

The Real Apprenticeship Company Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		17–20 February 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- the provision meets the needs of employers and learners exceptionally well, as is evident from the development of new qualification units specifically aligned to employers' requirements
- learners make good progress towards their qualification and develop good personal, social and employability skills
- apprentices complete a wide range of additional units, training courses and short qualifications beyond the requirements of the framework, greatly enhancing their employment prospects; a high proportion of apprentices progress into employment at the end of their apprenticeship
- its relationships with a widening range of highly supportive employers, which are fully committed to apprenticeship training, are outstanding
- safeguarding arrangements are good, including 'chaperone' arrangements for young apprentices staying away from home as part of their training.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- not enough of the teaching learning or assessment sessions are outstanding, as there is too much variation in the quality of English and mathematics teaching
- not all tutor/assessors (called learner managers) are as confident as the best in helping apprentices improve their basic mathematical and English skills
- during reviews, learner managers do not sufficiently include discussions about what apprentices have learned in the work place and how this improves their job performance.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that quality improvement arrangements, including the sharing of the best practice within the provision, are fully implemented, in order to improve further the consistent quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Develop the confidence of all learner managers so that they are better able to help learners develop their English and mathematical skills.
- Improve learner managers' practice at learner reviews in order that apprentices understand more fully what they have learned in the work place and how this has improved their performance.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- All of the Real Apprenticeship Company's (TRAC's) learners are apprentices. Most are working towards an intermediate apprenticeship and the remainder towards an advanced apprenticeship. A large majority are aged 16 to 18. Most current learners are working towards a qualification in trade business services within retailing and wholesaling, with a very few on programmes in each of: engineering, education, and business administration and law.
- Most apprentices successfully complete their qualification frameworks and do so within the expected timescale. In 2013/14, the first year that the provider had a contract to deliver apprenticeship training, a very high percentage of learners completed their framework qualification, and all of those who did so managed to do so by their planned end date. However, the number of learners involved was small and all were in administration. In the current year, most apprentices who are still in learning are making good progress towards completion, and the provider has made well-timed and effective interventions to accelerate the progress of those who were making slower than expected progress.
- The analysis of performance data is good. Managers at both TRAC and the major employers monitor the performance of all groups of learners closely. However, the provider has not been delivering apprenticeship training under its own contract for long enough or with enough learners for it to gather sufficient meaningful data to identify any significant achievement gaps between different groups of learners.
- Apprentices develop good personal social and employability skills. They develop the confidence, communication and interpersonal skills required to function well in customer-facing job roles. Their employers value these skills highly.
- Learner managers strongly encourage their apprentices to go beyond the framework requirement for functional skills. Of those not already deemed to be at level 2 and exempt from the functional skills requirement because of their English and mathematics GCSE grades, around one fifth of apprentices work toward and gain level 2 functional skills even though they only require level 1 for their frameworks.
- The provision meets the needs of both employers and apprentices particularly well. A very large majority of apprentices, who complete their frameworks, gain full-time employment and usually with their existing employers. Since the start of the contract, this includes all of those who have completed their apprenticeships in trade business services, which is now by far the largest subject area. Apprenticeship programmes include competence and knowledge units, mapped closely against particular job roles with their employer, and well in excess of the number

required to complete the apprenticeship framework. Many apprentices gain additional valuable qualifications such as fork-lift truck licences.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good; this is reflected in the high proportion of apprentices who have completed their framework and progressed into employment, and the good progress current apprentices are making.
- Care and support are good. Learner managers and employers strongly encourage apprentices to take qualifications that are additional to the basic requirements of their frameworks, to take part in research projects that engage them and promote independent learning particularly well. Apprentices gain valuable additional job-specific short qualifications. One employer pays apprentices a bonus whenever they achieve a unit of their qualification. This strongly motivates the apprentices to make rapid progress. Similarly, another employer rewarded good work performance with free driving lessons.
- As their confidence and skills develop, apprentices contribute well to their employers' business. One Welsh-speaking apprentice, placed in a Welsh branch of one of the large employers working with TRAC, used her initiative to translate letters to customers into Welsh. The result was a significant increase in business, a delighted employer, and an apprentice with ambitions to manage her own branch within the next few years. Another apprentice noticed that one of their regular customers was profoundly deaf and that the other staff were unable to communicate effectively with him. She was able to use sign language to interpret his requirements and as a result, he made a significant purchase; the depot manager subsequently arranged for all the staff to learn basic sign language.
- Learners feel very safe at work. Their knowledge and understanding of health and safety at work is very good. Apprentices who attend a short, residential training course with one employer are accompanied by a chaperone from TRAC who ensures they are safe and well supported while away from home. However, learner managers do not sufficiently promote the importance of e-safety, particularly where young learners are encouraged to make extensive use of the internet for research projects.
- The apprenticeship programmes meet the needs of apprentices and employers particularly well. Staff work closely with employers to identify the skills needed when a vacancy arises. They use the associated job description to ensure they recruit candidates with the right attitudes and pre-employability skills to maximise their chances of success. Learner managers visit apprentices regularly and frequently to ensure they settle into work well.
- Short-term target setting is good and used very well to drive apprentices' progress through the programme. Learner managers set very clear short-term targets for apprentices to submit pieces of work and to gather or strengthen evidence between the regular assessment visits or progress reviews. All apprentices complete a diagnostic assessment at the start of the programme, but the assessment has not been effective at identifying the additional learning needs of a small minority of apprentices.
- Assessment in the workplace is good. Learner managers enable apprentices to provide a wide variety of evidence for assessment, such as recorded technical discussions, articles based on personal research uploaded to TRAC's electronic recording system (The Real Academy), direct observation and witness testimony from employers. Verbal feedback is very detailed and strongly supports learners to correct or add to submitted work. Written feedback, or access to recordings of verbal feedback, requires improvement to enable apprentices to reflect on what they have learned during the programme. A few apprentices lack confidence or experience in accessing the electronic portfolio system.
- Most apprentices begin work on functional skills at the beginning of their programme. Learner managers provide most of the teaching through regular and frequent individual coaching

sessions that prepare the apprentices to take the external assessments as soon as they feel confident. All apprentices, including those who are exempt from a functional skills qualification, are encouraged to continue to improve their functional skills.

- One learner manager skilfully embedded mathematics development in an apprentice coaching session by asking the apprentice to calculate how much he could save in a year if he gave up smoking and how many driving lessons this could pay for. However, not all learner managers are as confident in helping apprentices to improve their basic mathematical skills and understanding through naturally occurring activities. On occasion they use past papers as their only resource to support the development of maths.
- Information, advice and guidance are good and regularly refreshed through the programme. TRAC recruiting staff make potential apprentices who are considering leaving their current full-time education programme to take up an apprenticeship aware of all the implications of taking this route. They also encourage them to discuss it with parents or carers before making their decision.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Apprentices are treated fairly and the level of care and support is good. However, learner managers do not routinely discuss how diversity at work affects their job role or the implications of living and working in a multi-cultural environment.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the formation of the company, the Chief Executive Officer, directors and the senior management team have had a clear vision of its role. The corporate mission is very clear and focuses on meeting the needs of learners and supporting businesses. The senior management team communicates the aspirations, vision and ethos of the company to staff very effectively through weekly and monthly newsletters. The annual staff conference in October further reinforces these values and longer-term aspirations.
- Senior managers use data effectively to monitor the performance of staff and learners. They receive a monthly data pack identifying a range of key performance indicators which they then discuss. However, they recognise the need to improve further their use of data and have commissioned new software to help them to do so. TRAC has invested in new systems to record and track learners' progress more effectively.
- TRAC's owners currently provide governance, and they challenge and hold the senior management team to account effectively. Plans to include an independent chair from September 2015 to enhance further governance arrangements are well advanced.
- The senior management team has developed effective systems for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment; however, its implementation is too recent to have had any significant impact. Observation records are particularly detailed, and very effectively identify areas for improvement. However, too often the subsequent action plan for the learner manager is unclear. Plans for a college to undertake joint observations to quality assure grades given by TRAC have been drawn up and are complete. These observations are due to start in a month's time.
- The annual self-assessment of the quality of the provision is effective. It covers the whole of TRAC's provision including areas not within the scope of this inspection. The company has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvements. Learner managers have the opportunity to contribute to judgements during the annual conference. However, not all fully recognise how they have contributed to this process or the judgements made.
- The senior management team has developed and introduced a range of quality assurance processes. These are very recent and many have not yet resulted in consistent improvements

across the provision. For example, the quality of mathematics and English teaching varies from very good to weak.

- TRAC's approach effectively meets both national and local priorities. Directors have developed outstanding relationships with a range of employers resulting in the development of programmes which specifically address the needs of the employer and the learner. Where necessary, TRAC works with the awarding body to create new units specifically addressing the sector's needs; for example, the apprenticeship in trade business services, a very flexible programme, gives learners a wide range of skills to enable them to work in a variety of positions within a trade wholesaler.
- Senior managers have developed appropriate policies and procedures to promote equality and diversity across the company. All staff have received training on equality and diversity, although a minority of staff do not demonstrate sufficient knowledge to ensure effective promotion to apprentices. There is an ethos and culture of respect within TRAC. Apprentices are treated with respect and are highly valued by their learner managers.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. The senior manager, who is the designated safeguarding officer, has received recent, detailed safeguarding training. All learner managers have taken a more basic course. All staff have undergone either a CRB or a DBS check, a record of which is held centrally. Staff have used the clear processes and procedures very effectively when learners have expressed concerns including, when appropriate, the involvement of local safeguarding bodies. The promotion of health and safety at work is good, and learner managers often reinforce this during progress reviews. The company has a detailed policy regarding the responsible and safe use of the internet and other electronic devices. It places the responsibility for learners' safety on all staff.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

The Real Apprenticeship Company 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						2		
Outcomes for learners	2						2		
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2						2		
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2						2		

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Retailing and Wholesaling	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	400								
Principal/CEO	Debbie Shandley								
Date of previous inspection	N/A								
Website address	www.therealapprenticeship.com								
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+	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	222	31	8	8	0		0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		N/A		N/A				
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A								
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
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"> N/A 								

Contextual information

The Real Apprenticeship Company has held a contract to train apprentices since April 2013. It had previously delivered training under sub-contract. The company headquarters are in Warwick. Learners are spread throughout the country. The company's home-based learner managers deliver most training and carry out assessments on employers' premises. One company employs most current apprentices. TRAC has agreements in place to work with other major employers. The provider engages in a variety of training and business solutions activities which were out of scope for this inspection. These include a pilot project to introduce UK-style apprenticeships into work-based learning in the People's Republic of China.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Cliff Rose HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Business Development as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last two 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 area 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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