

Pilot IMS Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53895

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Established in 2001, Pilot IMS Limited (Pilot) provides a range of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training, apprenticeships and literacy programmes funded by the Skills Funding Agency. At the time of the previous inspection, the company offered only Train to Gain programmes, mostly in manufacturing technologies. It now offers, in addition, warehousing and distribution, preparation for life and work and business administration. It also offers information and communication technology and education and training, but provision in these subjects was too small to be separately inspected and graded. Pilot does not subcontract any of its work, almost all of which is government-funded.
2. Most learners work in the manufacturing and food technology sectors. Companies in Birmingham, the Black Country and in Suffolk and Norfolk employ most of the learners. Pilot carries out most training and assessment on employers' premises. The company has an administrative centre in Birmingham.
3. The managing director is responsible for all aspects of the company's business. A team of eight managers, who are responsible for marketing, operations, quality and sales and business development, support him. The company employs 14 assessors and internal verifiers and a team of eight freelance staff.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	1,327 learners
Apprenticeships	193 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		3
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		3
Subject Areas		Grade
Engineering and manufacturing technologies		2
Warehousing and distribution		3
Preparation for life and work		3
Business administration and law		3

Overall effectiveness

4. Pilot is a satisfactory provider of adult learning. The proportion of learners who achieve their qualification is similar to national rates. However, many learners take longer to complete their studies than they had planned. Pilot's assessors recognise this problem and are taking appropriate actions.
5. Learners feel safe and they enjoy learning. They develop good vocational skills which employers value. Many gain a promotion or increased responsibilities at work.
6. Training in the workplace is satisfactory. Learners enjoy group learning sessions and they produce satisfactory assignments and portfolios. However, some tutors use a narrow range of teaching methods which fail to engage and challenge all learners, especially the most confident. Assessment and reviews are satisfactory. However, assessors take insufficient account of learners' starting points when setting targets. Assessors' poor recording of short term

targets in progress reviews often results in learners lacking clarity about what they have to do to achieve within planned timescales.

7. The company has good links with employers, which it uses well to benefit learners. It designs programmes jointly with employers, selecting only those qualification units that meet employers' needs and learners' interests. Pilot acts promptly in response to user feedback. Staff provide satisfactory care, guidance and support, as well as careers guidance, for learners.
8. Managers provide satisfactory leadership for the company. They carefully managed a recent restructure avoiding any disruption to learning. The company has begun to raise its expectations about the performance of learners and of staff. The company has satisfactory arrangements for safeguarding and for promoting equality. However, assessors do not sufficiently reinforce equalities topics during reviews. The company involves all of its staff in producing an accurate self-assessment report but it does not make enough use of performance data to support its judgements. Managers recognise this weakness and have begun to take appropriate improvement actions.

Main findings

- Overall success rates on most programmes are satisfactory or better. However, the proportion of learners who complete within planned timescales is low. Pilot understands why these learners fail to achieve on time and it has begun to take appropriate actions to tackle the problem. Current learners are progressing satisfactorily. All groups of learners perform equally well.
- Learners make considerable gains in their economic and social well-being. They develop new skills which their employers value. Employers offer promotions and increase responsibilities for many learners who successfully achieve their qualification. Learners on literacy programmes develop confidence and are better able to understand and comply with work instructions and procedures.
- Learners feel safe at work. Where required, they operate machinery safely and confidently. Learners understand the importance of health and safety at work. Assessors reinforce this understanding during reviews. Learners understand well their employment rights and responsibilities.
- Learners receive satisfactory standards of training in the workplace. They demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and produce assignments to a satisfactory standard. In the weaker learning sessions, tutors rely too much on a narrow range of methods insufficiently related to learners' work and life experiences. These sessions are uninspiring and the most able learners are insufficiently challenged.
- Assessors carry out assessment and reviews to satisfactory standards. They visit the workplace during periods when learners are most likely to have the time to participate successfully in an assessment activity. However, assessors do not always use initial assessment results to set targets that meet learners'

individual abilities. Progress reviews often fail to record short term targets for learners to achieve in between the three month review visits.

- Pilot works very well with employers to meet learners' needs. It consults extensively with employers when designing new learning programmes. Optional units are selected to meet the needs of the employer and the interests of the learner. Pilot staff respond promptly to feedback from learners and employers. Employers comment very favourably on the responsiveness and flexibility of Pilot's staff.
- Pilot's staff provide appropriate care, guidance and support for learners. Staff use initial assessment results to identify and plan for any additional needs that learners may have. Foundation learners receive good study support to help them achieve. Learners value the support and guidance from assessors.
- Pilot's managers have worked hard to raise expectations and promote ambition. Senior staff understand national and regional priorities well. A recent company restructure was managed effectively with little disruption to learning. The company now sets ambitious but achievable targets. It has begun to monitor performance more carefully. It is too soon however, to judge the effectiveness of these measures.
- Pilot has satisfactory safeguarding arrangements. All staff receive Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance. Staff have received appropriate training. A designated manager for safeguarding is in place. Learners have an appropriate understanding of safeguarding. They know who to speak to if they have a concern about their safety or well-being.
- Pilot's arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory. The company's staff and learners reflect the diverse communities from which Pilot recruits. The company has successfully encouraged small companies to invest in training. Staff promote equality and diversity well during induction. However, assessors do not always use reviews effectively to promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
- The provider has good arrangements for engaging with employers and learners. The company's project managers maintain regular and frequent contact with employers to keep them informed about learners' progress and to deal with any problems. Pilot uses feedback from employers and learners well to make improvements to the provision. The company provides satisfactory value for money.
- Self-assessment is inclusive and accurate. However, the self-assessment report is insufficiently judgemental. It does not use data effectively to support claimed strengths. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory, though the company focuses too much on complying with awarding body requirements. Observations of training are insufficiently rigorous. Learning sessions are over-graded. Observers give insufficient weight to the learning that is taking place.

What does Pilot IMS Limited need to do to improve further?

- Continue to identify the reasons for learners failing to achieve within the planned period of study and take corrective actions so that success rates improve to above national rates.
- Ensure that assessors plan learning sessions to meet the needs of all learners by making use of vocationally-related learning materials and providing sufficient challenge so that all learners have opportunities to make good progress and achieve their full potential.
- Use the results of initial assessment to devise challenging and achievable targets for each learner. Ensure that progress reviews contain clear and realistic short term targets and that assessors make better use of reviews to promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
- Devise an effective and rigorous self-assessment process by making better use of performance data, evaluative language and critical reflection to support judgements.
- Implement a more effective observation of teaching and learning process so that observers focus on learning and give realistic grades and feedback to help tutors and trainers improve.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification while getting paid
- learning at work
- the availability of language support when needed
- friendly, helpful and knowledgeable assessors who explain things clearly
- the increased opportunities at work as a result of the training
- the very good support from assessors
- increased self-confidence
- improved language and communication skills
- good tutor feedback on written work
- the clarity of learner task sheets for homework.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the clarity of information early on in the programme about how much work needs to be completed at home
- the focus on speaking and listening skills in literacy classes so that learners have more opportunity to practise.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- that Pilot is good at keeping employers informed and that it offers a better service than other providers
- that assessors are very accommodating in fitting in assessment and training with business practices, including training on the night shift
- Pilot's polite and helpful staff
- the responsiveness of Pilot's staff in meeting employers' needs
- the increase in staff motivation after training.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the requirement for learners to attend lengthy training sessions during busy periods. Some employers would prefer learners to attend short, bite-sized learning programmes
- the clarity of Pilot's written information about the employer's role in training.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. Pilot's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Overall inspection grades have declined since the previous inspection. However, the company has grown in size considerably since that inspection and it now offers provision in more subject areas. Success rates have remained at or around national rates. The company recognises that it has problems with the high proportion of learners who achieve beyond their planned end date and it is taking appropriate measures to tackle this. Self-assessment is inclusive but the company does not use the process effectively as a tool for improvement. Managers recognise that this is a significant area of improvement for Pilot and have consequently begun to take a range of appropriate corrective actions.
10. The recent company reorganisation has strengthened Pilot's quality assurance team, though it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangements. The company has a very clear focus on achieving external quality standards such as those set by funding and awarding bodies. It also has a well established internal audit process that thoroughly monitors the company's compliance with internal and external standards. Pilot's managers recognise that they need to steer the company towards quality improvement processes rather than to focus on contract compliance and audit procedures. Managers have begun to tackle this issue but it is too soon to judge the impact.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

11. Overall success rates on engineering, preparation for life and work and business administration programmes are satisfactory or better. Success rates for warehousing and distribution learners are below national rates. The proportion of learners who complete within the planned period of study is generally just at or below national rates on most programmes. The provider has identified the reasons for poor performance as redundancies, job redeployment and businesses reorganisations at many of the companies where learners work. Pilot staff work hard to help learners complete their programme even where learners have received a redundancy notice or been redeployed. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this strategy. Current learners are making satisfactory progress. No significant performance differences exist between different groups of learners.
12. Learners enjoy their learning and value the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification. They gain specialist skills which their employers value. Many go on to receive a promotion or enhanced responsibilities. Learners improve their employability and make valuable contributions to improving workplace practices and procedures. Foundation level learners report improved confidence and are better able to understand work instructions, job roles and company notices. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory.

13. Learners report that they feel safe at work. Engineering and warehousing and distribution learners operate machinery confidently and in accordance with their employer's safe working practices. Learners are aware of the correct personal protective requirement they need to wear at particular company sites or while carrying out specific tasks. Assessors reinforce these good practices during reviews. They also satisfactorily cover health and safety topics during learner induction and reinforce this during progress reviews. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

14. Assessors deliver training in the workplace to satisfactory standards. They use an appropriate range of learning materials to cover all aspects of the qualification. Staff are experienced and appropriately qualified. Learners demonstrate a sound knowledge of topics taught on their programme and successfully complete learning activities that assessors or tutors set for them. Learners enjoy learning sessions and find them very useful in supporting their development. However, in weaker sessions, especially in preparation for life and work and in business administration, tutors rely too heavily on a narrow range of methods which do not sufficiently set learning in the context of the learners' working environment. In these sessions, learning is often dull and repetitive and the most confident learners receive insufficient challenge.
15. Assessment and reviews are satisfactory. Induction and initial assessment are also satisfactory. Assessors plan assessment flexibly to accommodate the constraints of learners' work patterns. They use questioning effectively to check and reinforce understanding. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. However, some assessment and review practices are weak, especially in warehousing and distribution and business administration. Assessors do not always use the results of initial assessment to identify the extent of learners' previous experience to provide challenging and appropriate targets on individual learning plans. Progress reviews satisfactorily record learners' progress but they do not always clearly articulate short term targets that learners need to achieve in between the three month progress review visits. Pilot has begun to make use of an electronic portfolio system to record and monitor learners' progress more effectively, but it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of this initiative.
16. The provision meets effectively the needs and interests of users. Employers comment positively on learners' improved communication as a result of their training and their increased effectiveness in the workplace. Managers take appropriate improvement actions in response to learner and employer feedback. Assessors carry out night shift training and assessment and they work flexibly with employers to accommodate changing patterns of learner availability.

17. Partnerships with employers are good. Pilot has developed effective partnerships with a range of supportive employers. Many companies regard Pilot as the local provider of choice for training in engineering and warehousing and distribution. Pilot is particularly responsive to employer requests for training to meet their organisational needs. Pilot staff help employers to tailor learning programmes to meet business needs, for instance by selecting specific optional units to help learners progress at work.
18. Learners receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. Pilot's staff provide satisfactory information, advice and guidance, which they reinforce throughout the learner's programme. The provider uses initial assessment effectively to identify and meet additional learning needs. Assessors provide appropriate support that allows learners to enjoy and maximise the benefits of learning. Preparation for life and work learners receive valuable study support in classes and in individual sessions with tutors.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

19. Pilot's managers carried out a major company reorganisation about 18 months before the inspection. They handled this process well with minimum disruption to learning. During this period the provider re-established its priorities and strengthened its management team. Ambitious targets are now set and performance monitoring has much improved. The provider has very good relationships with local employers and a good understanding of national and regional priorities. Staff are well supported and provided with good opportunities for personal development. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these measures on raising performance across all areas of the provider's work.
20. The arrangements to safeguard all learners are satisfactory. The company exceeds the minimum requirements for safeguarding by carrying out CRB checks of all of its staff, even though this is not required by the legislation because all learners are in employment. Procedures for staff lone working are good. Staff have received recent safeguarding training. The designated safeguarding officer has received higher level training and is the company's point of reference for any safeguarding concerns. Though staff have a satisfactory understanding of safeguarding, they tend to interpret safeguarding narrowly as being concerned with learners' health and safety rather than with their general safety and well-being.
21. Pilot has satisfactory arrangements for promoting equality and diversity. The company's staff and learners reflect well the diversity of the communities that the company serves. Pilot works particularly well in areas of economic disadvantage to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to participate in training. The provider satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity at induction and during assessment. However, assessors do not sufficiently reinforce learners' understanding of equalities during reviews. Learners are treated fairly

and assessors are very flexible in planning learning and assessment to ensure that all learners have good access to assessment. Many of Pilot's staff are fluent in community languages. These staff provide particularly effective support for learners who speak English as an additional language. Managers measure the impact of equality and diversity promotion during course evaluations and many learners acknowledge that their awareness of equality and diversity has increased while on programme.

22. The provider has particularly effective arrangements for communication with employers and learners. A project manager contacts each employer every month. Employers value this contact because it ensures that they receive regular updates on learners' progress and any issues arising from the delivery of the programme. Pilot uses this information very well to make programme improvements. Managers gather and analyse the views of learners regularly to further develop and enhance the programme.
23. Quality improvement arrangements, including development planning, are satisfactory. However, the company places too much emphasis on the importance of internal audits and complying with external awarding body requirements as a measure of performance. It does not focus sufficiently on the quality of the learner's experience. The observation of assessment practice is good and observations are used well to improve the quality of assessment. However, the observation of teaching and learning process is insufficiently rigorous. Observation records do not contain enough detail to be useful for tutors. The process is not yet effective in raising the overall quality of training sessions.
24. The self-assessment process is inclusive and broadly accurate. Inspectors gave the same grades as those in the self-assessment report for most aspects of provision. However, the report contains too few evaluative statements or judgements. Little use is made of performance data to support claimed strengths related to success rates. Self-assessment is not used sufficiently well as a tool for making improvements. Managers recognise this weakness and have begun to tackle this issue.
25. The provider has significantly increased its resources to respond to the delivery of new qualifications. Overall success rates are broadly satisfactory. Staff are well-qualified and appropriately focused on using the company's limited resources to make improvements. The company is committed to using its resources in a sustainable way and works well with employers who have a strong ethos of environmental waste reduction and energy conservation.

Subject areas

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Context

26. At the time of inspection 17 learners were studying for an NVQ in performing manufacturing operations and 24 were following an apprenticeship in business improvement techniques. Almost all learners are studying at intermediate level. Some 50% of the learners belong to a minority ethnic group, and about 25% are female. Pilot provides all training in the workplace and coordinates the programmes from its main office in Birmingham.

Key findings

- Success rates have risen steadily over the last three years and are now good. The proportion of learners completing within the planned period is also good. Success rates for the small number of learners on an advanced level programme are low. The provider has correctly identified local redundancies and business closures as the main reason for this poor performance. Current learners are making satisfactory progress.
- Learners make good progress at work and enjoy their learning. They value the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification. Learners report gains in self-confidence and employability skills. After successful completion of their training, some learners receive promotion at work or additional responsibilities. Employers consider learners to be valuable team members.
- Learners report that they feel safe at work. They operate machinery effectively and comply with company safe working practices and procedures. Some learners complete additional employer-certificated health and safety qualifications in addition to their main award.
- Assessors and trainers provide satisfactory workplace training in small groups for apprentices and individually for those on an NVQ programme. They use a range of appropriate learning material effectively to cover the knowledge requirements of the programme. Assessors are effective in checking learners' understanding to ensure competence at the required level. Learners on the business improvement techniques programme use assignments and projects effectively to improve the production environment.
- Assessment is well planned, flexible and frequent. Assessors ensure that learners are clear about the requirements of the qualification. Learners' portfolios contain a range of diverse evidence such as photographs and witness testimony. Internal verification is frequent and meets awarding body criteria. Feedback to assessors is informative and helps to improve the assessment process.
- Learner reviews are satisfactory and completed regularly. Assessors ensure that all elements of the learning programme are thoroughly covered. Targets are set and agreed verbally for the next formal review, but these targets are not

recorded or precise enough. Assessors record their contact with learners between review visits but they do not sufficiently monitor and record the progress learners have made between these visits.

- The provision meets the needs and interests of users well. Employers speak positively about learners' improved communication as a result of the training they receive and their increased contribution and effectiveness towards team working. Many learners on the performing manufacturing operations programme have progressed from Pilot's foundation level programme. Most employers support and encourage learners to progress to the next level when they are ready.
- Partnerships with employers are good. Local employers are particularly complimentary about Pilot's provision. Pilot has recently equipped a training centre to a high standard in a local company which, in addition to its use as a training facility, also provides an opportunity for local jobseekers to develop employability skills. Many companies regard Pilot as the local provider of choice for engineering training.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Staff provide effective information, advice and guidance. However, some learners and employers do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the commitment and time required to complete the programme within the planned period. Some of Pilot's staff, who are fluent in a community language, make good use of this to communicate effectively with learners from a South Asian background.
- Leadership and management are effective. A recent management restructure is just beginning to have a positive impact on provision. Managers use regular structured meetings to monitor learner and assessor performance. Staff feel well supported. Managers have recently begun to make effective use of feedback from employers and learners to improve provision.
- Pilot has been very successful in promoting programmes to diverse groups of learners. No significant performance differences exist between different groups of learners. Staff cover equality and diversity topics effectively during induction. Assessors check learners' understanding during reviews, but they do not reinforce it sufficiently during the programme.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive. All staff received an opportunity to contribute towards the judgements in the report. Inspectors judged the self-assessment report to be broadly accurate but too descriptive and lacking in critical evaluation and judgements. The quality improvement plan is too generic. It gives insufficient attention to provision in engineering.

What does Pilot IMS Limited need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners and employers fully understand the commitment required for learners' successful completion of the programme within the planned period so that overall success rates continue to improve.

- Devise an effective strategy for improving the quality of reviews so that target-setting is more precise, learners' progress effectively monitored and understanding of equalities reinforced.
- Make better use of self-assessment as an improvement tool by ensuring that judgments are critical, evaluative and judgemental and that the development plan clearly includes strategies for improving provision in engineering.

Warehousing and distribution

Grade 3

Context

27. At the time of inspection, 24 learners were following the certificate in warehousing and storage skills at intermediate level and 28 an intermediate apprenticeship programme. Most learners are male. Some 25% belong to a minority ethnic group. Warehousing, distribution and manufacturing businesses in the West and East Midlands employ all of the learners. Pilot's assessors and trainers visit learners in the workplace regularly to provide learning, assessment and reviews.

Key findings

- Overall success rates on the intermediate certificate qualification are low. The proportion of learners completing within the planned period is also low. Many learners with completion dates in 2011/12 left the programme early owing to business restructuring and redundancy. The company has taken effective actions to support current learners to achieve. The training team now carries out more frequent assessor visits. Pilot staff work flexibly with employers to ensure that learners receive support with their studies.
- Learners following the apprenticeship programme enjoy their learning and make satisfactory and often good progress. They produce appropriate standards of work which meet awarding body requirements. Most learners are on target to complete within the planned period. No significant performance differences exist between groups of learners.
- Learners develop good skills and knowledge which increase their employability, extend their understanding of tasks and in some instances contribute to improving workplace practice. Apprentices develop appropriate literacy and numeracy skills to support them in their work. Many learners progress on to further learning programmes or gain additional responsibility or promotion at work.
- Learners feel safe at work and during learning. Working practices are safe and consistently maintain high standards. Pilot's trainers underpin and reinforce this good practice during learning and assessment activity. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work. Many businesses and learners are involved in community activities which have strong links to charitable events and open day activities for local people.
- Training and assessment are satisfactory. Initial assessment and induction are also satisfactory. Assessors plan learning and assessment flexibly to meet learners' needs. A minority of learners do not have their previous learning adequately recognised. These learners receive insufficient challenge in learning. Staff are experienced and appropriately qualified. Individual learning plans are satisfactory but do not include specific reference to personal learning and thinking skills.

- Progress reviews are generally satisfactory. Verbal feedback to learners is supportive and well understood. However, progress reviews are ineffective in setting short-term targets and in monitoring progress. Records are often incomplete. Employers do not always understand the importance of reviews in helping learners to achieve within the planned period. Pilot has well-developed plans to implement an electronic portfolio system so that assessors can better record learners' progress.
- Provision satisfactorily meets users' needs. Assessors plan learning well and match qualification units to learners' job roles. Learners have a range of progression routes and opportunities for career improvement. Managers take appropriate improvement actions in response to learner and employer feedback. Assessors carry out night shift training and assessment and they work flexibly with employers to accommodate fluctuating patterns of learner availability.
- Pilot has developed effective partnerships with a range of supportive employers. Improvements in provision are well coordinated in response to employer views and evolving business practices. This contributes to the maintenance of a valuable and business focussed portfolio of learning to meet employers' needs.
- Support for learners is personalised and appropriately focussed on individual needs. Assessors provide satisfactory support that enables learners to enjoy and maximise the benefits of learning. Where relevant, learners receive appropriate information, advice and guidance on career development or further learning. Assessors refer learners to employers' personal support services or human resource services where this is in the learner's interest.
- Programme management focuses strongly on ensuring that the provision complies with external regulatory requirements. Managers place insufficient emphasis on sharing good practice. Transition arrangements for new qualifications to improve the learning experience for learners were only partially effective. Recent actions to improve team capability have proved effective in raising team performance levels and staff morale.
- Pilot integrates equal opportunities and diversity well with learning and assessment practice. It supports this by demonstrating high standards of practice in the workplace. Staff challenge harassment, bullying and discriminatory behaviour where it occurs. Satisfactory procedures for managing complaints and incidents are in place for learning and within workplace activity, which learners understand.
- Self-assessment is broadly accurate. However, the self-assessment report is too descriptive and insufficiently critical. Managers give insufficient attention to the low success rates on the intermediate certificate programme. The report focuses on the extent to which provision complies with regulatory requirements rather than with the quality of the provision. Inspectors gave the same grade for the provision as that in the self-assessment report.

What does Pilot IMS Limited need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that assessors take proper account of learners' previous experience and achievements and that individual learning plans include clear references to how learners will demonstrate achievement of personal, learning and thinking skills.
- Implement a more rigorous and effective procedure for progress reviews so that review targets are properly recorded and realistically achievable and that employers contribute to the target-setting process. Make better use of reviews to monitor learners' progress so that success rates improve.
- Ensure that transition arrangements for new qualifications are effective by having greater standardisation of assessment, updating assessment records and improving assessor knowledge.
- Provide a more critical and reflective account of the overall quality of provision by making better use of management information and evaluative language to support self-assessment judgements.

Preparation for life and work

Grade 3

Context

28. Pilot provides literacy courses for some 156 adults in the workplace. Learners can study from pre-foundation level to intermediate level. Most learners work for employers in the manufacturing sector in the East of England and Northampton. Some 55% of learners are female. Almost all learners are migrant workers from eastern European countries. The provider offers classes in two-hour blocks for eight to 15 weeks. All training takes place on employers' premises.

Key findings

- Success rates in 2009/10 and 2010/11 were good and well above national rates. The proportion of learners who completed within the planned period was also good. Data for 2011/12 indicates that these success rates have fallen to around the national rate. Most learners complete their course successfully and progress well. Current learners are making satisfactory progress. All learners achieve equally well regardless of their ethnicity or gender.
- Learners enjoy their learning and improve their confidence. They have a much improved understanding of work instructions, job roles and notices. They confidently ask for help and clarification resulting in productive and positive working relationships with their managers and colleagues. They become more effective and efficient in their workplace. Learners feel more secure in their employment and they report that they feel safe.
- Most learners improve their knowledge of language structures appropriately and increase their reading and comprehension skills. They are able to correct themselves and use language accurately, becoming more effective in their daily work and personal life activities, such as filling in forms unaided, shopping, telephoning banks and making appointments.
- Knowledgeable and experienced tutors plan lessons appropriately by incorporating a good mix of reading and writing skills, with some listening and speaking activities. However, tutors place too strong an emphasis on grammar and completing worksheets. They often use a narrow range of methods and do not make sufficient use of relevant topics related to the workplace or to learners' experiences.
- Initial assessment accurately identifies learners' starting points. Learners enrol on courses that match their abilities and previous learning. However, tutors do not use the findings of initial assessment sufficiently to set learners specific and time-constrained targets. Learning plans are too general and learners and employers cannot easily measure learners' progress against their learning objectives.
- The programme satisfactorily meets the needs of learners and employers. Learners attend classes in employers' time in small groups that assessors

arrange flexibly around shift patterns. Partnerships with employers are generally effective. Employers are aware of the progress their employees are making and are generally satisfied with the rate of progress. However, employers are insufficiently involved in the planning of training and setting individual learning targets for learners.

- Support for learners is satisfactory. Tutors provide valuable study support in classes and in individual sessions with learners. These include guidance to help learners learn at home and dyslexia support for those who need it. Pilot staff provide clear information, advice and guidance for learners.
- Curriculum management is satisfactory. Pilot has successfully provided valuable training to local employers for many years. However, it has not managed the recent substantial growth in provision well. Pilot has begun to provide training for some employers who are reluctant, during busy periods, to release learners to attend training sessions. Pilot has not secured sufficient high-level support for the training programme from these employers. The provider recognises this problem and has begun to take appropriate steps to secure the necessary support.
- The provider promotes equality and diversity effectively. Pilot offers learning to learners who are new to the country and in most need in the workplace, often working in unskilled roles. Tutors reinforce learners' understanding of equalities well throughout the programme. Staff respect and value the diverse range of learners' ethnicity and language.
- The self-assessment report for the subject area is inclusive and accurate. However, it is too descriptive and contains few judgements or supporting evidence. Inspectors gave the same grade as that in the self-assessment report. Quality improvement and development planning are satisfactory. The observation of teaching and learning process is also satisfactory. Peer support, including staff development is effective.

What does Pilot IMS Limited need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of initial assessment to identify and record in individual learning plans challenging and realistically achievable learning objectives. Ensure that assessors monitor and share progress against these objectives with learners and employers.
- Encourage trainers to make better use of a wider range of teaching and learning methods and resources that incorporate topics drawn from learners' work and life experiences.
- Involve employers in designing and evaluating the training to meet better the needs of employers and learners. Ensure that employers participate in the setting of individual learning targets for learners.
- Ensure that senior staff at each employer are fully committed to the training programme and that they support learners to attend all of the training sessions.

Business administration and law

Grade 3

Context

29. At the time of inspection, 147 learners were studying programmes in customer service, business administration, team leading and management. Some 54% of learners are male and most are of white British heritage. The majority of learners are on an intermediate level apprenticeship programme. A small number of advanced apprentices are following a management and business administration programme. Pilot staff carry out all training and assessment in the workplace.

Key findings

- Overall success rates have been consistently at or around national rates for the last three years. The proportion of learners who complete within the planned period have followed a similar pattern. Success rates for learners on advanced level programmes are generally higher than for those at intermediate level. Provisional data for 2011/12 indicate that overall success rates have declined to below national rates.
- Job progression opportunities for learners are good. One employer is supporting learners with their apprenticeship training as part of its organisational succession plan for future managers. Learners benefit from career and personal progression during their apprenticeship training. They report good gains in business and customer service skills which their employers value.
- Assessors satisfactorily reinforce health and safety during learner reviews and they regularly check that learners are implementing safe working practices. Learners feel safe in their workplace. They wear appropriate personal protective equipment and are aware of their responsibility for complying with workplace health and safety procedures.
- Learners demonstrate sound knowledge of topics and they successfully complete learning activities and tasks. They enjoy training sessions which they find contributes to their personal and career development. However, training sessions are not always well planned or structured and tutors do not plan sufficient variety and challenge to engage fully all learners throughout the session.
- Assessment and review are satisfactory. Assessors are flexible as to when they carry out assessment visits. However, they do not always use initial assessment results to set appropriately challenging targets for learners. Progress reviews, though regular and supportive, do not result in sufficiently individualised targets. The recording of learners' progress is often poor. Pilot's recent introduction of an electronic portfolio has begun to tackle these issues.
- Tutors meet learners' literacy and numeracy needs particularly effectively. Learners receive clear explanations that they then put into practice through appropriate tasks during learning sessions, and which learners complete

successfully. Learners speak highly of this support, which enables them to improve their confidence, particularly with mathematical calculations.

- The range of provision meets the needs of learners and employers well. Working relationships with employers are good. Pilot works collaboratively with employers to tailor programmes to meet employers' needs. Learners are encouraged to select units that will further develop their skills and knowledge to enable progress within the workplace. Assessors negotiate topics for training and assessment sessions with employers to plan for the best use of fluctuations in organisational business flows.
- Managers have taken effective actions to improve the quality of provision, although many of these actions are very recent. Project managers now monitor the performance of learners and of assessors on each programme. Managers have begun to raise expectations and to set appropriate and challenging targets. Staff are well supported and receive good opportunities for personal development and training.
- The promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately trained and have a satisfactory understanding. However, learners' awareness of equalities topics is often weak. Pilot gives insufficient weight to the promotion of equality and diversity during learner reviews.
- The self-assessment report provides a broadly accurate account of the subject area. Inspectors gave the same grade as that in the self-assessment report. However, the report is overly descriptive and insufficiently judgemental. Quality assurance and improvement arrangements are generally satisfactory. Managers make effective use of feedback to improve the provision.

What does Pilot IMS Limited need to do to improve further?

- Implement more rigorous and effective assessment procedures and make better use of reviews to monitor learners' progress so that success rates improve.
- Help tutors to plan learning sessions better so that they focus on challenging all learners by providing differentiated activities that enable learners to achieve their potential.
- Improve the effectiveness of assessment and reviews by ensuring that assessors take proper account of learners' previous experience and achievements and that review targets are specific, measureable and time-constrained.
- Develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity by making better use of reviews to reinforce their awareness.

Information about the inspection

30. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's quality 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.
31. 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)**Pilot IMS Limited**

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	432	432
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
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?	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?	3	
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?	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?	3	
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?	3	
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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