

PBC Associates Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58536

Name of lead inspector: Mike White HMI

Last day of inspection: 26 November 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 27 Finsbury Way
Handforth
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 3AQ

Telephone number: 01625 251265

Information about the provider

1. PBC Associates Ltd (PBC) is a private training provider which was founded in 1994 to deliver commercially-funded training. It has administrative facilities in Wilmslow, Cheshire. PBC was awarded a Train to Gain contract in May 2008. It delivers training for employed learners in food manufacturing, customer service, sales, administration, warehousing, cleaning and support, health and safety, and learning and development. Government-funded Train to Gain provision accounts for approximately 65% of annual income. The majority of the learners are located in the North West. PBC also provides food manufacturing and warehousing for one employer in West Yorkshire under a subcontracting arrangement with Newcastle-under-Lyme College.
2. At the time of the inspection, PBC had 79 learners in training who were funded by the Skills Funding Agency under Train to Gain arrangements. These learners work towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 2 or level 3. Twenty-nine learners were taking an NVQ in food manufacturing, 21 in customer service, 15 in cleaning and support, nine in administration and five in warehousing. Thirteen food manufacturing and two warehousing learners were on the subcontracted provision. This inspection graded food manufacturing training. It also sampled other provision which contributed to the judgements made about the provider overall.
3. The Managing Director and one other director manage the provision and deliver all the training and assessment. PBC recruits learners through employer contacts and recommendations by previous learners. All training and assessment are carried out in the workplace.
4. PBC provides training on behalf of the following provider:

- Newcastle-under-Lyme College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain	179 learners

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 3
----------------------------	----------------

	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas

Manufacturing technologies	2
----------------------------	---

Overall effectiveness

5. Provision at PBC is good. The majority of learners complete their programmes successfully and gain their qualifications within the planned timescales. Success rates for all learner cohorts are high. Employers confirm the programmes provide a positive impact on business processes and efficiency.
6. Training and the assessment of learners' work are good. Assessment is carefully planned to co-ordinate with on-the-job training. Many learners successfully progress to higher level qualifications and gain promotion in their workplaces. PBC has developed very strong links with employers. Programmes and assessments are carefully structured to meet business and personal needs. Support for learners is satisfactory. Not enough written information is provided during induction.
7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The company has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. However, self-assessment is not used as a key driver for quality improvement. Actions to improve success rates have been very successful. PBC makes good use of the informal feedback gained during its frequent contact with employers and learners to inform quality improvement but systematic user engagement is under-developed.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates in 2009/10 were high and had improved markedly on the rates achieved in 2008/09. Success rates and achievement of NVQs within the planned timescales have been consistently above the national average since the start of the contract.
- There are no marked differences between the success rates for male and female learners or for those from different minority ethnic backgrounds. All were high in 2009/10.
- Learners enjoy their learning, make good progress and demonstrate good workplace skills. Many learners have gained promotion in their employment following completion of their programme. Employers confirm that programmes provide a positive impact on business processes and efficiency.
- Training and assessment are good. Assessment is carefully planned to ensure it links well with on-the-job training to the benefit of learners. Assessors are well qualified, experienced and knowledgeable.
- Arrangements for the initial assessment and provision of Skills for Life support are satisfactory although initial assessment processes are over-reliant on the skills and experience of the two assessors.
- Learners value the training and assessment they receive, particularly the opportunity to gain a qualification in a poor economic climate. Good opportunities for progression exist and many learners have successfully progressed to higher-level programmes.
- PBC has developed very strong relationships with employers who appreciate the flexibility of the programmes and how they respond to business pressures. Employers value the improvement in learners' attitudes, skills and performance.
- Support for learners is satisfactory. Induction is too informal. It consists primarily of a discussion with learners and does not include the provision of sufficient written information. Advice and guidance during the programmes, especially when related to progression routes and opportunities, are effective.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The company has a good understanding of its employers' needs and is very effective in structuring its programmes to meet them. Monitoring of learners' progress to help ensure completion within planned timescales is good. Success rates are high. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. Resources are used effectively. PBC provides good value for money.
- The recruitment of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has been successful. These learners are as successful as others in achieving their qualifications. Equality and diversity are covered during induction but, as with other induction arrangements, not underpinned sufficiently by written information. The promotion of equality and diversity during learners' quarterly progress reviews is insufficient.

- The directors have a good understanding of the strengths of the provision and the areas for improvement. Frequent informal contact with employers is used well to further develop the training programmes. Actions implemented to improve the success rates have been very effective. However, self-assessment is insufficiently developed as a key driver for quality improvement and is not informed sufficiently by learners' and employers' views.

What does PBC Associates Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Formalise the initial assessment process to ensure a more consistent approach towards identifying and supporting learners' Skills for Life needs.
- Develop and implement a more structured induction to ensure that learners receive detailed written information about all aspects of their programme.
- Make better use of the quarterly progress reviews to check, reinforce and record learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
- Formalise quality improvement activity by implementing an effective self-assessment process based upon the current Common Inspection Framework and ensure it is fully informed by users' views.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- assessors knowing how to explain things in different ways to make them easy to understand
- the friendly, supportive and professional assessors
- career progression as a result of gaining the NVQ the course structure which is well matched to personal and work needs
- PBC making learning enjoyable
- PBC being good at building people's confidence.

What learners would like to see improved:

- no improvements identified.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- training that is tailored to meet their needs
- the frequent feedback on learners' progress
- the clear links between assessment and in-house training
- assessors' attitudes, professionalism and knowledge
- the well-structured programme
- assessors' very good rapport with learners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- no improvements identified.

Main inspection report**Capacity to make and sustain improvement****Grade 3**

8. Actions to improve success rates have been very successful. Both overall success rates and the completion of programmes within agreed timescales are now high, and have been consistently above the national average since the start of the contract.
9. The two directors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. Frequent informal contact with employers is used appropriately to develop programmes that are very effective in meeting the needs of both learners and employers. PBC makes good use of data to inform improvements.
10. Self-assessment is insufficiently developed as a key driver for quality improvement. The provider is only now developing its first self-assessment report. The use of learners' and employers' views to inform this report is under-developed.

Outcomes for learners**Grade 2**

11. NVQ success rates at level 2 have improved and were very high in 2009/10. In food manufacturing, the completion rates within the planned timescales were low in 2008/09 and well above the national average in 2009/10. Overall rates were also very high in 2009/10, having been satisfactory the previous year. In administration, both the overall rate and the proportion of learners who complete within the planned timescales were low in 2008/9 and very high in 2009/10. Success rates for NVQs at level 3 dipped in 2009/10 from previously outstanding levels but remain high and well above the national average. There are no marked differences between the success rates for male and female learners or for those from different minority ethnic backgrounds which are all high and well above the national average in 2009/10.
12. Learners enjoy their learning. They make good progress towards their qualifications and demonstrate good workplace skills. Employers cite very good instances of how the provision has provided a positive impact on business operations. For example, a customer satisfaction survey, organised as part of the level 2 NVQ in customer service programme at a medical surgery, has led to the redesign of the patient enquiry process and investment in a new telephone call management system.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. Teaching, training and assessment are good. Assessors are well qualified, experienced and knowledgeable. Assessment is pragmatic and flexible and it effectively meets the needs of learners and employers. Clear links exist between assessment activity and on-the-job training which helps to ensure the programmes are logically planned and progressive. Arrangements for the provision of Skills for Life support are satisfactory although initial assessment processes are over-reliant on the skills and experience of the two assessors.
14. Programmes meet the needs and interests of users very effectively. Learners value the training and assessment they receive during the programme, particularly the opportunity to gain a qualification in a climate of job insecurity. Many learners progress from qualifications at level 2 to higher level qualifications. Some learners gain promotion as a direct result of achieving their NVQ while other learners move on to management programmes following their initial NVQ. PBC negotiates carefully with employers to select and plan further training which includes bespoke training, additional NVQ units and referrals to other providers when appropriate.
15. The provider works very effectively with partners, particularly with employers. It maintains long-standing relationships with employers and provides training across several vocational areas. Training is planned very effectively and fits well with on-the-job training provided by the employer. Assessment activity is delivered flexibly in order to meet the needs and interests of the learner and to accommodate business needs. It can be provided at weekends and at night, when required.
16. Support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors give good practical support, using their considerable experience of working with learners in a work-based environment. Advice and guidance during the programmes, especially relating to progression routes and opportunities, are effective. However, induction is too informal and over-reliant on the skills and experience of individual assessors. It is insufficiently detailed and written information, such as learner and employer handbooks, are not provided.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. PBC is a very small provider which successfully delivers a high-quality service to a largely long-standing client base, including some regional branches of large national employers. Employers value the provider's good understanding of their nature and operations and how programmes are effectively structured to meet specific priorities, needs and constraints. The skills held by the two directors complement each other well, enabling a relatively wide range of programmes to be offered. Data are used effectively to track learners' progress and to ensure learners achieve their qualifications within the planned timescales. Resources are well managed and success rates are high. PBC provides good value for money.

18. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. The provider does not train learners who are under 18 years of age or vulnerable adults on its Train to Gain provision. It has a satisfactory safeguarding policy and procedures. The two directors have completed Criminal Records Bureau checks and undertaken awareness training. Appropriate attention is given to health and safety in the workplace and learners confirm that they feel safe. Employers receive thorough health and safety checks before learners, who are all employed, are accepted onto the training programmes. Assessors have built up good relationships with employers, and learners are confident that assessors will act on their behalf if needed.
19. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Recruitment of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has been successful. These learners had high success rates in 2009/10 and there are no significant variations in the performance and achievement of any cohorts of learners. PBC has a good understanding of the reasons why the few learners who do not complete their programmes are unsuccessful. Policies and procedures for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Aspects of equality and diversity, including procedures to report harassment, abuse or discrimination, are covered orally during induction but are not supported by written information. Checking and reinforcement during progress reviews are insufficient. The close working relationships with employers and frequent visits to learners ensure that any potential problems are quickly identified. Celebration of learners' success is good and learners are presented with framed qualification certificates.
20. Employers' and learners' feedback is obtained orally on an ongoing basis during the frequent visits made to learners' workplaces. This feedback ensures that PBC has a good understanding of employers' businesses and that programmes have appropriate structures to support their specific needs, such as shift-working patterns and differentiated approaches to assessment practice. Employers are kept well informed of learners' progress, and any issues are identified and appropriate actions are agreed. Since early 2010 this informal system has been supplemented with more formalised and systematic processes but these are under-developed.
21. Self-assessment processes are under-developed and self-assessment is not a key driver for quality improvement. The provider has only recently started to develop its first self-assessment report and at the time of the inspection it was still in draft format.

Information about the inspection

22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report, and data on learners and their achievement.
23. Inspectors used 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 used evidence from 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)

PBC Associates Ltd

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

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners Part-time learners	79	79
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	N/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	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?	2	
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?	3	
Leadership and management	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	N/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090105

© Crown copyright 2010

