

Pearson plc

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 57951

Name of lead inspector: Jai Sharda HMI

Last day of inspection: 17 February 2012

Type of provider: Employer

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Information about the provider

- 1. Pearson plc is part of the multi-national Pearson Education group employing over 33,000 people in 70 countries. It provides educational materials, technologies, assessments and related services to teachers and students. It is also a leading provider of electronic learning programmes and of test development, processing and scoring services to educational institutions. corporations and professional bodies around the world. The company has a contract with the Skills Funding Agency to provide work-based learning for employees within the group. The company works closely with a subcontracted training company, Elmfield, to run the programmes. Currently, 40 learners are on government funded work-based learning programmes. Pearson uses its own training rooms and facilities to provide the training, currently these are: Pearson VUE in Salford; the Pearson distribution centre in Rugby; Pearson International in Harlow; and One90, High Holborn in London. Elmfield carries out all off-the-job and some on-the-job training and Pearson's in-house trainers carry out the remainder. A senior manager within Pearson Shared Services manages the contract and human resource staff in each location and also monitors the contract. Elmfield provides an account manager, staff dedicated to the Pearson contract based permanently on the Pearson sites and supported by other staff based in their own offices at Daresbury, near Warrington. The Pearson group provides funding for those employees who are not eligible for government funding.
- 2. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the provider:
 - Elmfield Training

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11 |
|---------------------|--|
| Employer provision: | |
| Apprenticeships | 171 |

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 2 |
|------------------------------------|---------|
|------------------------------------|---------|

| Capacity to improve Grade 2 |
|-----------------------------|
|-----------------------------|

| | Grade |
|--|--------|
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| Leadership and management Safeguarding | 2 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 2 |

| Subject Areas | Grade | |
|----------------------------------|-------|--|
| Warehousing and distribution | 1 | |
| Business, administration and law | 2 | |

Overall effectiveness

3. Pearson is a good provider of work-based learning. Apprenticeship success rates are high in business administration and very high in warehousing and distribution. However, the proportion of learners who achieve their apprenticeship within the planned timescale has declined in recent years, though it remains roughly at the national rate. Learners develop excellent skills which help them at work and which contribute to their increased confidence and professionalism. Learners feel very safe. The standards of health and safety are very high, especially in warehousing and distribution. Off-the-job training sessions are good. Assessors carry out regular assessments in the workplace and they set learners challenging targets to help them achieve guickly. Almost all learners report that the apprenticeship programme meets their needs very well. Staff at Pearson and at Elmfield have a good working relationship that ensures that the programme runs smoothly and that it maintains very high standards. Learners receive good support from Pearson and Elmfield staff to help them achieve. Managers work very hard to maintain the high standards found by inspectors. They know the key strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship programme and they have good quality action plans to further improve the provision.

Main findings

- Success rates are good in business administration and outstanding in warehousing and distribution. However, the proportion of apprentices completing within the planned timescale has declined over the last three years but remains broadly in line with national rates. Current learners are making very good progress in their studies.
- Learners gain excellent vocational skills, which they value. Many gain additional responsibilities or a promotion. They become valued members of Pearson's workforce and they perform their roles professionally and confidently.
- Learners feel safe. They confidently apply Pearson's health and safety practices in the workplace. Warehousing and distribution learners apply very high levels of health and safety practice at Pearson's distribution centre. Accident reporting procedures are good. Staff are well trained. They carry out detailed risk assessments and take prompt action to ensure learners' safety.
- Training and assessment are good. Staff use initial assessment well to place learners on an appropriate programme. Assessors use a wide range of assessment methods to meet learners' individual needs. Assessors are accessible to learners and they carry out workplace assessment at times that take learners' work schedules into account. They use progress reviews well to set learners realistic and manageable targets. Off-the-job training is good.
- Pearson provides encouragement and support for all staff who express an interest in an apprenticeship programme. Learners make significant gains in skills and confidence, which they value. National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units are carefully matched to business needs and where possible, to learners' preferences. Learners speak very highly of the extent to which the programme meets their needs.
- Pearson's relationship with its subcontractor, Elmfield, is very effective. Staff from the two companies meet regularly to discuss all aspects of provision. Problems are swiftly resolved. Both partners have very high expectations of the programme and of the learners. They work well together to produce an accurate self-assessment report.
- Learners receive good support which helps them to achieve their qualification. Assessors personalise their approach to each learner's needs, abilities and work schedule. Learners share any concerns they may have with their assessor and these are promptly resolved. Pearson provides a wide range of welfare and support services that benefit learners.
- Pearson's senior managers established the apprenticeship programme after a thorough and detailed strategic analysis of the company's business needs. The programme meets a key priority of the company, to promote 'learning for all'. Managers have supported the apprenticeship programme well and have worked closely with Elmfield staff to ensure that provision is of high quality.
- The provider has good arrangements for safeguarding. All relevant staff receive an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check that the company renews

- after three years. Staff receive regular training to help them carry out their roles effectively. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding and they know who to speak to if they feel unsafe or threatened.
- The company promotes equality and diversity well. Induction for staff and learners is thorough. Managers receive regular training to reinforce their understanding of the legal and company frameworks related to equalities. Learners say that assessors treat them courteously and with respect. Managers make good use of data to analyse performance differences between different groups of learners and they take swift actions to minimise any disparities.
- Pearson has highly effective quality improvement arrangements. Managers make very good use of data to analyse all aspects of performance. Self-assessment is honest and accurate. Staff analyse learner feedback well and use it effectively to make improvements. The company's observation of key learning processes is very effective in maintaining the high standards of provision.
- The company provides excellent value for money. Physical and staff resources are of high quality. Success rates are good. The company has maintained and improved the high standards found at the previous inspection.

What does Pearson plc need to do to improve further?

■ Increase the proportion of apprentices who complete their programme within the planned period of study by identifying reasons for the decline in performance and taking corrective actions.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors What learners like:

- the way everything is explained to make it easily understood
- the availability of assessors and the advice and guidance they provide
- the friendly and approachable staff and their willingness to listen
- the key skills component of the apprenticeship framework
- the coverage of employment rights and responsibilities
- the well-structured and managed apprenticeship programme.

What learners would like to see improved:

the amount of time given to achieve the qualification.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

- 4. Pearson has a good capacity to improve. Managers set a clear strategic direction and provide high quality training that meets learners' needs well. The quality of provision has improved since the previous inspection. Many aspects are outstanding. Success rates are high and have been above national rates since the previous inspection. However, the proportion of learners who complete within the planned period of study has declined to around the national rate. The provider has implemented several initiatives to reverse this decline. Current learners are making very good progress. Training and assessment are good. Managers have successfully tackled the weaknesses found at the previous inspection.
- 5. Quality improvement arrangements are highly effective. Managers at Pearson and at Elmfield know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision well. Managers use data effectively to monitor performance and to make improvements. Managers use a wide range of information, including the views of staff and learners, to reach judgements about outcomes for learners, the quality of training and assessment and leadership and management. The self-assessment process correctly identified the main strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors. However, it did not recognise the significance of the decline in the proportion of apprentices who achieved their qualification within the planned period of study. Inspectors gave a higher grade for warehousing and distribution than that in the self-assessment report but they gave the same grade for all other aspects of provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

- 6. Success rates for intermediate level and advanced level apprentices in business administration are good and in warehousing and distribution are outstanding. The provider has maintained high overall success rates since the previous inspection in 2008. However, the proportion of intermediate level apprentices who complete within the planned timescale is generally at or just above national rates, while the proportion of advanced level apprentices who complete within their planned period of study is now at or just below national rates. Provisional in-year data indicate that current learners are making good progress towards completion of their apprenticeship. No significant differences in success rates exist between male and female learners or between those from different minority ethnic groups.
- 7. Learners make good progress towards their learning goals. Learning targets are challenging and realistic. Thorough and regular reviews help learners to achieve short-term targets and to complete key skills and technical certificates well within timescales. Many learners progress through different courses and levels.

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- 8. Learners gain excellent vocational skills that help them in their employment. They report that they are better able to carry out their work to Pearson's high standards and that they enjoy the extra confidence that this gives them. Many learners are promoted within Pearson upon completion of their apprenticeship. Others, who leave Pearson to work elsewhere, say that their apprenticeship helped them to gain employment.
- 9. Learners report that they feel safe at work and in learning sessions. They have a very good understanding of Pearson's comprehensive health and safety policy and procedures. The standards of health and safety practice at Pearson's warehousing and distribution centre in Rugby are particularly high. Learner induction covers all aspects of health and safety. Staff apply safe working practices during learning sessions. The health and safety committee regularly reviews and acts upon health and safety issues. The provider ensures that staff receive good quality training and that they carry out detailed risk assessments to identify and minimise risks to safety.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

- 10. Training and assessment are good. Staff make good use of initial assessment to place learners onto a programme that matches their ability and to plan for additional support if necessary. Assessors use a wide range of assessment methods to meet the needs of all learners. They use questioning effectively to check and reinforce learners' understanding. Learners can schedule assessment visits to suit their work commitments. Assessors are available to carry out workplace assessments during the day and evening to meet learners' needs. Progress reviews are very effective in monitoring learners' progress. Employers' involvement in progress reviews is good. Assessors set clear and manageable targets for learners to help them make good progress. Off-the-job training is good. Trainers effectively integrate key skills with the learners' main programme, so that learners can gain a better understanding of the application of key skills to their work.
- 11. The extent to which the provision meets the needs of users is outstanding. Elmfield staff work closely with Pearson's managers to identify the most suitable NVQ units and the method of delivery to meet Pearson's business needs and the needs and interests of learners. Pearson provides excellent support for staff who decide to participate in the apprenticeship programme. All staff, including agency staff, are encouraged to apply. Learners speak very highly of the many benefits of the apprenticeship programme, including the increased confidence and professionalism that it nurtures.
- 12. Partnership working is good. The relationship between Pearson and its subcontractor, Elmfield, is highly effective. Subcontractor staff are based at several Pearson sites and easily accessible to learners. Staff from the two companies meet regularly to consider all aspects of performance. Elmfield

- provides a detailed breakdown of achievements and progression for Pearson each month, which are carefully scrutinised. The two companies worked well together to produce an accurate and rigorous self-assessment report.
- 13. Care, guidance and support for learners are highly effective in enabling learners to achieve their full potential. Assessors know their learners well and have a good understanding of how to work effectively with each learner. Learners have good access to their assessor, which enables them to share concerns early on and to resolve them promptly. Learners who require additional support receive personalised high quality interventions that help them to achieve. Learners have a good awareness of the range of opportunities available to them after they complete their apprenticeship. Learners benefit from the very wide range of welfare services that Pearson provides for its employees.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

- 14. Strategic planning is outstanding. Pearson's senior managers have an extremely clear and well thought out strategy for planning and developing programmes. The apprenticeship programme fits in particularly well with Pearson's policy of 'learning for all.' Senior managers carefully analysed business requirements before embarking on the apprenticeship programme. Managers are committed to the value of training and they have high expectations of the subcontractor and of their learners. Overall success rates have been consistently above national rates since the programme began.
- 15. Safeguarding arrangements are good and meet current government requirements. The subcontractor has a comprehensive policy for safeguarding learners. All staff who have regular contact with learners receive an enhanced CRB check, which the subcontractor renews after three years. Elmfield maintains an up-to-date central record that identifies when each CRB check is due for renewal. It has a designated senior safeguarding officer and a designated officer for Pearson's apprentices. Staff training in safeguarding is frequent and comprehensive. Learners say that staff and other learners treat them with respect. They know who to go to if they feel unsafe or threatened. Elmfield provides learners and employers with appropriate safeguarding training materials and information.
- 16. The promotion of equality and diversity is good, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. All staff and learners receive a thorough introduction to Pearson's approach to equalities during their induction. Managers receive regular training to update them on changes in equalities legislation. Staff monitor how well assessors promote equalities during progress reviews and they reinforce learners' understanding well. Marketing and promotional materials reflect and celebrate diversity. An equality group reviews and monitors all issues related to equality and diversity. Managers make very good use of data to analyse the performance of different groups of learners and they take swift action to minimise any disparities.

- 17. Elmfield has good systems for collecting information from learners during their programme. Feedback is carefully analysed and appropriate actions taken to make improvements. The company also gains feedback from learners through the observation of induction, progress reviews and training sessions.
- 18. Quality improvement arrangements are highly effective. The provider makes good use of a wide range of evidence, including success rates, observations, and user feedback, to develop an accurate picture of the provision and identify how it could be further improved. Staff carry out observations of key learning processes regularly to ensure that assessors and trainers promote high standards. Grades are generally accurate and judgements effectively moderated. Assessors receive clear and constructive feedback to help them improve. Action plans for assessors are clear. Managers use data well to monitor performance. Self-assessment is a rigorous and inclusive process.
- 19. Pearson is committed to managing its available resources effectively and provides excellent value for money. Success rates have remained high since the programme began in 2006. Resources to support learning are of a high standard. Elmfield staff are well qualified and all have an appropriate training or assessor qualification. Pearson and Elmfield demonstrate effective commitment to sustainability.

Subject areas

Warehousing and Distribution

Grade 1

Context

20. Currently 17 learners are following an intermediate level apprenticeship in warehousing and storage. All learners are adults. The majority of learners belong to a minority ethnic group. Twelve apprentices are male. Pearson only offers the provision at its plant in Rugby. Elmfield staff carry out regular assessment and progress reviews.

Key findings

- Success rates for apprentices are outstanding and significantly above national rate for the last three years. In the same period, the proportion of learners completing within their planned end date has declined to around the national rate. However, current learners on programme are making very good progress and all are on target to achieve successfully well within their planned period of study.
- Learners develop excellent vocational skills. They gain in confidence and they enjoy the programme, particularly the key skills sessions. They make a valued contribution in their work role. A few learners have progressed on to the team leader qualification and gained additional responsibilities. Learners benefit from having to understand and to comply with the wide range of external quality standards within which Pearson operates.
- Learners are well motivated and enthusiastic. They speak highly about the apprenticeship programme. They feel safe and enjoy their training. The reinforcement of health and safety working practices has a very high priority within the learner's own highly secure working environment. Learners successfully gain additional certification in counterbalance truck training as well as in a range of manual handling training courses, and specialist air cargo security courses.
- Trainers plan and manage learning sessions well. Elmfield staff have a high level of subject knowledge and establish good working relationships. High quality customised learning materials have been developed. For example, key skills materials that require the learner to research Pearson's long history, provides an excellent way of contextualising and promoting learning. Learners make good use of information and learning technology to support their studies.
- Assessment is good. Staff make good use of initial assessment to direct learners to an appropriate programme and to arrange additional support if necessary. On-the-job assessment is frequent, with assessment taking place on day, evening and night shifts. Workplaces are very clean and tidy, providing an excellent working environment. Well-presented portfolios contain a wide range of diverse evidence. Assessors use question and answer effectively to check learners' understanding.

- Progress reviews are detailed and thorough, with effective employer involvement. During reviews, assessors discuss learners' progress and monitor all aspects of the apprenticeship. Learners receive clear and manageable shortterm targets. Assessors do not promote and develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity sufficiently during progress reviews.
- The extent to which the programme meets the needs and interests of users is outstanding. Programmes meet learners' individual needs extremely well. Pearson employees and agency staff are equally encouraged to apply for and complete the programme. Units selected on the apprenticeship programme closely match the company's business need in providing a workforce equipped with the high level of relevant occupational skills required in the industry.
- Pearson has excellent relationships with the subcontractor, Elmfield, which has primary responsibility for managing and coordinating the programme. Learners benefit from the productive working relationship that Elmfield staff develop with Pearson colleagues. This close working relationship ensures that learners receive good opportunities to gather evidence and sufficient time to complete their qualification successfully.
- Learners receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Assessors provide excellent personalised and flexible support to help learners achieve. Learners benefit from a range of information, advice and guidance during induction and throughout their programme. Staff provide clear guidance on progression to other appropriate available opportunities. Pearson's welfare arrangements are excellent and include the provision of subsidised food and free drinks on site.
- Leadership and management are good, with some outstanding features. Pearson's managers take a close personal interest in learners' progress and achievement. Pearson has provided a very clear strategy to develop existing staff by supporting the programme and providing an excellent range of resources. It monitors effectively the subcontractor arrangements and seeks regular learner feedback, to which it responds promptly if learners raise concerns.
- The self-assessment process accurately identifies most of the strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors. The self-assessment report is inclusive, rigorous and evaluative. It makes very good use of data to support judgements. Though the self-assessment report identifies slow progress, it places insufficient emphasis on this area for improvement.

What does Pearson plc need to do to improve further?

■ Increase the proportion of apprentices who complete their programme within the planned period of study by identifying reasons for the decline in performance and taking corrective actions.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

21. Pearson offers apprenticeships in administration, customer service, team leading and management for 23 learners. Some 18 learners follow an intermediate level apprenticeship programme and five an advanced apprenticeship. Most learners are working towards an apprenticeship in customer service. An Elmfield account manager has day-to-day responsibility for the programmes and two assessors offer the programmes across the five Pearson sites. All learners are aged over 19.

Key findings

- Overall success rates are good and significantly above national rates. The proportion of intermediate level apprentices completing within the planned period of study is satisfactory, but it is significantly below national rates for advanced apprentices. The provider has recognised this issue and increased the length of the advanced apprenticeship programme in customer service to nine months, but it is too soon to assess the impact of this measure.
- Progression from the intermediate customer service programme to advanced level is good. Learners have a good understanding of the available progression routes and they value the relevance of the programme to their job role. Attendance at reviews, assessment and key skill workshops is good.
- Learners feel safe in the workplace. They have a very good understanding of safeguarding, as well as of employment rights and responsibilities and equality and diversity. Learners are able to answer confidently questions on these subjects. They have the confidence to report any problems or concerns to their team leader or manager and, where necessary, to take any issues to other managers or departments.
- The assessment of learning is good. Assessors plan assessments well and use a wide range of assessment methods. They make optimum use of time by using a Dictaphone to record guided discussions and to provide evidence of the learner's understanding. The use of expert witness statements enables managers to take an active part in the programme. Assessors promptly record assessment decisions and they give constructive feedback to learners.
- The use of technology to promote learning is satisfactory. Elmfield staff have to provide laptops in learning and assessment sessions as Pearson training rooms do not have access to the Pearson computer network. This limits learners' access to on-line sites in group sessions and uses up valuable time as assessors set up their equipment.
- Programmes meet the needs of learners well. Learners recognise the relevance of the apprenticeship to their job role. For some learners, it is the first qualification they have gained since leaving school. Learners who have received

- a promotion within the company say that managers took account of their qualification when promoting them. Some learners are not sufficiently aware of progression routes available to them after the apprenticeship.
- Elmfield staff have good relationships with learners. They work well with learners and their supervisors to plan and co-ordinate the programme. Supervisors play an active role in assessment and reviews. Elmfield staff work in a professional and friendly manner and have built high levels of trust with learners and Pearson's staff. However, Elmfield staff have only limited contact with Pearson's own learning and development team.
- Learners receive good support to help them achieve. Assessors provide additional support for learners who struggle with key skills. They use regular progress reviews well to support and guide learners. Pearson' supervisors provide assessors with good feedback on learners' progress within the workplace. Learners report that their assessor is accessible and very supportive.
- Promotion of programmes within Pearson is good. Use of the Pearson intranet site enables prospective learners to see the programmes on offer and to obtain additional information directly from Elmfield staff. Pearson's managers cascade the details of the programmes to all staff in their department and encourage them to enrol. Agency staff, many from Eastern Europe, are also encouraged to participate in the programmes.
- Learners' awareness of their company's equality and diversity policy and procedures is good. Most learners are white British. Overall success rates of learners from different ethnic backgrounds are consistently high. Staff cover equality and diversity issues comprehensively at induction and through completion of the Employee Rights and Responsibilities booklet. Assessors reinforce learners' understanding of equalities well during progress reviews.
- The self-assessment process makes effective use of feedback gathered from assessors, as well as learners and their supervisors. Users feel that Elmfield listens to and acts on their views. Staff use learner feedback well to make improvements. Assessors receive constructive feedback from managers following observations of performance. Assessors feel well supported.

What does Pearson plc need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of advanced apprentices who complete their programme within the planned period of study by identifying reasons for the decline in performance and taking corrective actions.
- Improve learners' access to Pearson's computer network so that they have easy and direct access to on-line learning.

Information about the inspection

- 22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by Elmfield Training's quality improvement manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
- 23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Pearson plc

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

| | Τ | 1 |
|--|---------|---------------------|
| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall | Employer responsive |
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | | |
| Full-time learners | 40 | 40 |
| Part-time learners | 0 | 0 |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 | |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 | 2 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 1 | |
| How well do learners progress? | 2 | 4 |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 1 | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 1 | |
| Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?* | n/a | |
| How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?* | n/a | |
| Quality of provision | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development? | 2 | |
| How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users? | 1 | - |
| How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners? | 2 | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 2 | |
| Leadership and management | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 1 | |
| How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?* | n/a | |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners? | 2 | |
| How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap? | 2 | |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement? | 2 | |
| How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners? | 2 | |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 1 | |

^{*}where applicable to the type of provision

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