

Weir Training Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		16–20 March 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- a high proportion of apprentices successfully gain their qualification, and almost all of those who are successful complete within the planned timescale
- the great majority of apprentices develop their skills well and improve the way they contribute to the effectiveness of their workplace
- apprentices benefit from good training, coaching and guidance which very effectively increases their confidence, communication skills and willingness to take on greater responsibility at work
- training specialists with good industry experience make the programmes relevant to apprentices' work
- the apprenticeships offered by Weir Training support well the key priority of the local enterprise partnership (LEP)
- staff work closely with employers to ensure they understand what their apprentices need to do and how this can help their businesses; this makes the training even more effective
- information, advice and guidance are effective in ensuring apprentices are on the right programmes, fully understand the expectations and commitments of the course and how they can progress further
- managers are effective in monitoring the performance of staff and in helping apprentices achieve their qualifications
- staff and managers enthusiastically ensure that apprentices have the care and attention they need to succeed.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- directors do not set out their priorities for improvements in teaching and learning clearly enough; in a small number of areas change is slow
- apprentices are not all encouraged to take their learning beyond the formal requirements of the apprenticeship framework
- closing the gap in achievement for those with additional learning needs is taking too long.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Identify key areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment in order to improve quality; make more effective use of available information to set out main priorities in a simple plan with clear timescales, responsibilities and desired outcomes. Focus on key areas such as professional development of teaching staff, delivery of functional skills, more effective use of the online portfolio, improvement of resources and reinforcement of equality and diversity in the workplace.
- Develop staff understanding of how they can use initial assessment information more effectively so that all apprentices are set challenging tasks from the outset of their programme.
- Provide further training for the training specialists so apprentices receive consistently high quality support in developing English and mathematical skills through everyday workplace situations.
- Share existing good practice to provide outstanding teaching, learning and assessment for all apprentices and help the more able apprentices develop their skills and knowledge beyond the basic requirements of the apprenticeship framework.
- Review the effectiveness of actions to support those with additional learning needs and implement any necessary changes so that the achievement of such learners matches that of their peers by the end of 2015/16.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Weir Training supports apprenticeships in over a hundred, varied businesses. The great majority of apprentices are taking qualifications in administration or management, with much smaller numbers in retail, warehousing and information and communication technology (ICT). Increasingly, Weir Training is working with large organisations such as NHS trusts. Nearly half of the current 400 apprentices are over 24 years of age, with just over 10% being 16 to 18 years old.
- In the large majority of programmes and levels of learning, nearly all apprentices achieve their qualification and a very large proportion does this by the planned end of their programme.
- Success rates fell significantly between 2011/12 and 2012/13 from the previously exceptionally high rates; this decline has been halted. Causes for this drop, clearly identified by Weir Training's self-assessment process, included weak management at that time, ineffective introduction of functional skills, inappropriate recruiting of apprentices and a failure to respond rapidly to the increased length of courses for most of Weir Training's apprenticeships. Managers have dealt effectively with nearly all of these problems over the past two years. In 2013/14, three quarters of apprentices were on programmes where rates improved slightly or matched the previous high levels.
- No sustained or significant differences exist in the performance of different groups of apprentices, except that the very small minority of those with additional learning needs have underperformed for the past three years. Staff now provide increased support and resources for these apprentices; some improvements are evident, but further improvement is needed to ensure these learners achieve as well as their peers.
- Successful completion of English and mathematics qualifications mirrors the good performance in the main qualification. Apprentices receive support from staff to ensure they work towards a qualification exceeding the mandatory minimum needed for the framework; a small number have recently achieved a higher-level qualification. The ICT functional skills examinations have proved difficult for many apprentices, and the proportion passing the qualification at the first

attempt is low. A series of improvement measures are having an early beneficial impact in this area.

- The very large majority of apprentices are making good progress in their qualification in the current year. In areas such as retail, where there is some slow progress, managers are giving apprentices more support to ensure they complete on time.
- Development of relevant workplace skills is particularly good. Training specialists work closely with apprentices and employers to ensure that learning is relevant to job roles. The great majority of apprentices are already employed when they start their apprenticeship, but many do develop new skills; for example, project managing the introduction of a new customer relationship management database which is helping a business improve, or managing conflict within a team to make the workplace more harmonious.
- Staff across Weir Training successfully develop the employability skills of the small number of 16 to 18 year olds applying for apprenticeships. Short 'taster' sessions with employers, tips on interviews, challenging discussions on motivation, and a thorough induction all help these learners prepare for their apprenticeships.
- After they complete their apprenticeship, a good proportion of apprentices stay in employment, progress into more demanding work that requires advanced skills, such as team leader in a very busy area of a hospital, or progress to a higher level of training. Managers at Weir Training are rightly attempting to improve the way they track the destination of apprentices so they can deal with any deficiencies in programme planning.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, reflecting the good outcomes for apprentices. The subject areas inspected cover most of Weir Training's provision.
- Apprentices benefit from good training, coaching and individual guidance, which increase their confidence very effectively so they make good progress in developing communication, personal and social skills. For instance, they improve their ability to use telephones and computers effectively. One apprentice learned not only the importance of good time management in ensuring vans are loaded promptly but also how time taken to check that customer orders are accurate reduces the financial loss that comes with errors.
- Training specialists have good industry experience which they use well to motivate apprentices and develop their confidence; they foster positive relationships of trust and professionalism with apprentices and their employers by being punctual, well organised, reliable and by making frequent workplace visits to support apprentices.
- Supportive training specialists encourage and motivate apprentices to extend their skills in carefully structured ways. Visits are frequent and communication between visits is generally good, with prompt responses to queries encouraging good, consistent progress for the great majority of apprentices.
- In a minority of cases, training specialists on visits answer questions too readily in discussions, so apprentices do not fully develop their own problem solving skills. Training specialists do not always challenge the more experienced apprentices, particularly those who are already employed in positions of responsibility with good work records, to extend their skills and knowledge beyond the requirements of the apprentice framework.
- The quality of learning resources used with apprentices is not consistently good. An increasing number of interesting, interactive resources are now available in the online portfolio, but training specialists do not routinely help apprentices use these effectively. In group training sessions, resources, such as handouts, are basic and do not provide a long-term, useful record for apprentices.
- Initial assessment is good. Training specialists gain a detailed picture of apprentices' initial abilities in English, mathematics and information technology skills as well as their existing work skills. They liaise closely with employers to identify and set clear and appropriate workplace

objectives that meet the needs of the business and the apprentices well. Apprentices have clear targets based on skill gaps identified through this process. Training specialists focus well on supporting apprentices to develop the weaker aspects of information technology skills, but a minority of apprentices still make slow progress. Training specialists do not always use the initial information well enough to ensure that all apprentices are set challenging tasks from the outset.

- Specialist trainers deliver effective short off-the-job training workshops; apprentices review key learning points and build their confidence through interesting group activities and well-focused discussions with their peers that enable them to share their workplace experiences. Apprentices value this training, which enables them to do their best in their technical certificate assessments.
- Most apprentices find the online portfolio system very helpful because it helps them to present evidence easily and monitor their progress independently. They receive prompt feedback on their work and the majority use this feedback well to improve. Feedback is generally encouraging and supportive, but in a few instances fails to identify what the apprentice has to do next or to direct them well enough to pertinent, challenging resources. Not all apprentices or training specialists are confident and skilled enough to benefit fully from all aspects of the online portfolio.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Employers and apprentices clearly understand what is expected of them and what will be provided. Weir Training staff suggest other training opportunities if the courses they offer are not suitable to meet applicants' immediate needs. The online portfolio contains very helpful information about websites and job search tools, as well as links to the National Careers Service, allowing apprentices to plan next steps to meet their long-term goals.
- Apprentices understand how improved mathematical and English skills allow them to make better progress at work, and they work effectively on the formal qualifications. However, training specialists do not consistently embed practice of these skills into work tasks. Employers report improved standards of written work and greater accuracy in financial calculations and statistical analysis. Apprentices with weaker skills receive additional support, but staff are not sufficiently experienced in this to help all apprentices make fast enough progress.
- Apprentices value highly the strong mutual respect and trust in their working relationships with their training specialists and trainers. Training specialists rigorously check health and safety matters in the workplace and ensure that apprentices feel safe. Training specialists do not take enough advantage of everyday workplace situations to hold stimulating discussions that raise awareness of equality and diversity beyond the basic requirements of employment rights and responsibilities.

Retailing and wholesaling Warehousing and distribution

Apprenticeships

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in retailing and wholesaling and warehousing and distribution are good because:

- a high proportion of apprentices successfully complete their qualifications; they increase in their confidence and ability to take on more demanding work tasks and they develop good employment related skills, such as effective telephone communication, team working, stock control and fork lift operation
- training specialists, along with a functional skills specialist, provide a flexible, very supportive service to apprentices in their workplaces
- training specialists use a wide variety of methods to gather evidence about apprentices' performance, encourage the apprentice to reflect on better working practices, and make assessment relevant to workplace tasks such as completion of despatch notes

- training specialists have detailed knowledge about retail and warehouse practices, have good occupational competence and a clear understanding of the apprenticeship requirements which they weave into coaching and assessment sessions
- apprentices receive positive and encouraging feedback from training specialists; they have a good understanding of their progress and participate fully in learning
- apprentices make good progress in developing their functional skills in English and mathematics; this improvement adds to their confidence in taking on more demanding tasks at work
- apprentices and training specialists make very effective use of the online portfolio which encourages progress and allows more focus on skills development rather than on the qualification paperwork
- good linking of apprentices' learning aims to their employed roles ensures that evidence is relevant to the qualification and apprentices are on the correct programmes
- employers operate and enforce good safety policies; training specialists place a very strong emphasis on health and safety during assessments and questioning
- apprentices for whom English is not their first language receive additional support that helps them succeed.

Teaching, learning and assessment in retail and wholesale and warehousing and distribution are not yet outstanding because:

- a minority of apprentices are making slow progress; this has been recognised and corrective action has been taken
- initial assessment arrangements are not fully effective; for instance, results from initial diagnostic tests are not thoroughly recorded in the online portfolio, which means training specialists are less likely to be aware of apprentices' weaker areas and apprentices who have GCSEs do not take English and mathematics tests to assess whether they still have areas for improvement.

Administration

Business management

Apprenticeships

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in business administration and management are good because:

- a high proportion of apprentices complete their qualifications, most within the planned timescales
- training specialists use detailed, current occupational knowledge and experience to inspire and motivate apprentices to broaden learning; apprentices value this technical and professional expertise which helps them develop skills in such things as creating an accurate manifest
- training specialists plan learning well to include a range of activities that meet the specific needs of the apprentices; they provide good support in the workplace, complemented by the training provided by employers
- apprentices develop good business administration, management and employability skills, leading to increased confidence in their abilities and improved work performance; for example, apprentices increase their skills in managing a ward reception in a hospital, or managing an international freight warehouse
- training specialists foster relationships of trust and professionalism with apprentices by being punctual, well organised and reliable, with frequent visits encouraging apprentices to make rapid progress

- apprentices are appropriately placed on a course that meets their needs and the needs of the employer; target setting is specific to the requirements of the employer, which results in highly motivated apprentices, improved workplace performance and, in many cases, rapid achievement
- clear and consistent developmental feedback supports apprentices to improve their work; most apprentices produce work of a good standard; however, the best are not consistently encouraged to develop skills and knowledge well above the requirements of the apprenticeship
- progress is closely monitored using the online portfolio system and most apprentices find this motivating; they understand the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve, and problems are clearly identified and dealt with promptly.

Teaching, learning and assessment in business administration and management are not yet outstanding because:

- initial assessment information or the apprentices' analysis of their own strengths and weaknesses is not always used effectively to identify apprentices' starting points; as a result, a minority of apprentices do not make the progress they could early in the programme
- development of English and mathematical skills is not effective across the learning programme; apprentices are not regularly given sufficient feedback on how to develop writing skills
- Weir Training staff have provided insufficient support to develop information technology skills, including effective use of the online portfolio system for every apprentice.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Very good day-to-day management of staff ensures that the majority of apprentices succeed and improve their skills and effectiveness in employment. Managers make good use of frequent formal reviews and then action based on data, examination of key performance indicators and analysis of how staff are helping apprentices experiencing difficulties. Training specialists are adept at managing their own challenging workloads to ensure they frequently meet with, and effectively support, apprentices and their employers.
- Staff at Weir Training are enthusiastic about their work and mutually supportive of colleagues and the aims of the company, despite the wide geographical distribution of home based staff. Training specialists routinely take initiatives to enhance provision, such as improvements in the delivery of ICT functional skills.
- Directors play an important role in engendering high staff morale. Directors take a clear lead in ensuring Weir Training remains financially stable and meets local priorities. They have carefully reviewed the aims of the business, working closely with the local Chambers of Commerce and other bodies, including the Enterprise M3 LEP. They have reviewed the potential to expand into new areas, such as hospitality, but have reasonably opted to build on their strengths and work mainly to support business, which is the first priority for the LEP.
- Leaders and managers are putting significant effort, with some success, into ensuring that young people in the area are more aware of apprenticeships. In the locality, with many other opportunities for young people, the number that embark on apprenticeships remains low. Analysis of performance and management actions ensure that nearly all apprentices have an equal chance of succeeding, with more work now taking place to close an identified gap in the performance of those with additional needs.
- Very good liaison with employers, before and during apprenticeships, ensures that apprentices make the most of their apprenticeship and contribute well to the effective running of their workplace. Weir Training staff support an increasing number of apprentices in local NHS trusts which have a clearly identified training need.
- Performance management of staff is good. Managers took effective action to deal with poor performance that contributed to the difficulties of two years ago. Well-structured and constructive meetings between managers and members of staff lead to routine development

activities and an effective approach to teaching and learning. Observations of training contribute to this process, but they lack sufficient rigour. These reviews are linked to a well-regarded appraisal system and a variety of useful meetings that enhance communication and allow staff to contribute to improvements in provision.

- Staff, encouraged by managers, regularly take advantage of, and benefit from, specific training and development opportunities, such as understanding changes in qualifications or funding or aspects of equality. Training specialists have appropriate assessment-related qualifications. Professional development of teaching skills takes place for staff involved in the delivery or design of training, but the company lacks a strategic or long-term plan for such development.
- Leaders identification and implementation of improvement priorities requires improvement. Self-assessment is rigorous, although unhelpfully out of phase with published data on success rates. The quality improvement plan is comprehensive, but many actions are vague, with no clearly identified responsibilities or timescales. Directors do not establish specific and coherent priorities for improving performance in teaching, learning and assessment. The work of teams and action by individuals does lead to improvement, but the lack of coherent planning means that the pace of change is sometimes too slow. Improvement activity is not always properly resourced and actions that might have the most impact on quality are not given sufficient priority.
- Safeguarding of apprentices is good. Although the great majority of apprentices are aged over 18 and are in employment, Weir Training staff carefully monitor their health and welfare and take action when necessary. Managers take appropriate actions to ensure that such things as the vetting of staff, and training and recruiting are effective. Managers are now implementing a good strategy to ensure that staff are better aware of how they can help apprentices avoid the dangers of radicalisation.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Weir Training 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
Warehousing and distribution	2
Administration	2
Business management	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	19+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	807								
Principal/CEO	Ms S Caines								
Date of previous inspection	July 2009								
Website address	http://www.weirtraining.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+	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	40	213	4	118	-		-		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	-		-		-				
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	-								
Part-time	-								
Number of community learners	-								
Number of employability learners	-								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A								

Contextual information

Weir Training is located in Chertsey, Surrey, just inside the M25, and close to Heathrow airport. Apprentices work in businesses in an area from Oxford to London, but the majority are in the Kingston upon Thames postcode area. Current apprentices are with around 120 different employers, ranging from leisure parks to manufacturers of power supplies, with relatively recent changes in recruitment meaning that almost 20% are in hospitals or NHS trusts. In this large area, there are variations in the socio-economic background, but in broad terms the young people have higher than average results in GCSEs and the proportion of people in Surrey who are in employment and those who have higher levels of qualifications is above the average for the rest of England.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Andy Harris HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by Weir Training's General Manager 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 apprentices' achievements over the past three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices 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

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