

Progress to Excellence Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		11–15 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Success rates for apprentices are too low and too many learners are on planned breaks of study.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not of a consistently good standard.
- Staff do not use information gained from initial assessments effectively in planning learners' programmes.
- Progress reviews are not thorough enough and employers are not sufficiently involved in the planning and reviewing of learning.
- The observation of teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently focused on learning.
- Managers do not have routine access to accurate data to make informed decisions about the quality and standard of training or the progress of learners.
- Quality assurance arrangements have not brought about improvements in the quality of provision quickly enough.
- The promotion and embedding of equality and diversity to learners is not of a consistent high standard across all courses.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Trainers and assessors have good levels of vocational knowledge and experience that they use effectively to engage, motivate and support learners.
- Learners develop good workplace skills that meet their own and employers' needs well.
- The employability programme is meeting the needs of unemployed learners and progression into employment is good.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase progression rates and the proportion of learners who complete within the planned timescale by:
 - taking swift and prompt action to establish clearly defined re-engagement targets for the growing number of learners who are on extended breaks of study
 - using the outcomes of initial assessment more effectively to plan individualised training so that learners can fulfil their potential
 - ensuring more accurate monitoring of individual learners' progress across all aspects of their programme and implementing swift action for learners most at risk of falling behind
 - regularly monitoring the performance of different groups of learners and taking effective action to narrow any identified gaps.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - planning and delivering a good and varied range of activities in all lessons that engage all learners and extend their knowledge
 - better coordination of learning and assessment opportunities within the workplace through the setting of specific short- and medium-term targets for all learners
 - improving the written feedback on learners' work so that spelling and punctuation errors are identified, and learners are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.
- Strengthen quality improvement arrangements by:
 - revising the observation and monitoring of teaching and learning processes, to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning rapidly improves
 - monitoring the quality of learners' training plans and progress reviews to ensure the information included is detailed, accurate and meaningful to learners
 - improving the rigour and accuracy of the self-assessment process by ensuring sound evidence is used and judgements are based on high expectations around learners' outcomes, high quality teaching, learning and assessment, and effective leadership and management
 - ensuring that learners' and employers' feedback is systematically collected and analysed and actions are quickly implemented to address any concerns.
- Rapidly improve the management information system by:
 - ensuring that managers have regular access to reliable, accurate and timely information on learners' overall success rates and the proportion who complete within the planned time
 - ensuring that managers and staff regularly analyse the relative performance of all learners and take effective action to quickly address any barriers to learners' progress, so that all learners achieve their full potential.
- Promote equality and diversity themes across all programmes by:
 - ensuring that teaching, learning, assessment and progress reviews maximise opportunities to explore and extend learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity
 - drawing on the broad diversity of learners and their employers' service users including their heritage, experience, culture and religious perspectives
 - ensuring that trainers' and assessors' knowledge is developed well so that they can promote equality and diversity effectively.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- In 2011/12, the overall proportion of learners who successfully completed their apprenticeship courses with Progress to Excellence (PTE) declined to below the national average. Specifically, declining success rates on apprenticeship courses in health and social care and business administration and law are below that of similar providers. The proportion of learners who achieved within the planned time was also very low. Outcomes for learners on workplace learning courses are inadequate but overall learner numbers on this provision have declined significantly and currently numbers are very low. Inspectors were not able to validate the provider’s own performance data for 2012/13.
- Recently recruited learners are making the progress expected of them. However, a small minority of apprentices who have been in learning for some considerable time continue to make only slow progress. At the time of the inspection, a minority of learners were on planned study breaks; the provider has very recently established a post to support these learners back on to programme, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this.
- Over the last two years, performance gaps, particularly between male and female learners on apprenticeship courses have narrowed. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed well. However, learners of White British heritage who form the majority of learners on programme are underperforming relative to their peer group nationally and against the very small number of learners of Black or minority ethnic heritage.
- On workplace learning courses, there are no significant variations in achievement between different groups of learners. The performance of different groups of learners is not systematically evaluated by managers at PTE.
- Learners develop appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding and vocational skills in the workplace and work safely; they enjoy learning. They have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities and an adequate knowledge of equality and diversity, although this is variable and insufficient in a few areas. Learners act with appropriate respect and behaviour towards each other and service users in their workplace settings.
- Learners on the recently introduced employability programme significantly increase their confidence and self-esteem as they become more competent and gain skills that equip them well to perform in a range of health and social care settings. They develop a good level of understanding of how they can achieve employment, including improving their ability to communicate and present themselves well to prospective employers at interview. Progression rates for these learners into employment are good and a small minority progress on to an appropriate apprenticeship course. Very few learners, particularly in health and social care, progress beyond the intermediate apprenticeship course.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
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- Tutors and assessors demonstrate good levels of commitment and support learners well, but the planning of learning to meet individual learners’ needs is not consistently good enough across all apprenticeship courses. Insufficient encouragement is given to learners by PTE staff to develop broader skills such as teamwork, leadership and problem solving to a sufficiently high level to support and extend their personal development. The few learners on the recently introduced employability course benefit from a positive learning environment, which builds learners’ self-confidence and supports their skills development well.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies too much, with on-the-job learning generally being of a better standard than off-the-job learning. In the better learning sessions tutors and assessors have high expectations of apprentices and use a good variety of activities which engage and motivate learners. Question and answer techniques are used very effectively to challenge learners and to help them extend their learning. Tutors make good use of their

vocational knowledge and experience to plan lessons and learning activities that enable learners to develop a clear understanding of how their learning links with their everyday duties. For example, learners within health and social care display a sound understanding of their own and others' safety within residential care settings.

- In less successful learning sessions, tutors and assessors do not plan activities well enough to meet learners' individual needs and abilities. Poorly differentiated learning activities result in the pace of learning often being too slow and tutors do not check regularly enough that learning is taking place or make effective use of information and learning technology. As a result learners lose concentration, become distracted from learning and do not make sufficient progress, particularly the more able who find some tasks too easy.
- Initial assessment requires improvement as tutors and assessors make insufficient use of the results when planning for individual learning. Learning targets do not take into account apprentices' wider needs, interests or skills development opportunities in the workplace. As a consequence of weak individualised short- and medium-term learning targets learners cannot monitor their own progress reliably. Tutors understand well the needs and interests of the small numbers of learners who have identified additional learning needs; this allows support to be targeted and ensures they do at least as well as, and often better than, their peers.
- Assessment practices are satisfactory. Learners' portfolios are generally well-organised and their work demonstrates an appropriate level of knowledge and skills development. Assessors visit learners frequently and provide good support during visits in the workplace. A minority of assessments are too assessor led. In better assessment sessions question and answer techniques are used very effectively by assessors to extend learners' understanding and they receive good verbal feedback. However, the standard of written assessment feedback to learners and the tracking of their progress varies too much, particularly in recording how well they are doing towards completing their course or what they need to do to improve. Individual learners' reviews, although frequent, are not thorough enough and lack appropriate clarity and detail. Learners are not sufficiently involved in setting or reviewing their own targets at these meetings.
- Managers, tutors and assessors have introduced improved arrangements to ensure that learners can successfully achieve their functional skills. Trainers and assessors help learners improve their English and mathematics by providing individual coaching to develop these skills further, but functional skills are not integrated sufficiently into vocational learning activities. Trainers and assessors do not routinely correct spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in learners' portfolios.
- Learners are provided with satisfactory information and advice and options to ensure that they have chosen the right programme. Assessors offer constructive advice to learners on the different aspects of their course, their personal needs and circumstances. However, too few learners are provided with appropriate guidance on possible progression routes, as reflected in the low number of learners progressing to higher-level courses. Employability learners receive good advice and support, which has contributed to high progress rates into employment.
- Tutors and assessors do not extend learners' understanding of equality and diversity in sufficient depth during reviews and taught sessions. The discussion of equality topics in reviews often lacks depth and detail, although diversity is more effectively promoted.

Health, social care and early years Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement, as shown in the decline in overall outcomes for learners in 2011/12. Current learners make at least satisfactory progress towards completing their courses, although a few make slow progress.
- Learners demonstrate good knowledge of safe working practices such as manual handling and lifting when moving service users in a range of domiciliary and residential care settings. They have a good understanding of their role and responsibility to maintain their own and their

service users' safety, such as the importance of following safeguarding procedures and respecting the confidentiality of the individuals they care for.

- Tutors are appropriately qualified and vocationally experienced. However, their planning of training for learners requires improvement. In the better sessions, tutors plan a good and varied range of teaching and learning activities including making appropriate use of online learning resources, which both enthuses and stimulates learners to extend their understanding. In too many sessions learning objectives are not made clear to learners.
- Assessors challenge learners effectively and, as a result, ensure that the majority of learners make the progress expected of them. Professional discussions are effectively used to check that learners develop good knowledge and understanding. Assessment records are generally well detailed. Where learners use electronic portfolios, tracking is good and learners make better progress. However, the majority of learners are using paper-based portfolios and the tracking of their progress by the assessor is too variable.
- The targets set by a minority of assessors do not provide sufficient challenge and often lack precision in relation to the setting of short- and medium-term actions for learners. There are inconsistencies in the quality of reviews and employers do not routinely receive regular feedback on learners' progress and their achievements.
- Initial advice and guidance requires improvement. Initial advice helps ensure learners are put on an appropriate course, but guidance to meet individual needs is not systematic or detailed enough and few learners progress to advanced-level courses. Guidance for the small cohort of employability learners is good and many progress successfully into employment.
- Support for learners in the workplace is good. Learners benefit from having good access to their assessors who work flexibly to provide appropriate personal and training support through regular visits, email and telephone contact. Employers provide learners with appropriate opportunities to practise and develop their vocational skills; this boosts their confidence and enables the more-able learners to demonstrate their ability to take on additional responsibilities in the workplace. The majority of learners successfully obtain additional health and social care qualifications that improve their effectiveness at work.
- Development of English and mathematics require improvement. Specialist functional skills tutors use a good range of resources including newly devised assignments that allow learners to identify and capture naturally occurring functional skills evidence. They also give good encouragement to learners to use dictionaries to improve their spelling. However, vocational tutors do not routinely inform learners on how they can improve their English, punctuation and grammar. For example, in health and social care, e-portfolio evidence does not include assessor feedback to improve English.
- Learners have an adequate knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity and treat service users with respect and dignity and recognise differences in culture. However, assessors do not regularly embed equality and diversity themes into their sessions or during progress reviews.

Administration and business management Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement as reflected in the outcomes for learners that also require improvement. While most coaching and assessment sessions to support learning are good, teaching is less than good. The majority of current learners are making reasonable progress.
- As a result of good coaching, learners develop good employability skills including increased levels of self-confidence. They improve their workplace skills in a wide range of administrative and management tasks, such as managing and motivating teams, using spreadsheets and collating bundles of documents for use by solicitors in court. In the better sessions learners quickly progress to become proficient administrators.

- Assessors have appropriate skills, knowledge and vocational experience that they use well to support learners. Assessments are well planned and sufficiently flexible to meet learners' and employers' needs. Assessors provide good oral feedback, but written feedback to learners lacks detail on what they need to do to improve their performance. Spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners' written work are accurately corrected.
- Assessors have high aspirations for their apprentices and carry out regular assessment visits, alternating between remote contact and face-to-face visits, at times convenient to learners' and employers' work commitments. Learners value this frequent contact, which has a motivational effect on their commitment to their course.
- Learners receive adequate information and guidance at induction. Learners undertake appropriate initial and diagnostic assessments including an assessment of their learning styles to ensure they are placed onto the correct course. Although appropriate long-term targets are set and recorded on the learners' individual learning plan, assessors do not use this information consistently well enough to set challenging individual learning targets during coaching sessions.
- The majority of learners are set appropriate targets to improve their English and mathematics skills and in a few cases learners work to a higher level. Good individual support is available from specialist functional skills tutors who use their industry experiences well to provide detailed and accurate feedback to learners on how to improve their English and mathematical skills.
- Learners' progress reviews require improvement. Although they occur regularly, these activities are often rushed, meaning that reviews of progress are insufficiently thorough or detailed. Too many reviews do not capture learners' progress sufficiently well regarding their achievement of elements or units of study, resulting in some learners being unaware of their progress or what they still need to do to complete their course.
- Most employers provide appropriate support for their learners to develop good vocational skills and ensure that there are appropriate work-related activities for learners to further develop their skills. The support given to learners by assessors is valued by employers as this enables their staff to gain qualifications and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills to an industry standard.
- Learners have a satisfactory understanding of health and safety, equality and diversity and safeguarding. Discussion of these topics is appropriately linked to knowledge questions and the employment rights and responsibilities work book. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in learning sessions requires improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The overall quality of leadership and management requires improvement. Since the last inspection, PTE has experienced a period of significant change and turbulence. A recently established management team has taken a number of actions to improve many aspects of the company's operations and the quality of the provision it offers. For example, a new staff structure has been introduced and roles and responsibilities have been redefined. However, despite these actions, learners' performance has not improved sufficiently.
- The operational management of provision has improved but it requires further improvement. PTE offers training nationally to a large number of employers in a diverse range of geographical locations. The company does not have a sufficient overview of learners' training activities; it is over-reliant on the assessors' record of schedules of training events such as off-the-job training, progress review and assessment meetings. Scheduling arrangements are not always effective at ensuring that all assessors have sufficient time to visit and support learners.
- The newly revised performance-management policy is effective, enhancing the capacity of all staff including managers to now speed up the pace of improvements. The Chief Executive has good insight into managers' developmental needs and coaches them well. The company provides a range of relevant staff development activities and acts swiftly to tackle underperformance.

- The self-assessment report has identified most areas for improvement found during the inspection. The quality improvement plan is detailed and focuses well on improving learners' success rates and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment processes. The company recognises that the pace of implementation of the action plan must increase.
- Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are insufficient to bring about sustained improvement to the provision. Although the process for the observation of teaching and learning has successfully identified a number of improvements required in teaching and learning, these have not been effective in raising standards. For example, planning of individual learning and progress reviews is not sufficiently systematic and robust.
- PTE collects learners' views through informal and formal systems and responds satisfactorily to the issues raised. The company acknowledges that the arrangements to gather learners' views and increase participation levels require improvement. Employers' views are sought but PTE does not respond well enough to their comments.
- The management information system is under-developed and is not used sufficiently to improve the provision. PTE uses a number of systems to collect data and information about different aspects of the provision and learners; the information held within these systems is not always reliable or readily available. Managers recognise that the arrangements to collect and analyse data and information require rapid improvement.
- PTE's arrangements to identify and monitor learners at risk of making slow progress are not sufficiently reliable. For example, the company has not developed a clear strategy to deal with many learners who have been on study breaks for too long. Assessors' evaluation of learners' progress is too variable.
- Employers value the effective working relationships with PTE managers and staff and the flexibility of provision promotes good development of skills and meets the needs of industry well. However, despite effective working relationships, leadership and management require improvement to ensure good teaching, learning and assessment processes contribute to high outcomes for learners and employers.
- PTE promotes a strong ethos of respect and inclusion between learners. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Tutors and assessors do not always sufficiently challenge learners' understanding of equality and diversity. The extent to which managers regularly and routinely use data to analyse performance gaps between all groups of learners is weak.
- PTE meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Safeguarding policies are satisfactory. The company has recognised that learners' knowledge of how to keep themselves safe is not reinforced sufficiently. For example, PTE has devised new progress review forms to improve learners' understanding of how to safeguard themselves and service users. This development is too recent to measure its impact.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Progress to Excellence Ltd

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	Apprenticeships	Employability
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	3
Early years and playwork	3
Administration	3
Business management	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: N/A							
	Part-time: 2,631							
Principal/CEO	Sandra Kirkham							
Date of previous inspection	August 2008							
Website address	www.progresstoexcellence.co.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	1	3	0	43	0	5	0	0
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	2		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	55	600	22	822	0	239		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	14							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAN Training Limited ▪ Partnership Training Limited 							

Contextual information

Progress to Excellence (PTE) is a privately-owned training company. Formed in 2000, the business was formally known as NVQ Training & Consultancy Services Ltd. In 2012 the company changed its name to Progress to Excellence and a new management team was appointed. Operating from offices in Birkenhead, PTE recruits its learners on a national basis across England. PTE specialises in offering training in health and social care as well as programmes in information and communication technology, administration and business management. Contracting directly with the Skills Funding Agency, PTE provides apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships, Foundation Learning and other work-based learning programmes. In recent years, the company has gone through a significant number of changes moving from Train to Gain provision into apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Victor Reid HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Managing Director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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[Piccadilly Gate](#)
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Textphone: 0161 618 8524

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