

Travis Perkins Plc

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58966

Name of lead inspector: Joy Montgomery HMI

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Type of provider: Employer

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Information about the provider

1. Travis Perkins Plc (Travis Perkins) is a large company supplying the United Kingdom's building and construction industry and home improvements market. It supplies more than 120,000 product lines through retail outlets including Travis Perkins Builders Merchants and Wickes DIY Retail. There are approximately 1,500 branches and stores split into the four categories of merchandising, specialist businesses, plumbing and heating, and retail with around 20,000 staff. Staff are known as colleagues.
2. Travis Perkins started government-funded training in 2009 through a contract with the Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships in retailing and wholesaling. An intermediate retailing apprenticeship, known as the 'master programme' started in Wickes stores in March 2010. In July 2011 Travis Perkins started an apprenticeship in merchandising and specialist businesses known as 'Building People'. The requirements of the retail apprenticeship are mapped to Wickes' own training programme for the master programme. Trained store managers and deputies confirm colleagues' competency. New Wickes' colleagues, on permanent contracts, work through the master programme after completing their induction. Designated 'buddies' coach and support colleagues during their programme.
3. At the time of this inspection, 516 Wickes' colleagues were working towards their master programme of which 55 per cent were funded by the Skills Funding Agency. These colleagues work in 112 stores in all 15 regions of England. A further 17 colleagues are enrolled onto the Building People apprenticeship. This was Travis Perkins' first inspection. The inspection focused on the delivery of the Wickes' master programme.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled Government funded learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	218 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 4
Capacity to improve		Grade 4
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		4
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		4
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		4
Subject Areas		Grade
Retailing and wholesaling		4

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of Travis Perkins' provision is inadequate. Although the training team recognises many of the issues relating to the slow completion by most Wickes' colleagues on the master programme, the planned improvements have yet to make a difference. Too many colleagues are given unrealistic timescales in which to complete and the rate at which they achieve their qualifications is lower than expected, particularly for some groups.
- The apprenticeship programmes meet Travis Perkins' needs well as the requirements for the national standards are part of the company's own training materials. Colleagues develop good customer service skills and gain a thorough understanding of the stores' products as they work through well-designed workbooks. Store managers and buddies provide satisfactory, and often good, coaching and support to colleagues. However, observation of colleagues' competencies is not systematic. Target setting and reviewing are not effective in motivating and managing colleagues' progress.
- Directors and managers are very supportive of apprenticeships although the systems needed to quality assure the programmes are underdeveloped. While the health, safety and welfare of colleagues are given a high priority, the promotion of equality and diversity is not. Self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements are weak.

Main findings

- Qualification success rates are low and well below the retail sector national averages for colleagues aged 19 to 24 but above for other age groups. Most colleagues do not complete their master programme within agreed timescales. The standard six-month duration is not always realistic. Too little account is taken of colleagues' contracted hours of work or their prior skills and experience.
- Colleagues develop good work-related skills. They develop detailed product knowledge, and have the opportunity to study further modules on the different products stocked by the company. They also improve their customer service skills and confidence. However, they are not clear about opportunities to progress in their job roles or further qualifications available after they finish their apprenticeship.
- Colleagues feel safe in the workplace. Health and safety have a high priority and are reinforced well throughout the master programme. Colleagues demonstrate safe working practices in the store and warehouse areas. A lone worker policy is effectively applied and many managers in isolated sites ensure colleagues feel safe when travelling to and from work. Safeguarding is satisfactory.
- Travis Perkins has developed a wide range of good company specific learning resources. The programmes meet business needs and complement existing training and development activities. Considerable work has taken place to match the national qualification in retail to internal training to provide a comprehensive model of training and assessment, valued by colleagues and their managers.
- Colleagues receive good coaching throughout the master programme from managers and buddies assigned to them. This helps colleagues engage well with the master programme, encourages self-reflection and helps to build colleagues' confidence. However, much of the coaching is not formally planned or recorded and is not sufficiently co-ordinated to support colleagues' reviews, progress and individual needs effectively.
- Managers and buddies do not set clear, measurable, challenging and achievable targets to motivate colleagues. Most targets are long term and not specific, with no milestones for achievement. Individual learning plans are generic, taking no account of colleagues' different work situations. Managers and buddies do not review colleagues' progress towards their targets.
- Store managers and buddies receive basic in-house training to understand their roles in the master programme. Some do not feel sufficiently trained to be confident in these roles. Store managers learn how to carry out observations of colleagues in the work place. However, they do not regularly use other techniques to assess colleagues' work competences.
- Quality control of assessments on the master programme is underdeveloped. Not all store managers carry out observations in a consistent or systematic manner. Feedback to colleagues is sometimes inadequate. Internal verification

visits to support store managers are not sufficiently regular to ensure the sharing of good practice.

- Directors and managers throughout the group are very positive and supportive of apprenticeship programmes. Each programme is carefully structured to meet the needs of the different brands within Travis Perkins. Ambitious targets exist but some are unrealistic due to current internal and external pressures on the businesses.
- Colleagues work well together, treating each other and customers with respect. However, topics relating to equality and diversity are not sufficiently promoted throughout the master programme. Discrepancies exist in the performance of different groups of colleagues; managers have been unaware that some groups succeed at different rates to others and have not yet identified the reasons for these discrepancies.
- Quality improvement arrangements are unsatisfactory. Self-assessment processes are underdeveloped and use a narrow range of evidence and views. The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan fail to identify several factors that affect colleagues' experience. Many planned improvements are at the early stages of implementation and have not yet had a significant impact on colleagues' learning experience.

What does Travis Perkins need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of the information collected about colleagues when they start to ensure the master programme more closely meets individual needs and realistic timescales for successful completion are set and met.
- Ensure that managers and colleagues with key coaching, guidance and assessment responsibilities receive sufficient training and time, to support colleagues effectively and confidently.
- Improve the coaching and support for learners by better recognition of the buddies' role. Clarify the selection criteria for buddies and the allocation of responsibilities and accountability between buddies and managers or their deputies.
- Ensure that managers and buddies draw up individualised plans for each colleague's programme of learning. These should include specific targets and timescales that are regularly reviewed with colleagues to monitor their progress.
- Improve the assessment process through the introduction of more diverse assessment methods to support the observation of colleagues' behaviours and maximise naturally occurring evidence.
- Extend internal verification processes to give uniformity across all regions and stores. Further develop sampling plans, standardisation and sharing of best practice to assure the quality and consistency of assessments and increase the number of colleagues achieving within planned completion times.

- Improve colleagues' understanding and awareness of equality and diversity by incorporating suitable learning activities into the master programme. Investigate the reasons for disparities in success rates for different groups of colleagues and take appropriate actions to reduce these.
- Ensure that self-assessment provides managers with a clear understanding of the programmes' strengths and areas for improvement and that resulting improvement plans focus on key factors that will improve the outcomes for colleagues and quality of provision.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What colleagues like:

- being able to learn while at work
- the generous support from buddies and other colleagues
- developing really detailed product knowledge to be able to help customers better
- being able to work with colleagues as a team
- having another chance to gain a qualification
- the quality of the workbooks
- the easy-to-understand online testing
- having more variety in the job role.

What colleagues would like to see improved:

- more time allowed to spend on the learning packs
- more practical tasks to support the workbook, particularly in calculating areas and volumes
- a more individualised programme, taking account of previous learning and experiences
- more observations
- more time with the buddies
- help with maths
- more individual reviews with managers to discuss progress.

Summary of the views of Wickes' managers as confirmed by inspectors

What they like:

- the bespoke programme, designed for the company, delivered in the company
- the good level of skills developed by colleagues, making them better employees
- making colleagues feel valued by giving them a qualification
- the availability of the training team at the end of the phone, and their willingness to help

- the ability to identify strengths in colleagues
- improved store sales.

What Wickes' managers would like to see improved:

- more flexibility in the model, to take account of colleagues who only work a few hours each week
- more time to devote to assessment to ensure it is completed properly
- more time in the business model to allow colleagues to study and complete within their planned end dates
- better knowledge of what assessment entails through more detailed training
- more explanation to colleagues at the beginning of the programme
- recognition of the role and responsibilities of the buddy.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

7. Travis Perkins' capacity to make improvements is inadequate. In the first full year of the Wickes' apprenticeship programme, qualification success rates were below the national averages for male colleagues and those aged 19 to 24 but above for female colleagues and other age groups. Few colleagues completed within the expected time. The training team recognises many of the issues but has been slow to plan and implement improvements that impact on the quality of the provision and improve achievement of qualifications within planned timescales. Travis Perkins recognises the need to improve management information to support continuous improvements and a new system is due to be launched.
8. Overall, quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. The first self-assessment report, produced in January 2010, did not make a judgement on the overall effectiveness of the provision and was insufficiently self-critical. Self-assessment processes are underdeveloped and do not yet support quality improvements. The process is not sufficiently focused on the experience for colleagues and is based on a narrow range of evidence.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 4

9. Most colleagues achieve their learning goals eventually or leave the company. The overall success rate is satisfactory although there are wide discrepancies for different groups. Success rates are good for 16 to 18 years olds and those over 24, but very low for 19 to 24 years olds. Very few achieve within the time expected and progress of current colleagues remains slow. Travis Perkins allocates the same timescale for completion to all colleagues, regardless of the hours they work or their previous knowledge and experience. Travis Perkins has not so far been able to analyse its data to identify any difference in the success rates between funded and unfunded colleagues or full-time and part-time colleagues.
10. Colleagues enjoy the master programme and most develop particularly good product knowledge which they value and sometimes leads to internal promotion within their stores. Colleagues develop good customer service skills and increase their confidence. They enjoy their work at their stores and feel the master programme helps them become more proficient in their retail roles. However, most colleagues are unaware of further learning opportunities, apart from further product knowledge modules, within the company and beyond.
11. In general, colleagues feel safe and understand their rights and responsibilities. They talk knowledgeably about safe working practices within their departments. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on health and safety in the training materials, and colleagues are aware of the potential dangers in their working

environment. Many store managers are proactive in promoting personal safety and ensure colleagues are safe when arriving at or leaving the out of town stores in the dark.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

12. Training, learning and assessment overall are satisfactory. Good quality, well-designed distance learning materials support the master programme. Workbooks help colleagues learn about the wide range of products stocked, and their role in the stores. Colleagues generally value the workbooks and enjoy working through them, although a few find some activities irrelevant. Buddies provide effective coaching and support to colleagues and help them develop good customer service skills. Buddies receive basic training for this role and are appointed by managers. They do not apply for the role and receive no recognition for it. Managers and other staff also help colleagues develop their skills and knowledge although most of this training is unstructured and unplanned.
13. Initial assessment is satisfactory and starts at recruitment and selection. Colleagues complete an online literacy and numeracy test; the quality of the resulting support varies from good to inadequate, depending on the knowledge and skills of the buddies and managers. No specialist support is provided for key skills. Colleagues complete an assessment of their own learning styles, but this does not make any difference to how they are expected to complete the programme. Individual learning plans are generic rather than individual, with all colleagues being expected to complete in the same time, regardless of the hours they work or their prior experience.
14. Managers do not set or review meaningful short-term targets with colleagues to encourage them to progress through their course. Reviews of progress are not regular and only involve the store manager and colleague, not the buddy. Most buddies and managers are aware of colleagues' slow progress through ongoing informal communications but revised targets for completion are not set or met. Wickes' colleague appraisal system does not link with reviews of progress on the master programme.
15. Store managers or their deputies receive basic in-house training to enable them to assess colleagues' competencies through observations in the workplace. A few store managers and deputies do not feel sufficiently confident in fulfilling this role. Some colleagues receive detailed feedback following an observation whilst others are sometimes unaware that they have been observed. Many store managers do not plan or conduct enough observations and few use other assessment techniques to assess colleagues' work.
16. The provision meets the needs of Travis Perkins and colleagues well in that it develops colleagues' skills, knowledge and confidence. All new Wickes colleagues on a permanent contract enrol onto the master programme after the

initial induction, although not all are funded. The master programme closely matches Wickes colleagues' job roles and is integrated seamlessly into the business. Travis Perkins are currently recruiting apprentices in selected Travis Perkins branches for a new apprenticeship programme 'building people'.

17. Travis Perkins works with a satisfactory range of partners. Close working with the awarding body ensures that the in-house training materials meet the requirements of the national qualifications in the retail apprenticeship. However, too few activities are designed to ensure colleagues practice their application of number key skills, which is a frequent feature of the job role. The training materials for the merchanting and specialist businesses have been endorsed by the Institute of Builders Merchants.
18. Guidance and personal support are satisfactory. Buddies devote a considerable amount of time to supporting colleagues and encouraging them during their programmes. The friendly atmosphere in the branches ensures colleagues feel able to ask for help should they need it. However, there is no formal co-ordination of the staff assigned to support colleagues. Colleagues are not aware of further development opportunities that might be available to them on completion.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

19. Travis Perkins strongly promotes learning and skills development through a clear strategy that aligns training to business needs. The different brands within the business are carefully recognised through the development of different apprenticeship programmes. Wickes' store managers are enthusiastic about the master programme even though not all of them have a full appreciation of their role in training. The standard target of six months for colleagues to complete the programme is unrealistic for some.
20. Arrangements for safeguarding colleagues are satisfactory. Travis Perkins promotes safe working practices effectively through a wide range of processes, policies and training. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for young people. However, some managers are unsure what action to take should a colleague disclose a personal matter that affects their health and wellbeing.
21. The promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate. The Wickes' induction programme provides a satisfactory introduction to colleagues on equality and diversity topics. However, colleagues' understanding and awareness of equality and diversity are not developed further during the master programme, nor is their knowledge sufficiently checked. The training team are unaware of the discrepancies in performance between different regions, age groups and male and female colleagues. Reasons for these differences are not clear and investigations are continuing.

22. Travis Perkins makes satisfactory use of feedback from all its colleagues. Staff surveys are used effectively to monitor levels of satisfaction and identify areas for improvement such as the low levels of awareness of opportunities to progress in the business. This resulted in a careers opportunity page being added to the company intranet. Colleagues on the master programme are invited to make suggestions for improvements. Most feel they are listened to by management.
23. Quality improvement arrangements are inadequate. Internal verification is not frequent enough and is too focused on checking workbooks at the end of the programme. Recent developments have not yet improved the quality of store managers' observations, the consistency in completing workbooks and reviews or ensuring colleagues' progress is more closely monitored. The self-assessment report was prepared by the training team and lacks input from those involved in the master programme.
24. Value for money is satisfactory. Travis Perkins has used government funding effectively to develop suitable apprenticeship programmes for different parts of the business and additional apprentices are being recruited. Training materials are of a high standard and include some references to the importance of environmental considerations and sustainability. The programme does not encourage colleagues to reflect on how processes may vary in other retail contexts.

Information about the inspection

25. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Travis Perkins' Group Training Manager (Operations and Skills), as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of Travis Perkins' most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body and data on colleagues' achievements since the start of the programmes.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of colleagues and Wickes' managers. They also looked at questionnaires colleagues and Wickes' managers had recently completed. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from the retailing and wholesaling programmes offered by Travis Perkins.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Travis Perkins 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

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	0	0
Part-time learners	173	173
Overall effectiveness	4	4
Capacity to improve	4	
Outcomes for learners	4	4
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	4	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
How well do learners progress?	4	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3	
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	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
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?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	4	4
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
<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?	4	
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?	3	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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