

# The Apprentice Academy Ltd

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		10-13 March 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- in-year attainment has declined from the good achievement rates gained in 2013/14
- apprentices, staff and employers have not been provided with appropriate guidance on the risks of extremism and radicalisation in this priority area of North West of England
- career coaches and their managers do not appropriately plan, monitor and review apprentices' progress to a consistently high standard to ensure that they make good progress, produce work of a consistently high quality and complete their apprenticeship in the planned time
- self-assessment reporting and associated quality improvement planning requires improvement; managers evaluation of the provision does not identify all key areas of improvement, and the associated targets in improvement plans fail to monitor the progress of targets to achieve rapid development
- processes to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are underdeveloped; current practice does not focus sufficiently on learning; performance management is insufficiently rigorous to improve the practice of career coaches and tutors.

### This provider has the following strengths:

- leaders and managers have successfully developed a curriculum to meet the local skills priorities through effective collaboration with the local enterprise partnership, chamber of commerce and employers
- apprentices develop good English and mathematical skills throughout their apprenticeship, which they can then effectively use in the workplace to improve their organisations productivity
- apprentices' development of personal, social and employability skills is good; managers have implemented a robust curriculum of development which is rigorously monitored; this development has been central to the significant improvement of permanent employment for apprentices, following the completion of apprenticeships over the past 18 months.

## Full report

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

- Rapidly improve in-year achievement to ensure that this aligns with the good achievement attained in 2013/14. Managers should systematically use a broad range of management information to assess and swiftly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that staff, apprentices and employers receive appropriate up-to-date guidance on the risks of extremism and radicalisation within the Manchester area to safeguard apprentices from their associated risks.
- Ensure learners' progress is reviewed and monitored to a consistently high standard by agreeing specific targets for improvement that inform them how and what to do to achieve in a timely manner.
- Ensure the self-assessment process is inclusive and robust. Rigorously use the quality improvement plan to identify accurately, the strengths of the provision and the areas for improvement. Agree specific targets, monitor the progress of improvements and document these on a regular basis.
- Ensure that career coaches' and apprentices' knowledge and understanding of diversity are comprehensive and up-to-date to be able support apprentices in understanding the impact of diversity in their work and personal lives.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Apprentice Academy (TAA) provides apprenticeships in administration and social media and digital marketing; both were inspected and graded as part of the inspection. Administration makes up around 90% of the provision, the remainder being in social media and digital marketing. A very large majority of apprentices are aged 16 to 18.</li> <li>▪ Outcomes for apprentices require improvement. Following TAA obtaining a contract to deliver apprenticeship provision in March 2013, the initial cohort of apprentices' achievements in 2013/14 was good with almost 90% of apprentices successfully completing their apprenticeship on time. However, in-year data indicates that the proportion of apprentices achieving their apprenticeship in a timely manner has declined. Too few in-year apprentices do not achieve their apprenticeship within the planned achievement date. Female apprentices', taking advanced apprenticeships, achievement is significantly lower than their male counterparts.</li> <li>▪ Apprentices' progress is too slow considering their prior attainment. The very large majority of apprentices have passed GCSE English and mathematics at school. A few have already completed business-related qualifications at college.</li> <li>▪ Target-setting requires improvement and, as a result, too many apprentices are making slow progress. The recording of units achieved is weak and the progress towards achievement is poorly documented.</li> <li>▪ The quality of apprentices' work requires improvement. On occasions, apprentices do not answer written questions in their e-portfolio accurately. Career coaches and the internal quality assurance personnel do not always identify these errors. Feedback to apprentices does not consistently identify what they need to do to improve and develop their skills and knowledge.</li> <li>▪ The promotion and implementation of personal, social and employability skills is good. Managers, in consultation with employers, have developed an innovative 'apprentice professional development' curriculum. It mirrors the competencies required by industry and includes skills such as commitment, self-motivation, reliability, respect and positive attitudes. Analysis of the impact of this curriculum by the provider shows apprentices improve these</li> </ul>	

competencies over the course of their apprenticeship. These skills positively contribute to the significant improvement of permanent job outcomes following the completion of their apprenticeship in the past 18 months.

- Collection and analysis of destination and progression data by managers are good. The proportion of apprentices progressing into permanent employment has improved significantly over the past 18 months. Two thirds of all achievers in 2013/14 gained permanent employment or progressed to higher-level apprenticeship and one in 10 apprentices progressed to further or higher education. In-year data suggests that the large majority of apprentices progressed to positive destinations. Managers are clear that this improving trend is due to the vocational and employability skills that they have developed throughout their apprenticeship.

### **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Requires improvement**

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement as reflected in outcomes for apprentices. Career coaches do not always use their skills to enable apprentices to make the progress of which they are capable. The very large majority of apprentices with high prior attainment are not challenged to extend their learning or make rapid progress.
- Assessment practice requires improvement. Too many apprentices are coached immediately before the assessment of their knowledge. They do not have time to reflect on their learning or carry out research on a topic. A minority of career coaches incorrectly assess apprentices' responses to written knowledge questions.
- Many apprentices are confident and take responsibility for their own learning, helping them to succeed. For example, apprentices took part in a 'job swap' exercise as part of National Apprenticeship Week. Apprentices gained a greater understanding of more complex roles within their workplace and the added responsibility involved.
- Support for apprentices requires improvement in order to ensure they make good progress and achieve their individual apprenticeship aims in a timely manner. Too many apprentices are insufficiently supported by their career coaches to develop additional skills beyond what is expected of their apprenticeship.
- Target-setting and the monitoring of apprentices' progress are weak. Career coaches do not set apprentices sufficiently challenging targets to ensure that they will make rapid progress. Apprentices and their employers do not use the electronic portfolio frequently enough to monitor the progress they are making or identify what they need to do in order to achieve.
- Feedback to apprentices requires improvement. Career coaches give apprentices too little written feedback on their work to enable them to reflect on what they have done well and what they need to improve and over rely on verbal feedback. Consequently, apprentices are not able to reflect and improve their written work or their performance in the workplace.
- Apprentices have a clear understanding of the importance of using good standards of English in the workplace. For example, apprentices recognise the need for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar when creating press releases for clients on social-media platforms. However, career coaches and tutors do not always model good standards of written English in documents given to apprentices.
- The development of mathematics skills for the small minority of apprentices who are working towards functional skills at level 1 is good. Level 2 apprentices develop good skills and confidence during mathematics lessons, which helps them calculate units of measurement and to make conversions between units. Career coaches break down the steps that apprentices need to take when making calculations in order to help apprentices understand the task they are doing. For example, at the start of one lesson apprentices lacked confidence, but after coaching they were able to calculate accurately the size and quantity of containers needed to accommodate a specific measure of marmalade.
- Career information advice and guidance that apprentices receive are good. This helps apprentices make decisions about the best qualifications and job opportunities to meet their

career aspirations. The recruitment team are skilled at obtaining information from apprentices to ensure they are carefully matched with an employer that best fits their aptitude and attitude to work. Apprentices have a good understanding of progression routes available to them when they have completed their apprenticeship, inspiring some to achieve qualifications at a higher level. However, not all apprentices are aware of the components of their current apprenticeship. For example, a small minority of apprentices who are due to complete their apprenticeships in the next month are not aware that they need to complete technical certificates.

- Apprentices' knowledge and understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity requires improvement. Career coaches do not challenge or extend apprentices' knowledge of these topics at meetings. Apprentices lack understanding of key aspects of current legislation; this does not enable them to ensure that their work in social media and digital marketing reaches all groups in modern society.

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

## **Requires improvement**

- Leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision 'to ensure Manchester has the skills it needs for the future'. Both founding directors have a strong strategy, which is clearly aligned to the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership skills priorities. The growth plans for the organisation are ambitious, as are the targets that are set at a strategic level. However, there is insufficient priority placed on the improvement of teaching and learning in the achievement of these targets and the ambition has not yet demonstrated any impact in 2014/15.
- Performance management requires improvement. Although there are clear, aspirational strategic targets set in the annual business plan these are not disseminated and documented through the annual appraisal system. A new system of monitoring performance on a monthly basis has been introduced, but it is too early to evaluate its impact. Although staff do receive support to develop their skills, there is no organisational strategy to coordinate this activity or what the expected outcomes of the activity will be. This prevents managers from evaluating the impact the development has on apprentices' learning experience and ultimately sharing best practice.
- The quality assurance of teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. The system for observing teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently robust and does not focus on the features of the session that most impact on learning. There is a lack of moderation of this process, which results in the content of the reports not reflecting the grades being awarded. Feedback does not clearly identify and record the professional development staff need to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Internal quality assurance is insufficiently rigorous and has failed to identify a few weaknesses in assessment practice.
- Self-assessment requires improvement. The report does not adequately identify the key areas for improvement that inspectors identified. The self-assessment report is over-generous in its evaluation and does not adequately address the importance of teaching, learning and assessment in improving achievement for apprentices. Apprentices' and employers' views are collected and analysed using a number of survey documents and focus groups. However, these are not sufficiently used to inform judgements or identify areas for improvement.
- Development planning requires improvement. Target-setting and the subsequent monitoring to improve the outcomes and the quality of learning that apprentices receive require improvement. The information contained within the quality improvement plan lacks detail, and prevents managers from having a good understanding of the progress that is being made on individual improvement areas.
- Learning programmes offered by TAA take notable account of the specific needs of apprentices and employers. For example, apprentices benefit from well-resourced learning facilities in the heart of Manchester city centre where the large majority of apprentices placements are located. Leaders have a good understanding of the skills requirements in Greater Manchester and work closely with the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership to align their curriculum with the skills demand. Leaders work well with local colleges, universities and the chamber of

commerce to access other sources of funding to deliver flexible training to meet the needs of a wide range of priority sectors within the city, especially in managerial development.

- Managers' use of data to identify gaps and variations in performance between different groups of apprentices require improvement. Managers have a limited understanding of their management information system, which results in them not fully recognising underperformance of different groups of apprentices. Staff have an adequate level of understanding in relation to equality and diversity; they treat apprentices with respect and appropriately protect them from harassment, bullying and discrimination.
- Safeguarding arrangements for learners require improvement. TAA have a single central register for the recording of all Disclosure and Barring Scheme checks and these are renewed every three years. Staff and apprentices have an adequate understanding of how to keep themselves safe in their workplace and online. Where apprentices raise concerns, these are dealt with quickly, sensitively and appropriately. There are effective support mechanisms in place such as the Young People Support Foundation to assist apprentices when required. However, there has been no guidance provided to staff, apprentices and employers on the risks of extremism and radicalisation within the city, which is a designated 'Prevent' priority area.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)****The Apprentice Academy Ltd**

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	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Administration</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Marketing and sales</b>	<b>3</b>

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	192								
Principal/CEO	Ms Alison Bagnall								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.theapprenticeacademy.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+	
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	57	1	67	19	N/A	N/A			
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:	N/A								

## Contextual information

The Apprenticeship Academy operates from its headquarters and delivery centre in Manchester city centre. It is funded by the Skills Funding Agency to provide training and development for apprentices and specialises in training administration, social media and digital marketing. Almost 13% of the working-age population of Manchester have no qualifications compared to 9.3% nationally. In 2014, 51.4% of 16-year-olds in Manchester attained five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grade A\* to C, compared to the national average of 53.4%. The percentage of Manchester residents claiming job seekers allowance is 3.7%, compared to national average of 2.4%. According to the 2011 census, 34% of all residents in Manchester are of a minority ethnic heritage compared to 21.2% nationally.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Paul Cocker HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Training 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 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:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012)

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