

# Mantra Learning Limited

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		10–14 March 2014
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Good-1
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

## Summary of key findings for learners

### This provider is good because:

- Learners develop a wide variety of vocational, employability, personal and functional skills. These prepare them well for the next stage of their training or employment.
- Mantra Learning Limited (Mantra) has very strong and influential links in the region, which benefit both learners and employers. This enables the organisation to tailor its programmes to meet the needs of both learners and employers well.
- It has high aspirations for the organisation, its staff and learners. Senior managers set high standards for the organisation as a whole and expect high levels of commitment from staff and learners alike.
- The training, learning and assessment provided by the enthusiastic, skilled and experienced staff is good. Staff have a wealth of industrial experience, which they apply beneficially to the learners' programmes.
- Resources are exceptionally good. This includes the realistic work environments fitted with industry standard equipment, the well-equipped classrooms and workshops and the high-quality information and communication technology used both to support teaching and learning and the smooth management of the organisation.
- Mantra has a strong focus on employability in the logistics sector and convinces employers of the return on investment achieved by having appropriately trained staff. It promotes the advantage of taking on staff from its employability programmes or of further training for existing staff.

### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The proportion of apprentices completing their qualifications, particularly within the expected time frame, is not high enough.
- Not enough of the teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further strengthen quality improvement systems to ensure consistency of good practice across all areas of the provision and in particular to raise the standard of teaching, learning and assessment to outstanding.
- Ensure that actions taken to retain apprentices on programme are effective so that a high proportion successfully complete, and devise strategies to promptly accelerate slow progress when identified in order to maintain learners' motivation and help them to complete within the predicted time.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- The vast majority of the high volume of learners on short courses under the provider's 'Job Gym' brand achieves their qualifications. These include vocational qualifications related to warehousing and storage operations, fork lift truck operation, road transport and customer service in a contact centre as well as key and functional skill qualifications.
- In the last two years a very large majority of workplace learners successfully completed their NVQ qualifications, almost all of which were in plant operations, and they did so within the expected time frame.
- Overall the percentage of all apprentices successfully completing their qualifications declined in 2012/13 to just below the national average. The percentage of intermediate apprentices doing so was just above the national average, but for advanced apprentices it was low. Most current apprentices are making good progress toward completion of their qualification frameworks within the expected timeframes. However, too many warehousing and distribution apprentices are making slow progress.
- Learners on the new traineeship programme gain a good grounding into the world of work and the logistics sector in particular. Progression into apprenticeship or employment is high. Since the first cohort, all trainees who have left the programme have either entered employment or an apprenticeship. In 2012/13 roughly half of the learners on Mantra's previous 'Pathway to Apprenticeship' programme progressed into an apprenticeship, a job or into further education. This had increased to two thirds of learners for the later cohorts.
- In work-based learning over the last three years the previous inequality of outcomes by gender, where male learners were performing better than female learners, has closed to the point where male and female learners now perform equally well. However, the performance of the very few learners from black or minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than the rest. In 2012/13, there was little difference between age groups in the percentage of intermediate apprentices who completed their qualifications; whereas advanced apprentices aged 19 to 24 performed markedly better than their younger and older counterparts.
- Apprentices, trainees and learners on employability programmes all develop good vocational and other work-related skills. These prepare unemployed learners on the short preparation for work and other employability programmes particularly well to meet industry requirements for entry level jobs in the logistics sector. Learners in all areas, except warehousing apprentices, are developing good English, mathematics and functional skills.
- Learners on employability programmes progress well into jobs. A significant number get jobs, often with the help of the provider, after the three month tracking period required by the funding body. Learners demonstrate progress over the course of their programme through industry-recognised measurable performance indicators such as pick rates.

- In motor vehicle the progression of intermediate apprentices to advanced apprenticeships is high. In warehousing and distribution the progression of intermediate apprentices to advanced apprentices is low and reflects the employment needs of the industry. However, apprentices in this area gain highly valued additional qualifications such as specialist fork lift truck licences, enabling them to take fuller more productive roles at work.
- Mantra operates a work environment type approach to attendance and punctuality, which results in high attendance levels and good punctuality for learners.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the good outcomes overall and recent improvements in the proportion of apprentices gaining their qualifications in those subject areas where this had dipped in 2012/13.
- The majority of learners are highly motivated and engaged in their learning. They benefit particularly well from the good support and care from staff. Training advisors provide good coaching, which enables learners to acquire good practical skills. Apprentices quickly make good contributions to their workplaces, take on extra responsibilities such as expanding the company's internet sales and preparing expenditure reports on stationery use, or they gain promotion at work.
- Training advisors skilfully enthuse learners. They use their good vocational expertise productively to inspire learners. This contributes effectively to high standards of learners' practical work. Most training advisors plan sessions well using varied activities, which interest learners and sustain their concentration. Learners are stimulated by focused questioning from training advisors, for example, on planning delivery routes. This challenges them and they contribute well to discussions.
- On a few occasions, training advisors fail to give learners enough opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. Learners engage less effectively in the development of theory on those occasions when the training advisors talk too much or when the same few learners are allowed to dominate group sessions. Not all training advisors take enough account of the results of initial assessment when planning learning.
- Learning resources are good, and particularly good in logistics, forklift truck driving and driving goods vehicles training, where learners have very good access to specialist equipment. Training advisors use stimulating resources very effectively to support individual coaching and group training. Employability learners make good use of learning technologies to develop practical skills in the contact centre and in warehousing.
- Training advisors arrange sessions very flexibly to meet the demands of learner and employer work patterns. Learners benefit from a good and flexible range of assessment methods to capture their learning. Internal verification is rigorous and assures the quality and consistency of the assessment process. Apprentices appreciate the computer-based portfolios. They can quickly and easily communicate with their training advisors between workplace visits so that units are assessed promptly and they can monitor their progress very effectively.
- Staff make good use of initial assessment to assess learners' functional skills levels and vocational aptitudes. Formative assessment is thorough and well-planned, and learners receive good verbal feedback so that they know what they have done well or what they need to do to improve. Written feedback is less detailed and does not always provide learners with enough information that they can refer to later. The quality of action planning varies and learners are not always provided with enough clear detail on their next steps.
- The majority of employers actively contribute to learners' reviews in the workplace. Learners benefit from the detailed oral feedback from training advisors and employers on their progress. However, workplace learning is not always formally planned into the learning programmes.

Learners' portfolios demonstrate at least satisfactory levels of work with some good standards, particularly for the employability learners.

- Functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology receive high priority and are promoted well by the provider. A large majority of learners clearly understand the importance of improving their skills and some progress to a level above that which is needed for their frameworks. The majority of learners develop their functional skills effectively through their vocational work and with the specialist tutors. However, for a few apprentices, the development of functional skills lacks imagination. In warehousing and storage, apprentices do not always receive support to develop their functional skills until too late in their programme. Not all training advisors routinely correct spelling and grammatical errors in learners' written work.
- The provider has worked with numerous referral agencies and employers over a long period to engage effectively with a wide range of learners, many of whom have multiple barriers hindering their learning or progression into employment. Learners are provided with good pre-enrolment information. The induction programmes ensure learners are on the right course.
- Learners across all programmes are provided with very effective support. The provider has good arrangements in place for learners who require additional help such as a scribe or signer and appropriate support for specific needs such as dyslexia. Staff and employers provide good information, advice and guidance on progression and further opportunities.
- Learners acquire a good understanding of equality and diversity. At induction they acquire good knowledge of relevant legislation and respect for others. All learners feel safe and have a sound knowledge of safe working practices. However, training advisors do not always create enough opportunities for learners to extend their understanding of this area through challenging discussions in the rest of their programmes.

## Motor Vehicle

### Apprenticeships

### Traineeships

### 19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good; this is reflected in the good outcomes. Staff have high expectations of their learners and encourage and support them to achieve their frameworks to a high standard. Learners are well motivated, enjoy their learning and develop good work-based skills to industry standards. Health and safety and safe working practices are promoted effectively during training at the provider and in employers' workshops.
- In the well-planned theory sessions, industry experienced training advisers promote best commercial practice. Learners remain engaged and focused on their class work. The use of e-portfolios to promote learning is particularly good. Very effective use of motor vehicle models enhances learners' understanding. For example, a sectionalised drive shaft and differential unit was used to demonstrate its operation. Practical training is very good. Learners develop good engineering skills and the well-planned sessions place a strong emphasis on the use of mathematics. For example, learners learned how to make accurate measurements using vernier calliper gauges. However, in some sessions, there is insufficient focus on learning objectives.
- Learners receive frequent and very useful progress reviews. During which, clear, relevant targets are set. Training advisers provide very good advice and guidance on how learners can improve their performance and their progress, giving a high priority to health and safety. They make particularly good use of the tracking and monitoring system, e-portfolios and cameras to

ensure learners record and understand what they have achieved and to provide focused guidance on the next steps in their training.

- Although employers are not always present at the review or involved in learner target setting, they receive detailed and accurate feedback from Mantra staff on the progress and standard of work of their individual learners. Employers know their learners well and are fully involved in planning the learning and support that learners receive in the workshops. Employers appreciate the methods of evidence recording in the workplace to provide portfolio evidence and demonstrate the learners' standard of performance.
- Observation of learners during their on-the-job training has a high priority. Well-prepared learners respond effectively to the good use of questions enabling assessors to judge their depth of knowledge and understanding. On completion of the assessment learners are given accurate and detailed feedback on their performance. Learners display a good range of skills to a high standard. Learners who are not yet competent are given sensitive, accurate and relevant advice on how to improve their performance.
- In lessons and during workplace reviews training advisers encourage correct spelling, punctuation and grammar and emphasise the importance of mathematics. For example, one learner was instructed in the use of conversion rates between bars and pounds per square inch when checking vehicle tyre pressures. Assessors routinely check learners' written work and provide verbal feedback on the quality of their spelling, stressing the importance of correct English when writing customer reports for employers. However, not all spelling mistakes, particularly in job write-ups, are corrected.
- Learners receive valuable advice and guidance at the start of their qualification, preparing them well for the programme. They benefit from very good support and advice during recruitment, selection and online testing. Relevant and effective support is given to learners to ensure that they maintain their progress. Learners have a high level of knowledge regarding their frameworks.
- The promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity during the regular progress reviews is well recorded. However, it is not sufficiently planned into the learning activities in theory sessions. Learners understand their responsibilities and aspects of harassment and bullying well, but do not relate to the broader aspects of diversity.

## Warehousing and distribution

### Apprenticeships 19+ Learning programmes Traineeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which correlates with high success rates for learners following driving goods vehicles programmes. On-going changes to restore the recent decline in overall and timely success rates in warehousing and storage and traffic office qualifications have not yet impacted fully. Most learners are supported well by their training advisors to develop good vocational skills and benefit from high-quality employer training
- Learners improve personal and practical skills well enabling them to interact better with colleagues and carry out a wider range of workplace tasks such as managing the receipt and despatch of deliveries, completing inventories and driving fork lift trucks. Advanced apprentices in warehousing and storage develop an improved understanding of how to manage a team better. Employers value the skills learners develop highly and many learners have received additional work responsibilities.

- Learners benefit from training advisors' particularly good knowledge of logistics and the work demands within the industry. They help learners identify work-based projects that contribute well to programme learning. For example, one learner developed ideas for alternative storage solutions in the warehouse and identified cost savings through better use of materials.
- Good quality employers provide specialist on-the-job training for learners, which develops and extends their skills and experiences well. Training advisors do not always involve employers in planning and setting learning goals, resulting in workplace training occurring independently of the learners' programme. Off-the-job training resources are of a particularly good quality and provide learners with realistic working environments contributing significantly to the development of their logistics knowledge and skills.
- Training advisers use effective coaching skills to provide detailed verbal feedback during assessment sessions, which motivates learners well and helps their understanding. Written feedback lacks specific detail about what they need to do to improve.
- Initial assessment accurately identifies what learners need to do to improve their English and mathematics skills. Learners' speaking and listening skills are developed well through regular professional discussions with their training advisor. However, late planning and introduction of functional skills training, together with too little specialist teaching, results in a majority of learners not achieving their English and mathematics qualifications when expected.
- Training advisors regularly set vocational targets for learners. The better targets effectively guide the learner to complete small chunks of learning and are clear about what the learner is expected to achieve. However, others are too broad, for example relating to completion of workbooks or researching topics, and do not provide sufficient information to help learners progress quickly. Learners are rarely set explicit targets to support the development of their functional skills within the work place.
- Most training advisors routinely focus on the development of learners' English skills, regularly identifying spelling and grammatical errors in their written work. However, insufficient guidance is given as to how learners can correct and practise their skills to eradicate errors in the future.
- All learners are on the right programme with programme units chosen well to meet the needs of their job role. Assessors provide appropriate specialist on-going advice and guidance to learners about what they need to do to progress within the sector.
- Learners demonstrate a particularly good understanding of risks and hazards within their environment and how to keep themselves, colleagues and customers safe. Learners receive good employer-led training about equality and diversity and most have appropriate knowledge about topics and issues in this area.

## Preparation for work

### Employability

#### 19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the high success rates and good job outcomes. Significant numbers of learners have been supported into employment both before and after the required tracking periods. Learners make good progress and develop a range of highly relevant vocational and social skills to improve their employment prospects. These skills include confidence, team-working, communication and problem solving. Learners have a particularly good understanding of health and safety issues in the workplace.
- In the best lessons learners enjoy and benefit from inspiring, well-planned activities delivered at a challenging pace, promoting participation and lively discussions. Learners are engaged in



vocational tasks which bring theory and practice together to enhance their learning experience. In one warehousing and storage lesson, deliberate mistakes were introduced with the goods received so learners had to problem solve, correct the mistakes and take appropriate actions to improve the handling and control of stock.

- Training advisors have high expectations of their learners and act as good role models to prepare them particularly well for work. During both the preparation for employment and vocational programmes, completion of the workbooks demands a high volume of work from the learners to develop their understanding and skills. Open, direct and probing questions are used very effectively to check and extend learning. Peer assessment, trainer feedback and personal support are used well to motivate learners to develop, progress and succeed.
- English, mathematics and information technology are well delivered and embedded in both planned classroom and workshop activities. In one warehousing and storage lesson, learners calculated the costs to an employer of replacing staff injured through incorrect manual and handling techniques. However, spelling mistakes in assessed work are not consistently identified and corrected.
- Teaching is less beneficial in a small minority of lessons where training advisors do not sufficiently check all learners' understanding. This is not helped by training advisors allowing the more confident and verbal learners to dominate discussions. Training advisors do not consistently stretch and challenge the more able and independent learners during activities.
- Information, advice and guidance provide learners with a good understanding of the different stages of vocational programmes and prepare them well to take advantage of job opportunities. Job coaches use their experience and probing questions to support the learning process, ensure curricula vitae are thoroughly detailed and individuals are appropriately prepared for interviews.
- Employers are highly complimentary about the learners they recruit from Mantra Learning. They recognise that learners have the right skills and attitude to meet their needs. Managers and training advisors continue to provide more flexible and responsive delivery to match the working patterns of different employers. Learners value the short employability course that develops their knowledge and skills and places them in a better position to apply for and be successful in seeking work.
- Resources to support learning are of a very high quality and mirror industry standards. For example, learners developing their skills in the contact centre have access to the latest telephone equipment. In warehousing and storage, lifting machinery is particularly effective in supporting learners to acquire new skills or refresh existing ones.
- Equality and diversity are promoted and reinforced very well. During induction, rights and responsibilities and discrimination in relation to job descriptions are covered well with learners.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

**Good**

- Leadership and management are good. Leaders have high aspirations, which are shared and espoused by staff. They offer clear strategic direction based on the needs of the industry and local and national priorities. Close and tireless working with providers, agencies and industry in the region is having a very beneficial influence on training and skills development in the Greater Manchester area. Mantra has developed good capacity to improve further through organisational development, careful staff recruitment and significant investment.
- Operational management is strong. The provider is flexible and responsive to the needs of partners, employers and learners. Communications within Mantra are managed well with frequent team and management meetings. Mantra engenders high expectations throughout its

provision on quality and learner achievement. Managers set challenging targets, monitor performance closely and address underperformance effectively.

- Mantra has good mechanisms in place to improve teaching, learning and assessment. A thorough and rigorous observation system linked to staff performance and development has improved the quality of learning sessions. Staff are very experienced and knowledgeable in their industry sector and provide learners with good support and guidance. Resources are particularly good and in many cases offer learners an exciting, relevant and motivating experience. Mantra has invested well in information and learning technology and technical equipment.
- Arrangements for quality assurance and quality monitoring are effective, with demonstrable impact on the quality of provision. For example, the impact of the strengthened internal verification process. However, some measures have not yet fully impacted across all the provision. Self-assessment is inclusive and generally leads to effective action; however, quality processes are not sufficiently coherent. For example, the quality improvement plan focuses on operational targets and does not address areas for improvement identified through self-assessment sufficiently. Quality activity is not shared sufficiently across the organisation to utilise fully the skills and experience of all staff.
- Managers set realistic and challenging performance targets, which are monitored closely. Data have improved and a wide range of detailed data reports analyse performance thoroughly. Data are generally used very well to inform and support operational activity; however, managers recognise the benefits in further refining data presentation. Mantra manages the collection, collation and analysis of learner and employer views well, and uses this effectively to influence the quality of provision.
- Mantra is particularly good at meeting the needs and interests of learners and employers. Managers have a good knowledge of local market intelligence and plan programmes well to meet local needs. Close working within their industry increases opportunities for learners and swells the pool of relevant skills for employers. The functional skills strategy clearly outlines process and responsibility and, with suitably qualified staff, English and mathematics are embedded well in most programmes. Initial assessment and individualised training offer good support to meet learners' specific needs.
- Arrangements for the management and promotion of equality and diversity are generally satisfactory. Mantra is a very inclusive organisation which works hard to attract a wide spectrum of learners, many of whom are disadvantaged. Appropriate and thorough policies and procedures are in place which are reviewed and updated annually. The provider ensures access and ease of participation for all, with good provision of adaptive technologies, for example, hearing loops, and good access for learners with limited mobility. Mantra also works well with local partners, including schools, to support young people with learning difficulties. Good arrangements protect learners from bullying and harassment and staff take effective action to tackle bad behaviour. Learners receive useful handbooks, which inform them about equality, and they have appropriate knowledge and understanding of their rights and responsibilities.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is not planned for or addressed sufficiently to ensure that all staff and learners have their knowledge and understanding of a broad range of diversity issues developed or reinforced. Mantra does not set targets for performance or recruitment of particular groups although it does collect and analyse relevant data and takes action where issues are identified. Aspects of equality are covered in various different plans and documents, but these are not sufficiently comprehensive or coherent.
- Mantra's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet statutory requirements. It subjects all staff to appropriate checks. Staff are trained to a good standard and their understanding of safeguarding is assessed regularly. Learners are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and contact details. Systems to manage and record incidents are effective. Health and safety, particularly safe working practices, are promoted well and risk is managed appropriately.



**Record of Main Findings (RMF)****Mantra Learning Limited**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	NA	NA	NA	2	2	2	2	NA
Outcomes for learners	2	NA	NA	NA	2	2	2	2	NA
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	NA	NA	NA	2	2	2	2	NA
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	NA	NA	NA	2	2	2	2	NA

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Motor vehicle</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Warehousing and distribution</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Employability training</b>	<b>2</b>

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: 2,131								
Principal/CEO	Mr Mark Currie								
Date of previous inspection	October 2005								
Website address	www.mantralearning.com								
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>									
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	N/A	103	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	25		2		27				
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	53	84	4	31	N/A	N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	103								
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"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>								

## Contextual information

Mantra Learning Limited operates from its main premises in Middleton, Manchester and three other sites in Greater Manchester and Warrington. It is funded by the Skills Funding Agency to provide training for apprentices, trainees, workplace learners and employability learners. It specialises in training related to employment in the logistics, automotive and contact centre sector of industry. Twelve per cent of the working-age population of Greater Manchester have no qualifications compared to 10% nationally. In 2012, 53% of 16-year-olds in Manchester attained five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grade A\* to C, compared to the national average of 59%. The percentage of working age Manchester residents claiming job-seekers allowance is 4% compared to 3% nationally.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Cliff Rose HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the chief executive 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 relevant 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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