

ProCo NW Limited

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 are not yet consistently high across all programmes.
- Too few learners gain employment following completion of courses that aim to prepare them for work.
- Tutors do not plan well enough to meet the individual needs of learners.
- Teaching and learning do not provide sufficient opportunities for learners to develop their skills and gain qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Insufficient progress has been made in enabling learners on the new study programmes to benefit from work experience.
- The development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues is insufficient.
- Quality improvement arrangements are insufficiently thorough.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners successfully develop personal and social skills that they can apply in their lives and in job roles.
- Learners make good progress in improving their vocational and practical skills.
- Learners benefit from high standards of classrooms, workshops and specialist accommodation, which provide good learning environments.
- ProCo NW has successfully expanded its range of provision in recent years to meet a wide range of community and employer needs.
- Strong strategic partnerships enable ProCo NW to respond well to local community and employer needs.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners that successfully complete their programmes by:
 - improving attendance
 - identifying at an early stage those learners at risk of falling behind or not succeeding
 - providing effective additional support for all learners who need it.
- Enable a higher proportion of learners on the study programmes to gain employment on completion of their courses by providing more effective advice and guidance for progression.
- Improve the planning of learning to meet the individual needs of learners by:
 - taking more account of their study and career goals
 - setting more specific and relevant targets for individual learners
 - accurately monitoring learners' progress towards their targets.
- Ensure that all learners have sufficient opportunity to improve their skills in English and mathematics successfully, and to gain relevant qualifications.
- Enable all learners on study programmes to undertake high-quality work experience so that they can enhance their employability and vocational skills in a real work environment.
- Ensure that all learners develop a good understanding of equality and diversity by increasing the awareness and confidence of tutors to explore equality and diversity issues in their teaching.
- Increase the effectiveness of quality improvement arrangements by:
 - improving the self-assessment process so that it accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses, and leads to a quality improvement plan with clear actions
 - increasing the focus in self-assessment on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
 - improving the arrangements for observing teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that tutors understand what they need to do to improve
 - monitoring progress against actions for improvement identified through observation more systematically
 - using management information more effectively to evaluate the impact of provision on learners' success and progression, and to identify improvement actions.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- In 2011/12, success rates were low across the majority of the provision. Success rates on the apprenticeship programme improved significantly in 2012/13, and the number of learners who successfully completed their programme within the planned timescale was in line with that of similar providers.
- On the foundation learning programme that preceded the new study programmes, success rates also improved in 2012/13, but too many learners did not complete their course successfully or gain relevant qualifications. Almost half of the learners on the foundation programme progressed on to further study, either with ProCo NW or with a different provider. However, only a small minority of learners had secured employment or an apprenticeship by the end of their programme.
- In 2011/12, female learners on the apprenticeship programme performed slightly less well than male learners. Managers did not analyse the reasons for this gap or identify any actions to reduce it, and have not taken action to identify any achievement gaps between groups of learners who completed their programmes in 2012/13.
- Learners on the apprenticeship programmes make good progress towards their learning goals. They successfully gain knowledge and skills that enable them to become more effective in their jobs, and to enhance their future career prospects. The majority of learners successfully improve their confidence to undertake increasingly complex tasks in the workplace.
- The majority of learners on the study programme make good progress in developing practical and vocationally relevant skills that they will need in future job roles. They also successfully acquire the personal skills and attributes that they need in order to find work and carry out a job role successfully. However, too many learners do not have the opportunity to extend and apply their skills in the workplace because too few work experience placements are available. Attendance on the study programmes is low, and learners who frequently miss lessons do not progress as well as they should.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Apprentices on animal care and veterinary nursing programmes successfully develop the communication skills that they need in their job roles. However, too many other apprentices make insufficient progress in improving their English and mathematics skills. In 2012/13, too many learners on the foundation programme completed their course without gaining relevant qualifications in English and mathematics.
- A high proportion of apprentices successfully progress to the next level. For example, in 2012/13, over three quarters of apprentices on veterinary nursing and animal care programmes progressed from intermediate to higher-level programmes.
- Managers do not systematically gather and analyse information about learners' destinations once they have left ProCo NW. As a result, they are unable to evaluate the impact of the provision in enabling learners to gain sustainable employment and improve their employment and promotion opportunities.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
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- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement and this is reflected in the outcomes for learners. Tutors have good subject knowledge and vocational expertise, and are supportive and encouraging, enabling learners to make good progress in the development of their confidence and their practical vocational skills. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently high across the provision.

- In the most successful lessons, learners work productively and enjoy their learning. They benefit greatly from good use of demonstrations, individual coaching and effective use of questioning, which both checks and extends their learning. Learners participate fully in a wide range of activities and tasks, which maintain their interest and effectively develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, learners on a course on leadership through sport participated in well-managed role-play exercises that enabled them to gain a good understanding of how to respond to sports injuries. Many apprentices benefit from effective on-the-job training and good opportunities to attend training organised by their employers.
- In less effective lessons, tutors do not take sufficient account of assessment information or plan sufficiently well to ensure that they effectively meet learners' individual needs. Tutors talk for too long and do not check the understanding and progress of individual learners, even when group sizes are small. All learners work at the same pace and level, and this means that more-able learners often have to wait for other learners to catch up, which slows their progress. Tutors also allow some learners to dominate lessons at the expense of the learning of others in the group. Insufficient off-the-job training and coaching are provided to extend learners' occupational knowledge on the apprenticeship programme.
- Personal support for learners is good and staff make good use of external organisations to provide more specialised support. For example, a group of learners benefit from receiving specialist and individual mentoring support, which is helping them to overcome barriers to their learning and to remain on their programmes. However, support for learners with specific learning difficulties and disabilities, for example those identified with dyslexia, is insufficient.
- Learners benefit from classrooms, workshops and specialist accommodation that are of a high standard. Although learners have good access to a range of learning technology, its effective use in lessons and in assessment to promote, extend and to record learning is not yet sufficiently well developed. In a minority of lessons, there is an over-reliance on the use of paper-based learning resources.
- Initial assessment on directly delivered programmes identifies learners' starting points effectively. However, initial assessment is not always carried out sufficiently well in the sub-contracted provision. The setting of individual and measurable targets with learners is not sufficiently effective and, as a result, tutors do not always monitor learners' individual progress accurately.
- Assessment is of variable quality, and ranges from exemplary practice on the veterinary nursing programme, to practice that requires improvement, for example in animal care. On the apprenticeship programme, assessors use a wide range of relevant assessment techniques. Across all of the provision, the feedback on learners' marked work is not always sufficiently detailed or helpful for learners in indicating how they can improve the quality of their work.
- Vocational tutors and assessors are not sufficiently aware of the importance of developing the English and mathematics skills of their learners, and do not provide enough support to enable learners to develop these skills. On the study programmes, tutors support learners well to develop their English and mathematics skills. However, they do not provide sufficient opportunity for learners to gain relevant qualifications. Tutors and assessors do not routinely correct learners' spelling and punctuation errors in lessons and in their assessed work.
- Learners receive effective information, advice and guidance before joining programmes and develop a good understanding of their future progression opportunities. Apprentices receive good advice and guidance, both in relation to personal and welfare-related matters and their on-going and future career development. However, learners on courses that prepare them for work receive insufficient advice and guidance as they approach the end of their course about their future study and career.
- The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and learning is insufficient. On a small minority of programmes, this is done particularly well, for example in veterinary nursing. However, there is insufficient sharing of this good practice and overall, tutors and assessors do not pay sufficient attention to developing learners' understanding of equality and diversity in lessons and in progress reviews.

Animal care and veterinary science

Apprenticeships

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this reflects the success rate on the apprenticeship programme which increased significantly in 2012/13. The proportion of learners that complete their apprenticeship programme successfully within the planned time is now high. Outcomes for learners on the much smaller 16–19 study programme and 19+ learning programme require improvement. Learners on all programmes produce work of a good standard that is appropriate for the level and grade of the qualifications that they are aiming to achieve.
- Training that takes place outside the workplace is good. Trainers and assessors maintain a very up-to-date knowledge of their subject area and use their considerable industrial experiences to enliven learning and motivate apprentices. They use questioning and answering techniques effectively, plan a wide variety of relevant and interesting tasks, and constantly challenge learners to achieve to their maximum potential.
- Trainers and assessors use a wide range of resources effectively to support their teaching. Learners benefit from a high standard of specialist accommodation including a small town-farm on one of the sites. However, in a small minority of lessons, tutors do not use learning technology effectively.
- Work-based assessments and reviews are planned and carried out well. Assessors accurately identify strengths and areas for development for learners. Employers are fully involved in assessments and reviews. They work closely with assessors and value their support in developing their understanding of the programme and dealing with any problems that they have.
- Assessors review learners' progress and check their understanding accurately. Frequent review sessions take place, which both the learner and their employer attend. Assessors use the outcomes of review sessions to set challenging targets to enable the learners to make further progress quickly. However, targets for learners are not always clearly recorded and, as a result, a small minority of learners are uncertain what their specific targets are.
- Feedback to learners on veterinary nursing courses is very comprehensive and enables learners to produce work of a high quality and make good progress. However, on animal care courses, too much feedback is brief, and errors in the accuracy of written work are not consistently corrected.
- In the majority of lessons, learners improve their English and mathematics skills successfully. They improve their communication skills which enhance their future employment prospects. However, too few learners on classroom-based programmes gain English and mathematics qualifications.
- Learners benefit from individual tutorials and group sessions when they receive effective advice and guidance about their next steps in training and about employment opportunities. As a result, they speak confidently about their career aspirations and understand the relevance of their course to their future careers.
- Learners from a wide range of backgrounds work together well and enjoy their learning. Mutual respect for other learners' values and backgrounds is actively promoted. Tutors promote equality and diversity appropriately in their lessons, and particularly well on the veterinary nursing programme. However, on workplace reviews, assessors do not always check learners' understanding of equality and diversity.

Employability**16-19 study programmes**

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. In 2012/13, not enough learners on the foundation programme, which preceded the new study programme, progressed into employment or further education. Attendance on the study programme is too low.
- Learners make good progress in vocational lessons and develop good practical skills that are relevant to their future employment goals. For example, learners developing skills in motor vehicle repair enjoyed the challenge of being able to carry out practical tasks on cars within a short time of starting their course. However, learners do not have enough opportunities to reinforce their employability skills through work placements.
- In the best lessons, tutors plan well to promote learning. In these sessions, learners participate fully, and are motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. They routinely ask questions to check their understanding. Tutors use a range of effective questioning techniques to extend learning and to check learners' understanding. They use a wide range of teaching and learning activities to improve learners' skills and knowledge, and to improve their ability to learn independently.
- In too many other lessons, tutors provide insufficient challenge for learners. In these lessons, the pace is too slow and tutors talk too much. Tutors do not provide learners with enough time for reflection or discussion. They do not use learning technology effectively and rely too heavily on worksheets and other paper-based resources.
- Tutors provide good pastoral care for learners. They also ensure that learners can benefit from specialist support provided by external organisations when this is needed. Learners with specific learning difficulties and disabilities do not always receive sufficient support during their lessons.
- The majority of learners successfully improve their English and mathematics skills. For example, in one lesson learners were able to distinguish accurately between different types and purposes of writing. However, too few learners gain qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Initial assessment accurately assesses learners' starting points. However, the results of initial assessment are not always used to plan teaching and learning, and the individual needs of learners are not always identified. The planning by tutors to enable learners to achieve their individual goals requires improvement. Plans do not contain specific and measurable targets that relate to learning goals. Reviews of learners' progress are insufficiently specific and do not evaluate sufficiently the progress they have made towards their goals or what they need to do to further improve their skills.
- Learners receive appropriately detailed verbal feedback about their work during lessons. Feedback during lessons successfully enhances learners' confidence and enables them to understand how they can improve. When assessing learners' written work, tutors overlook too many errors including grammatical and spelling mistakes.
- Learners receive information from tutors during their lessons about further study and employment opportunities. They develop a good understanding of how they can progress after completing their course, and are confident in planning their future careers. However, learners do not have the opportunity to attend specific advice and guidance sessions to discuss their future study and career.
- Learners from a wide range of backgrounds demonstrate a high level of respect for each other and for staff. However, equality and diversity are not promoted enough in lessons. Too many opportunities are missed in lessons to discuss equality and diversity. Although equality and

diversity are included in learners' reviews, tutors do not assess how well learners understand equality issues as they relate to their own lives or their intended careers.

Administration and customer service

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement and this is reflected in outcomes for learners, which are slightly below the average for similar providers. Although more learners completed their apprenticeship in 2012/13 than in the previous year, overall success rates remain too low, and not enough learners complete by their planned end date. Many apprentices successfully progress from the intermediate to the advanced programme.
- Apprentices receive good on-the-job support from their colleagues in the workplace. This enables them to gain occupationally relevant knowledge, skills and understanding, and to become increasingly effective in their job roles. Most learners are conscientious and enthusiastic, and they value the good opportunities they have for learning in the workplace.
- Learners have good opportunities for attending training events organised by their employers. For example, an apprentice working as an administrator in a local authority housing department has attended training in manual handling, telephone skills, minute taking and assertiveness. However, ProCo NW does not always provide sufficient planned and structured off-the-job training, coaching and tutoring to extend and enrich apprentices' occupational knowledge.
- Learners have good access to relevant paper-based learning resources including booklets that have been written to support learners' progress on specific National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units. A virtual learning environment is being developed but it is not yet available to business administration and customer service apprentices.
- All learners complete appropriate initial assessments for English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT), and these give an accurate indication of their levels at the start of their programme. However, not all learners complete diagnostic assessments of their existing skills, and this means that their specific training needs are not always clearly identified. Good use is made of information about learners' job roles when selecting NVQ optional units and determining learners' starting points.
- Assessors use a wide range of relevant assessment techniques well to assess learners' occupational competence, including direct observation and witness statements. However, when assessing apprentices' written work, assessors give insufficient attention to its structure, accuracy and completeness. Oral and written feedback is not always sufficiently detailed, and is of limited assistance in helping learners to improve the quality of their work.
- Learners' English, mathematical and ICT skills are not routinely developed. Spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners' work are not systematically identified and corrected by assessors. Learners' progress in English, mathematics and ICT is not closely monitored and reported on when their progress is reviewed.
- Progress reviews occur regularly and are valued by apprentices. However, assessors often give insufficient attention to identifying what apprentices have learned and the impact that the learning is having on their occupational competence and personal effectiveness. Too many targets are insufficiently precise or challenging.
- At the beginning of their programme, apprentices benefit from good advice and guidance about the most appropriate apprenticeship and level, based on their qualifications, prior experience and job role. Apprentices are also given good information, advice and guidance during their programme when, for example, personal difficulties arise or when they need information about future training opportunities.

- Trainers and assessors develop very good working relationships with learners and employers. Employers are actively involved in training, and speak positively about the service that ProCo NW provides. Opportunities to extend learners' understanding of equality and diversity, health and safety, and safeguarding are often missed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior managers and members of the management board have developed a clear strategy and set challenging targets to enable ProCo NW to respond effectively to local needs and national priorities. This strategy is communicated successfully to all staff who value the open and clear communication from the senior team.
- Leaders and managers have developed successful collaborative partnerships with a large number of organisations, including employers, Wigan's professional rugby and football clubs, and the local authority. These partnerships enhance the ability of the organisation to identify and respond effectively to the needs of learners, employers and the wider community.
- ProCo NW has successfully expanded its range of provision and facilities to meet a wider range of community and employer needs. For example, the animal care and veterinary science programme has grown significantly in recent years and now attracts learners from across a wide geographical area. As the provision has expanded, managers have also improved and extended the resources and facilities for learning. Recent developments have included the acquisition and refurbishment of premises that now incorporate a town-farm and an arts and crafts workshop.
- Managers successfully plan the curriculum to meet to the needs of learners and employers. The new study programmes provide opportunities for learners to progress through different levels and on to further study. Apprenticeship programmes are designed to meet the skills needs of local and regional employers. ProCo NW successfully targets learners who live in the most disadvantaged communities and who are reluctant to engage in learning. Successful actions include recruiting new learners in areas where young people regularly meet socially.
- Quality improvement arrangements are insufficiently thorough. The self-assessment process takes account of the views of learners, employers and sub-contractors, and has resulted in modest improvements in the quality of provision. However, it is not thorough enough and does not identify accurately key areas for improvement or focus enough on improving teaching, learning and assessment. Actions and targets identified following self-assessment are not sufficiently detailed or challenging to drive forward improvement successfully and consistently.
- Information about learners' progress and success is considered at monthly meetings between managers and teaching staff to identify learners at risk of falling behind. This has begun to have a positive impact on the outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, the analysis of this information is not thorough enough to enable managers to establish exactly what needs to be done to increase the quality of learners' experience and improve success rates across the provision.
- The performance of all staff is regularly reviewed by managers and underperformance is identified and appropriately addressed. However, the process for the observation of teaching and learning requires further development to increase its effectiveness in improving the performance of teaching staff and raising the quality of the provision. Too few observations take place, both of directly delivered and sub-contracted provision, and training and development actions have not yet resulted in improved performance by a sufficient number of staff. Observations do not focus sufficiently on learning, the promotion of equality and diversity, or the development of English and mathematical skills.
- ProCo NW has an appropriately detailed equality and diversity policy that sets clear standards and expectations of learners, staff and stakeholders. All staff understand how to identify and respond to any incidents of bullying and harassment. Trainers and tutors provide good personal support for all learners to enable them to participate fully on their courses. However not all staff

are confident in their understanding of how to support learners with more complex needs such as dyslexia. Although learners have an appropriate understanding of equality and diversity, the majority of trainers and tutors miss opportunities to develop their knowledge further in lessons and reviews.

- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. A clear and comprehensive safeguarding policy is in place, and staff work effectively with local agencies such as the Wigan Safeguarding Children Board and children's social care. Staff receive appropriate training on safeguarding and carry out suitable health and safety audits to ensure that learners work in safe environments.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

ProCo NW Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Animal care and veterinary science	2
Employability training	3
Administration	3
Customer service	3

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 622								
	Part-time: 428								
CEO	Elaine Walsh								
Date of previous inspection	August 2008								
Website address	www.proconw.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	80	NA	35	15	NA	21	NA	NA	
Part-time	53	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Number of traineeships	16-19			19+			Total		
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	96	98	76	103	NA		NA		
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Wigan and Leigh College ■ St Helen's College ■ Bolton College ■ The Manchester College ■ Stockport College ■ Runshaw College ■ Coaching Connexions ■ Wigan Leisure Cultural Trust ■ INNOVED ■ Prestige Training 								

Contextual information

ProCo NW Limited is a private training provider based in the borough of Wigan in Greater Manchester. The population of Wigan was 318,700 in 2012. The unemployment rate is 8.5% which is similar to the rate across the North West. The proportion of people with a qualification equivalent to or higher than a National Vocation Qualification level 3 is 49.2%, below the national average of 55.1%. The proportion of young people achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including mathematics and English, was 64.2% in 2012, above the national average of 59.4%.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Steve Hailstone HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the Chief Operating Officer 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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