Overall effectiveness

Seetec demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

Programme registrations

Table 1 - Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 2	13	50%
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 3	13	50%

Table 2 - Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices		% of total registrations
	Level 2	Level 3	
Aviation operations on the ground	*	0	8%
Logistics operations	0	*	4%
Social media and digital marketing	0	12	46%
Supply chain management	*	0	15%
Warehousing and storage	7	0	27%

* less than 5

Table 3 - Qualifications of current apprentices on entry to their programme

Programme	ApprenticeshipsNI (%)
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and Mathematics	77%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	81%
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	88%
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	88%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	85%
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	0%

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website www.etini.gov.uk.

Three ETI inspectors observed four apprentices in four directed training sessions. They interviewed five apprentices in their workplace. Discussions were held with five employers/supervisors in the workplace and an additional five were contacted by telephone. Samples of the apprentices' work and personal training plans, and tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans were examined. The organisation's quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

C. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and on leadership and management.

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
Achievement	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.

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