

Vector Aerospace Helicopter Services

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58791

Name of lead inspector: Phil Romain HMI

Last day of inspection: 6 July 2012

Type of provider: Employer

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Information about the provider

1. Vector Aerospace Helicopter Services (Vector Aerospace), based in Gosport, provides repair, maintenance and modification of rotary-wing aircraft for all three armed services. It is owned by Vector Aerospace International, a Canadian company, who acquired it in 2008. Vector Aerospace is owned by EADS (Eurocopter). Previously, the organisation was a defence aviation repair agency known as DARA Fleetlands. DARA Fleetlands was last inspected in May 2005 when it was judged to be satisfactory.
2. Vector Aerospace employs between 10 and 16 engineering apprentices each year to train as aircraft engineers funded by the Skills Funding Agency. All training, apart from the technical certificate, is provided on site. The Training and Development Manager UK is responsible for apprentice training which is managed by an apprentice training team leader supported by four instructors and an internal verifier. Currently, 36 advanced apprentices are taking part.
3. Vector Aerospace employs around 900 staff in Gosport. The unemployment rate in Fareham is lower than the national rate at 6.4%. The proportion of the population of minority ethnic heritage is 3.6% compared to 13% in England. The proportion of school leavers achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C including mathematics and English is 59.1%, above the national figure.
4. Training is divided into three phases. Initial training takes place in the apprentice training centre. Phase 1 covers basic engineering and phase 2 basic aircraft knowledge and skills, developed by working on non operational, but current, helicopters. Phase 3 consists of experience working on operational helicopters and associated equipment in the main business units.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider:
 - Fareham College (technical certificate)
 - Graham Robb Associates (team working and leadership training).

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	34 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 3
Capacity to improve		Grade 3
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		2
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		3
Subject Areas		
Engineering		3

Overall effectiveness

6. Provision at Vector Aerospace is satisfactory. Apprentices develop good skills and gain qualifications and employment, but the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is no better than satisfactory.
7. The programme meets the needs of users well. It is closely aligned to business needs and successful apprentices gain qualifications and experience which enable them to progress into good jobs in the industry. Employers and apprentices speak highly of the programme.
8. Managers plan training well to meet the needs of the business but do not take sufficient account of the individual abilities of apprentices. Resources are good and are used effectively to develop the good skills and knowledge apprentices demonstrate. Vector Aerospace has been successful in maintaining success rates and remedying some of the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection; but the company has not developed a comprehensive and inclusive self-assessment process to help it improve further. Management information is not used sufficiently to monitor learners' progress. Both of these were key weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

Main findings

- Success rates are high, and have been above the national rate for two years. Apprentices enjoy their learning and take considerable pride in their work. They work diligently and produce work that meets the exacting standards of the aerospace industry.
- Apprentices develop good personal and team working skills. At work and in the training centre they work safely, conscientiously and demonstrate the company's values. Two short residential courses contribute to developing their personal, team and leadership skills well.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Training in practical sessions in the workshops is mostly good. Instructors help apprentices to develop good skills and knowledge through effective demonstrations and well-planned sessions. However, instructors do not challenge the more able learners sufficiently to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- The assessment of apprentices' performance relies too much on written evidence and witness statements. Assessors do not routinely observe apprentices in the workplace. Apprentices receive insufficient constructive feedback on their work or how it might be improved. Evidence in their portfolios does not reflect the high level of skill and knowledge they demonstrate in their practical work.
- Individual reviews of apprentices' progress do not include all aspects of their training. Actions discussed and agreed at these meetings are not always recorded and are not always based on a comprehensive understanding of the apprentices' progress and achievements.
- Programmes meet the needs of the business well. The content of the apprenticeship is closely aligned to the needs of the business and managers speak highly of the skills and capabilities of apprentices. Apprentices value the opportunity to train and work with a prestigious employer in their chosen industry and many remain with the company for many years following their training.
- Vector Aerospace promotes safe working well and has an appropriate range of support systems for apprentices. Managers check subcontractors' arrangements to ensure that apprentices are safe whilst on residential training programmes.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Apprentices receive appropriate training and information on equality and diversity. Inspectors found no discernible gaps in performance between different groups of apprentices. Arrangements to deal with complaints, bullying and harassment are effective.
- Internal verification and the monitoring of subcontractors are satisfactory. However, the company has not developed an inclusive self-assessment process that reviews and evaluates all aspects of the learners' programme, and does not make sufficient use of appropriate management information to monitor learner progress.

What does Vector Aerospace need to do to improve further?

- Plan training sessions with sufficient variation and challenge so that all apprentices, particularly the more able, are inspired to extend their knowledge and skills and progress at a pace more appropriate to their individual ability.
- Reduce the reliance on written evidence in assessment and ensure that assessors use a broader range of diverse evidence, including direct observation, so that apprentices' portfolios better reflect their good skills and knowledge.
- Ensure that the reviews of apprentices' progress are frequent and regular, cover all aspects of the programme and set challenging individual targets so that all apprentices have a consistently good experience and make progress at a faster rate.
- Introduce a comprehensive and inclusive self-assessment process that reviews all aspects of the learners' programme and, using appropriate management information, enables managers to understand better the quality of provision and plan and monitor improvements.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the opportunity to develop a wide range of practical skills leading to a good job
- working for a high profile employer
- the opportunity to work in all of the business units during phase 3 training
- the relaxed way of gaining a qualification and getting into a career
- the helpful staff
- the residential team building programme.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the length of time spent waiting around in the training centre.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the high level of the apprentices' skills, which has improved in recent years
- being able to work with the apprentices prior to making a decision to employ them.

What employers would like to see improved:

- nothing reported.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates have improved markedly from below the national rate to well above and apprentices' technical and employment skills have improved. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and the provision is managed effectively. Vector Aerospace has taken action to improve provision and has introduced a fast-track option for apprentices who join with existing qualifications, and has realigned the content of the programme to better meet the needs of industry. Additional training in drug and alcohol abuse and the wider aspects of being an employee has prepared learners for employment well. Whilst Vector Aerospace have instigated a programme of observing teaching and learning, and meet with apprentices to ascertain their views and concerns, this does not sufficiently inform the self-assessment process. The effective use of management information to monitor and review learner progress is insufficient.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. Most apprentices complete their qualifications successfully and progress into employment. Success rates are now high and have been for the past two years. Apprentices enjoy their learning and take considerable pride in their work. They work diligently and confidently produce work that meets the exacting standards of the aerospace industry. However, the progress they make relative to their prior attainment and potential is no better than satisfactory and few progress to higher level study.
11. Apprentices feel safe and readily apply the high levels of safe working, diligence and cleanliness expected of them in the training centre and in the workplace. Their knowledge and practices meet the very high industry standards and the strong company culture of protecting both employees and the high-value products they maintain.
12. Apprentices' personal and team-working skills are developed well, particularly during two separate week-long residential training programmes. During one of these they make a positive contribution to the community through supporting individuals with restricted mobility. Apprentices contribute to a local charity by organising inter-departmental football matches and car washes. They also support the annual Children in Need event through fundraising.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. During practical sessions in the training workshops apprentices develop high levels of skill and produce work to a good standard. Instructors use demonstrations effectively to illustrate techniques. Apprentices respond appropriately to directed questions and show good knowledge of products and grasp of skills, together with a clear understanding

of safe working practices. Instructors plan training well to enable apprentices to develop and improve their skills progressively. Managers also plan on-the-job training well, ensuring that all apprentices continue to develop their skills and gain a comprehensive knowledge of the company's core business. However, instructors pay insufficient attention to the needs of individuals. With the exception of a few who join the company with technical qualifications, apprentices progress at a similar rate regardless of their ability. Too often instructors give the more able learners activities to fill time while they wait for the rest of the group to finish, rather than extending and developing their skills and knowledge and helping them progress more quickly.

14. Assessment, although adequate to meet the requirements of the awarding organisation, relies on a narrow range of evidence. Assessors do not routinely observe apprentices in the workplace and depend too much on written evidence and witness statements. Apprentices receive insufficient constructive feedback on their work or how it might be improved. Apprentices' portfolios of evidence do not adequately reflect their high level of skills and competence. Internal verification satisfies the awarding organisation's requirements but does little to improve assessment practice or the apprentices' experience.
15. The monitoring and review of apprentices' progress varies too much and consequently their experiences are significantly different. Instructors hold regular mentoring meetings with apprentices, but the frequency of these meetings varies from between one and twelve weeks depending on the instructor. Reviews of apprentices' progress do not always include all aspects of their programme. The progress apprentices are making and any actions agreed are not always recorded.
16. Programmes meet the needs and interests of the company well. The provision is aligned well to the current and future needs of the business; business unit managers speak highly of the skills and abilities of apprentices trained by the company. Apprentices and ex-apprentices speak highly of their training and their career opportunities. They value working for a prestigious employer in their chosen industry. The highly structured programme, with well-planned training in each of the business units, gives learners a wide range of relevant vocational experience.
17. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Apprentices receive sufficient information on their programme and career choice during recruitment and induction. Induction is helpful in preparing apprentices for their programme. As employees of the company they have access to a good range of personal support, occupational health and counselling services. Apprentices have an adequate understanding of the qualifications they need to complete their apprenticeship and gain employment. However, the company offers insufficient advice and guidance on the opportunities for further study and progression after learners complete their apprenticeship.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

18. Vector Aerospace demonstrates a strong commitment to the programme through its continuing investment in training facilities and support for apprentices. Recruitment and training are closely aligned to the changing needs of the business and are reviewed annually. Whilst senior managers have high expectations of the programme they have not ensured more able apprentices make faster progress and have been slow to improve the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Business unit managers expect high standards and are appropriately involved in developing the content of the provision to meet the demands of current and emerging contracts. Detailed planning ensures that apprentices develop the skills they need and gain experience in all areas of the business.
19. The organisation's approach to safeguarding is satisfactory. All training staff have had enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks. Vector Aerospace promotes safe working well and has an appropriate range of support in place for apprentices, including access to occupational health and confidential counselling services. A safeguarding officer has recently been appointed. Managers check subcontractors' arrangements to ensure that apprentices are safe whilst on residential training programmes.
20. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The recruitment of apprentices is thorough and fair. Apprentices receive appropriate training and information on equality and diversity, and their rights and responsibilities, during their induction. However, their understanding is not further developed throughout their programme. The apprentices' profile generally reflects that of the local community, although the company recruits few women apprentices. Inspectors found no discernible difference in performance between different groups of apprentices. Arrangements to deal with complaints, bullying and harassment are effective and managed well.
21. Vector Aerospace makes appropriate use of the views of users to improve provision. Staff elicit the views of employers through regular meetings with representatives from each of the business units. Apprentices in the training centre have meetings with staff to discuss their requests and concerns. However, these meetings are infrequent and do not include a sufficiently wide range of issues. Apprentices in the business units do not have this opportunity, although the annual employee survey includes a section specifically for apprentices.
22. The company has taken appropriate action to bring about some improvements to provision but has yet to establish an effective self-assessment process to accurately capture and assess each element of the learners' programmes of study or to make better use of available data. Managers regularly observe all instructors but their findings do not inform self-assessment. Good use of the views of apprentices, as expressed in a detailed survey, has led to improvements to the programme. The performance of subcontractors is

effective and regular meetings report on the progress of apprentices. Managers do not regularly and systematically review provision against available management information and significant aspects of provision are omitted from the self-assessment report, including safeguarding and the quality of teaching and learning.

23. Vector Aerospace provides good value for money. The company makes a significant investment in apprentice training, ensuring that training workshops are well equipped and include a range of current helicopters and equipment. Success rates and progression to employment are high and learners attain high levels of technical and employability skills.

Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's training manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
25. Inspectors used group and individual interviews 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)

Vector Aerospace Helicopter Services

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	36	36
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	3	3
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?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	na	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3	
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	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>	na	
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?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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