

Virgin Media

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58810

Name of lead inspector: Charles Clark HMI

Last day of inspection: 31 August 2012

Type of provider: Employer

Address: Virgin Media
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Information about the provider

1. Virgin Media (VM) is part of the Virgin group of companies and is one of the largest entertainment and communications companies in the United Kingdom. It was established in 2007 and first started to employ apprentices in 2008, although this provision was outsourced to another provider at this time. VM currently has a contract with the Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships in information and communication technology (ICT). These apprentices are working nationwide. The main training centre is based in Birmingham, with training rooms across the country.
2. VM employs a senior manager, the head of apprenticeships, who is responsible for the provision, assisted by a team administrator and a recruitment manager. VM currently employs seven assessors who also line manage the apprentices. This structure is currently changing and support managers are being recruited to assist and support the learners, leaving the assessors to develop their assessment role further.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	63 apprentices

Summary report

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

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

Overall effectiveness

3. VM runs a good apprenticeship training scheme. Learners gain very good professional and customer service skills, and develop their confidence and team-building skills. Success rates for the previous two years are significantly above the national average. All learners enjoy the programmes and are very enthusiastic about their learning. Teaching and learning are good. Tutors are well qualified and very experienced. They provide good-quality training. Assessors use progress reviews well to support learners, setting demanding but realistic targets. VM meets the needs of learners exceptionally well, and offers good opportunities for progression within the company and on to further qualifications. Partnership working is good and VM has good links to other providers and local schools. VM provides outstanding care, guidance and support; the company advises learners throughout their training to help them make the correct career choices.
4. Strategic management is good. Managers offer a clear vision of the future and well-developed plans to broaden the provision, although they have not yet created a strategic management plan. Operational management is very effective. Good communication is facilitated through well-structured meetings and regular conference calls. Safeguarding is good; staff and learners give particular attention to safe working practices that include health and safety

checks on vehicles and equipment. VM informs and directs learners well to help them gain access to an outside agency for information about health and related issues. VM promotes most aspects of equality and diversity well. Quality improvement procedures are well established and effective, but the findings are not integrated into a quality improvement plan.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Overall success rates are well above the national average and most learners complete their qualification within the allocated time. Learners achieve the higher-level technical skills needed for their profession. Promotion within the organisation and rates of progress on to higher professional qualifications are very good.
- Learners develop a good range of wider professional skills and their future employability, as a result of the training, is excellent. They show much improved confidence and team-building skills. They develop very good customer service skills. Learners' participation is very good and learners enjoy their learning and appreciate the training provided.
- Learners feel very safe. Health and safety have a high priority within VM and are dealt with thoroughly at induction. They are reinforced throughout the training, which includes regular health and safety checks on vehicles and equipment. Learners have a good understanding of internet safety and other safe working practices. Learners and staff show mutual respect.
- Teaching and learning are good. Induction is very good and memorable for learners. Tutors are vocationally very well qualified despite lacking formal teaching qualifications. The electronic portfolios have a clear and detailed structure and tutors use them well to record evidence and progress. Online training is very good and the coaching plans are very detailed.
- VM meets the needs and interests of learners exceptionally well. Learners are very satisfied with the courses on offer and appreciate that their professional and personal needs are met so well. The company benefits from better qualified, and more dedicated, employees as a result. VM is particularly good at meeting the needs of learners with personal difficulties.
- VM uses partnerships well to develop its provision. VM has good relationships with local schools and an active involvement in promoting careers in ICT. Learners are encouraged to engage in local community work for up to five days each year. VM works with a number of national charities to raise money and to help young people into work.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding. VM provides learners with high-quality information about the courses and progression opportunities. Learners are well supported by the use of buddies, mentors, and other staff in the field. The individual reviews involve detailed support and valuable discussions. Learners receive continuous advice and guidance about career possibilities.
- Leadership and management are good. The current provision has been carefully managed to ensure that high professional standards are met. Senior managers

have a clear vision for the future, and well-developed plans to broaden the range and level of the qualifications. Whilst adequately documented, these are not integrated into a strategic management plan.

- Safeguarding is good. VM meets all the necessary requirements relating to safeguarding. It ensures the safety of its learners while driving and working alone. Each learner has a mobile phone and contact numbers. VM provides excellent training for safety on the internet and has robust procedures for preventing bullying and promoting whistle-blowing awareness.
- VM ensures that equality and diversity are integrated well into all aspects of the provision, especially the recruitment of new learners. VM monitors the proportion and performance of different groups of learners and actively promotes the programmes to under-represented groups.
- The self-assessment process is good. It involves all staff and takes account of the views and feedback from learners. Although inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, it is insufficiently self-critical. VM has no formal quality improvement plan. Nevertheless, managers have a good understanding of how the provision can be improved.

What does Virgin Media need to do to improve further?

- Produce an overall strategic management plan which links the various initiatives and plans for the future to provide a clear focus for the expansion and development of the provision.
- Produce a quality improvement plan which clearly reflects the areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report to ensure that action points are completed in a timely manner.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the very well organised courses
- the good support from staff at all levels and fellow apprentices
- the very enjoyable apprenticeship scheme
- the support and guidance to move onto the next step
- the excellent mentoring programme
- the fantastic training.

What learners would like to see improved:

No areas for improvement were identified.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

5. VM has a good capacity to make and sustain improvement. Staff have developed the internal apprenticeship programme well over the last two years. Outcomes for learners are good; success rates are significantly higher than national averages and learners develop good professional and vocational skills. Progression opportunities within the company and to further qualifications are good and are used well by learners. Leadership is good and plans to broaden the provision and to introduce higher levels of qualifications are well developed. Leaders and managers motivate staff and learners by setting demanding, but realistic, targets. All staff are highly committed and learners are passionate about their training. Self-assessment is satisfactory and involves all staff. The report is not sufficiently judgemental. However, it is largely accurate and reflected well the judgements of inspectors. Quality improvement procedures are well established and are thorough. Quality improvement initiatives are well documented but VM does not have an overall quality improvement plan. VM uses data effectively to monitor the learners' progress and outcomes, and manages the provision very effectively. It collects learners' feedback continuously and uses it to promote improvement. Staff are well qualified professionally and very experienced, although they lack formal educational training.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

6. Outcomes for learners are good. Overall success rates are outstanding for the past two complete years, exceeding 90%. Current data suggest that these rates have been maintained for 2011/12. Inspectors found no significant differences in success rates across age, gender or ethnicity. However, the success rates in the east of England are closer to the national average.
7. Learners develop exceptional employability skills. Technical skills are of a high standard and learners acquire additional strong skills in customer service and health and safety. Learners are highly motivated and enjoy their learning. Apprentices work as part of a team and develop good team-building and interpersonal skills. They make good progress and reflect on their learning in building their portfolios.
8. Learners' promotion prospects are good, and those completing their initial apprenticeship can move into more complex roles and advanced apprenticeships immediately. Half of the current group of advanced apprentices progressed from a level 2 apprenticeship. Advanced apprentices take on added responsibility at work, such as mentoring other apprentices. All apprentices become full-time employees on completion of their qualification.

9. Learners feel very safe in the workplace and adopt safe working practices. Their awareness of the dangers associated with their job roles is good. All learners are equipped with personal protective equipment and can call on support from other staff members in any hazardous situation. Vans are fitted with a panic alarm and route monitors. Learners treat others with respect and understand the need for personal and data security. Learners benefit from additional driver training.
10. Learners make a positive contribution to the community by arranging charity events, either on an individual basis or as part of VM corporate charity days. Learners currently contribute one day each year to charitable work. They also participate in promoting telecommunications engineering to schools and, in particular, to under-represented groups such as females.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

11. Teaching and learning are good with a strong emphasis on customer service. Practical off-the-job sessions are taught well; tutors incorporate relevant material and place a good emphasis on health and safety. Functional skills activities are occupationally relevant and particularly innovative, developing complex technical, personal and presentational skills. VM staff use excellent coaching plans to monitor the development of learners' skills and ensure learners meet the required standards. In some sessions, lesson plans are too brief and have no clearly stated learning outcomes. Teachers are technically well qualified. Learners have access to a wide range of effective online training materials, which they value. Assessment practice in the field is good. Photographic evidence and recorded discussions are used simultaneously to confirm learners' performance and background knowledge.
12. Comprehensive and supportive induction, lasting for five days, prepares learners well for both VM employment and the apprenticeship. It includes initial assessment in preparation for their first period of training. Learners find activities enjoyable and memorable, especially the opportunities for team working.
13. Learners' portfolios are clear and detailed. They make good use of photographic and recorded evidence. Links to assessment criteria are clear. However, assessors sometimes provide insufficient written feedback on how the learner can improve their work, particularly spelling and grammar.
14. Progress reviews are well planned and constructive. Tutors set, monitor and discuss measurable targets that include technical competence, dependability and customer service. Training needs are identified and supported throughout. Learners are encouraged to consider their longer-term career aims from the start. Equality and diversity are covered appropriately.
15. The needs and interests of learners are met exceptionally well. Learners value the high-quality training that they receive and the trust given to them by VM in

their independent working. Many learners progress very well as a result of their apprenticeship to a variety of jobs, meeting their longer-term career aspirations. VM recognises the significant benefit that the company receives from having well-trained and motivated employees.

16. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. All learners receive excellent support in the field from the start to develop their skills and confidence. Support is available from a range of staff who act as mentors, coaches, assessors or managers. Good relationships and high levels of trust are developed between the learner and these experienced colleagues. VM is particularly good at providing support to meet the individual needs of learners. For example, the company paid for additional language support for a learner whose first language was not English, and for dyslexia testing for another learner. Learners receive advice and guidance about career possibilities at every progress review.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

17. Leadership and management are good. VM has developed the apprenticeship programme in-house over the last two years very successfully. It has increased the number of apprentices significantly and maintained high success rates. Directors provide excellent support. Senior managers have clear and well-developed plans to expand the provision to include a broader range of courses and courses at higher levels, although they have not yet prepared a strategic management plan. VM has good links with local schools and other providers to recruit learners and to develop progression routes.
18. Communication within the organisation is very effective and sustained by regular monthly staff meetings, monthly support and training days for support managers, and weekly conference calls for all assessors. VM has an effective report system to communicate learners' progress and identify any particular issues. The provision is managed well and the functional skills components of the training are very well integrated. The management and use of data are good.
19. The safeguarding arrangements are good. The policy and procedures provide clear and detailed guidance to staff. VM's effective policies on bullying, harassment and whistle blowing are well understood by staff and learners. The head of apprenticeships is the designated safeguarding officer and all staff have received appropriate training. The promotion of e-learning and internet safety is good. Learners have good access to an outside agency for advice on sexual health, drug and alcohol-related issues and other concerns.
20. Promotion of equality and diversity is good. VM has appropriate equality and diversity policies and procedures, and manages them effectively. Equality and diversity are covered well at induction and reinforced within the training programmes. Particular issues relating to customer service are followed up in more depth. Promotional materials contain appropriate representation of under-

represented groups and recruitment is designed to optimise engagement with them. VM analyses data in relation to variations in achievement between different groups of learners, and its records show no significant differences.

21. VM uses every opportunity to obtain feedback from learners through evaluation of training sessions, sharing information from individual meetings and surveying learners' attitudes. Managers use this information effectively to develop the provision and improve the quality of the training.
22. The self-assessment process is good and inclusive. The self-assessment report is satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with many of the key judgements in the report, but it is insufficiently self-critical and does not identify the areas for improvement. The quality improvement procedures are used well to assure the quality of the training and the documentation. However, they are not linked into an overall quality improvement plan which would facilitate better coordination of quality management, especially as the provision expands. Observations of teaching and learning take place, but these are focused on the content of the sessions rather than the quality of the teaching and learning.
23. VM provides good value for money. Outcomes for learners are good and include the development of good professional and customer service skills. Learning resources and accommodation at the Birmingham training centre are outstanding, having just undergone extensive refurbishment. VM has developed sustainability procedures very well, and implemented them well within the company.

Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's head of apprenticeships, 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, and data on learners and their achievement.
25. 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.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Virgin Media**

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	192	192
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	2	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2	
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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