

Pathway First Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		02–05 June 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for apprentices		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 apprentices

This provider requires improvement because:

- until recently, too many apprentices left their programmes early without completing their qualifications
- teaching and learning are not consistently good; tutors do not provide sufficient challenge in lessons for all apprentices to learn and develop skills to their full potential
- the quality of teaching of English and mathematics is too variable and consequently too many apprentices make slow progress towards achieving the functional skills element of their programme
- management strategies to improve teaching and learning have not raised the standard of provision sufficiently
- written feedback on apprentices' work is not sufficiently detailed or helpful to improve their performance effectively.

This provider has the following strengths:

- most apprentices develop valuable employment skills, and a high proportion progress to full-time, permanent employment
- apprentices benefit from the involvement of employers in their programmes through managers' excellent, open and transparent communications with employers and their understanding of the needs of local and regional businesses
- leaders have recently created a new management structure which focuses more clearly on the needs of apprentices, have appointed new, enthusiastic staff and established good management of staff performance
- particularly good self-assessment provides an accurate, self-critical and evaluative self-assessment report and focuses effectively on appropriate actions plans to resolve issues and improve provision
- good approaches to safeguarding and equality and diversity result in apprentices with good understanding of equality and diversity, and an atmosphere of tolerance and respect.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of tuition that is good or better, by more rigorous and systematic monitoring and review of tutors, and strengthening the observations of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that tutors share the examples of very good practice in teaching and learning that exist within the organisation.
- Focus on providing all apprentices with sufficient individual challenge in lessons to enable them to progress according to their potential and to develop their skills further.
- Raise the standard of tuition for English and mathematics by using the findings from initial assessment more effectively so that each apprentice receives the appropriate support for English, mathematics and functional skills.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for apprentices	Requires improvement
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- Pathway First Ltd provides apprenticeship training at intermediate, advanced and higher level. Around two thirds of the apprentices are following intermediate programmes, and one third follow advanced programmes. A very small number of apprentices are following higher-apprenticeship programmes. Two thirds of the apprentices are on business administration and law programmes and one quarter are on health and social care programmes. The few remaining apprentices are following programmes in information and communications technology, retail and commercial enterprise, and education and training.
- Over the first 18 months of the provision, the proportion of apprentices that achieved their qualifications was very low. Until recently, too many apprentices left their programmes early without achieving their full apprenticeship qualification. However, the proportion of apprentices who recently completed their apprenticeship by the agreed end date was above the national rate.
- Managers have successfully reduced the number of apprentices leaving their programmes early. Consequently, the proportion retained on programme in June 2015 compared with June 2014 has improved significantly.
- Most apprentices are currently making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. However, a minority are not due to a large turnover of staff following a management re-structure and insufficient functional skills support in a minority of areas.
- The majority of apprentices develop good employment and personal skills such as proficiency in the professional use of spreadsheets. Business administration apprentices develop good technical business skills, but too many are slow to develop sufficient personal skills such as time management.
- Too many apprentices make slow progress on the functional skills element of their apprenticeships. Most of those who finish the NVQ element of their apprenticeship still have functional skills work to complete. Consequently, apprentices are not improving their English skills quickly enough or to a sufficiently good standard.
- Progression of apprentices into employment is good. Around four in every five apprentices who complete their apprenticeships either continue in permanent, full-time employment with their companies or gain permanent full-time employment with other companies.
- Male apprentices are more likely to achieve their qualifications than females, although female learners significantly outnumber their male colleagues. No significant differences exist in the

achievements between other apprentices when grouped by age, ethnic origin, disabilities or additional learning needs.

- Apprentices benefit from the opportunity to pursue additional qualifications, enhancing their career prospects. A high proportion take up the offer and achieve additional qualifications and develop additional skills.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement because, despite recent significant improvements, too few apprentices successfully complete their learning aims.
- Too little teaching is good or better and the processes to improve teaching, learning and assessment have been ineffective. Managers have conducted a detailed review of the observation of teaching and learning process and they have created a significantly improved model. However, too few observations have taken place using the new process, and it is too early to judge the impact of the new arrangements.
- Managers and tutors do not always plan for the development of functional skills well enough to meet the wide range of levels, needs and abilities of all apprentices. Often, apprentices delay working on their functional skills until they have completed their vocational studies; consequently, not all apprentices make sufficient progress in developing their mathematics and English skills.
- In the majority of lessons, tutors effectively reinforce and check on learning, mostly through effective use of questioning. They use praise appropriately to motivate apprentices and when giving individual feedback. Most tutors continually assess apprentices' work and provide good feedback to help apprentices improve. However, tutors miss opportunities to stretch and challenge apprentices to meet their potential by not setting challenging work or encouraging higher-level independent study.
- Apprentices benefit from good support from tutors, managers and employers. They receive frequent, high standards of support in the workplace from staff independent of the assessment process. This level of employer involvement helps to identify barriers to learning and keeps apprentices on track. The improved support that apprentices receive has contributed to the increase in the numbers staying on programme during the current year.
- Arrangements for initial assessment and advice and guidance for apprentices have improved significantly, and are now good. Staff place apprentices on the appropriate programme for the level of qualification and managers give careful consideration to matching apprentices with job opportunities. Tutors and managers now track the progress made by apprentices very effectively, and provide a clear picture of apprentices' progress against occupational standards.
- Tutors ensure that apprentices perform practical, vocational tasks to a high standard; this is especially so for childcare apprentices. Warehouse tutors demonstrate good practical skills and are good role models for apprentices. Apprentices benefit from this and learn new skills as well as improving their practical skills, confidence and competence.
- Tutors embed equality and diversity themes well into teaching and learning. Staff are confident discussing topics that cover these areas when they arise during learning sessions. Apprentices show respect to each other and staff and are confident exploring issues such as discrimination, victimisation, harassment and bullying within the workplace.

Early years and playwork**Apprenticeships**

Requires improvement

Teaching, learning and assessment in early years and playwork require improvement because:

- too few apprentices have completed their qualifications and those who have completed have not done so in the time allocated at the start of their programme; too many apprentices have not made the progress they are capable of making
- too many apprentices did not enjoy their apprenticeships at the start because their tutors, who are no longer employed, neglected them and were unreliable, which slowed the progress they made
- assessment of apprentices' work by these tutors was poor and the internal quality assurance of assessment did not pick up this weaknesses; consequently apprentices had to do additional work to pass their qualifications which delayed their completion
- apprentices have not had sufficient opportunities to learn independently to enable them to make better progress and consolidate their learning, because the resources to do this, despite recent improvements, are still limited
- apprentices receive too little written feedback on their work so they do not know what they should do to improve and develop their work in the future.

In early years and playwork the provider has the following strengths:

- due to staff changes, apprentices are currently making good progress; those who were behind are catching up quickly and all the current apprentices are developing the knowledge, understanding and confidence they need to become successful childcare workers
- current tutors are skilful at tailoring their teaching to the individual needs of the apprentices, for example, using questions to probe in detail how they apply what they have learnt to their work and giving the more able work at a higher level than they need to pass their qualifications
- good involvement of employers in supporting their apprentices and working with tutors to encourage apprentices to develop the skills they need; tutors relate theory to practical skills particularly well; for example, a tutor questioned learners very well about food preparation and health and safety before observing them feeding children
- good and thorough initial advice and guidance for apprentices who have started recently; tutors successfully ensure apprentices fully understand their apprenticeship and the support available to help them successfully complete the programme; apprentices know who is responsible for supporting them throughout their programmes
- staff promote diversity well and they encourage apprentices to develop and apply their understanding in their workplace; for example, an apprentice received encouragement to discuss her concerns about the impact on her work while she fasted during Ramadan.

Administration and customer service**Apprenticeships**

Requires improvement

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration and customer service require improvement because:

- too few apprentices complete their qualifications and too many are making slow progress
- tutors do not challenge apprentices who are making slow progress to improve their skills such as time management to meet deadlines, taking initiative and overcoming habits such as carrying out less urgent tasks that will delay completion of their course
- tutors do not always use their knowledge of the apprentices' personal career goals to stretch those on advanced-level programmes to develop transferable skills to a level beyond that needed for completion of course tasks
- too many apprentices are still doing functional skills at the end of their programme, which is likely to delay their completion of the apprenticeship
- tutors do not encourage apprentices to improve their skills in written English; they do not routinely comment on the presentation style and layout of written work produced by apprentices; for example, an apprentice submitted four pages of text that was not broken down into paragraphs without receiving any comments from the assessor on grammar and structure
- apprentices rely too much on tutors to tell them how well they are progressing instead of tracking their own progress, and at the advanced level, they do not carry out enough independent research to support their learning; as a result, their development of employability skills in this respect is impeded.

In administration the provider has the following strengths:

- qualified and experienced tutors use their industry knowledge particularly effectively to build trust rapidly with apprentices and to collaborate strongly with their managers so that they meet the needs of the apprentice, manager and the provider well
- tutors plan their training sessions very well using a wide range of creative and inspirational resources, including multi-media and case studies; they use excellent up-to-date examples that are highly relevant to the apprentice within their organisation, for example how to be competitive by providing 'best value'
- tutors use questioning well to coach apprentices to become reflective about the impact of their own behaviour in the workplace, for example, in creating and maintaining effective teams in the workplace
- apprentices are developing valuable business skills including providing informative presentations, writing formal letters and speaking with a high level of confidence on the telephone to suppliers and customers
- apprentices receive good advice and guidance to ensure that employers meet their needs in the workplace and they are fully aware of safeguarding and health and safety procedures to ensure their well-being
- tutors promote equality and the understanding of diversity very well using highly relevant examples from their own industry experience, and also drawing upon the experience and skills of apprentices; for example, in a busy pharmacy within a multi-lingual neighbourhood, tutors encourage apprentices to use their knowledge of other languages to make customers feel at

ease; in addition to being fully aware of equality legislation, apprentices recognise the business case for promoting equality and diversity in the workplace, in order to provide customers with a highly competitive and high standard of service.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- In November 2014, leaders and managers correctly identified an urgent need to make changes to improve significantly provision for learners. Success rates were poor, and most apprentices made slow progress. The self-assessment report acknowledges these failings. Since then, they have shown relentless determination to build effective systems and processes. This has caused a period of instability within the organisation, but their efforts have led to improvements for learners. The scale of change has required a methodical and thorough approach, and at times this has meant that the pace has been slow.
- Strong leadership at Pathway First Ltd has led to the creation of a new management structure and to the appointment of many new staff. Leaders and managers set sufficiently high expectations and standards and they now monitor learners' progress continuously. Managers have set demanding targets for improvements in the performance of staff and in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This includes more support to help staff to develop and improve their skills and effectiveness. Early indications show improvements in a few aspects of the provision, such as increased retention and more effective information, advice and guidance, but it is too early to assess the full impact of all of the changes.
- Leaders and managers accurately identified that provision requires further and sustained improvement. They have put in place a detailed and well-structured development plan. All managers and key staff meet frequently to discuss performance, quality and other operational issues, which ensures that change and improvement continue. They have appointed staff to identify apprentices who fall behind and then provide them with more support to help them catch up. Efforts to improve teaching, learning and assessment have not yet been successful. Sessions are not consistently good, feedback to apprentices is not detailed enough to help them improve and staff have more work to do to improve the provision of functional skills.
- Partnerships with employers are becoming increasingly effective, because leaders and managers have a good understanding of the needs of local and regional businesses; they plan the curriculum to match these needs, such as the planned construction of the nearby HS2 terminal. This ensures that managers and staff at Pathway First Ltd understand the skills employers are seeking and helps to meet the needs of current and future apprentices. Recognising the shortage of transportation and warehousing operatives, managers have well-established plans to provide these courses. Managers work closely with several local enterprise partnerships and other regional business and training networks to understand their skills and training requirements and to avoid duplication.
- The self-assessment report is thorough and accurate because leaders and managers understand their provision well. Managers make good use of data to support self-assessment judgements including the findings of learner, employer and staff surveys. Managers ensure that appropriate action is taken to make improvements following this feedback from the stakeholders. For example, the employer survey identified a need to improve communication, and managers responded positively by introducing account managers so that each employer experiences a consistent and responsive single point of contact. Managers have informed stakeholders of the need to make improvements and the vast majority of employers have pledged their support to help make this happen.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is a high priority for leaders and managers. Managers and staff promote an inclusive and supportive environment for apprentices. They ensure that apprentices are respectful to each other and to the people they meet at work. This helps to

improve the skills and behaviours apprentices need to do their jobs effectively. Arrangements for dealing with bullying and harassment are effective. Staff promote apprentices' welfare very well and resolve promptly any breach of the equality and diversity policies and expectations. No significant gaps exist between the achievements of different groups of apprentices with the exception of that between males and females.

- Safeguarding of all apprentices is good. Staff and apprentices have a clear understanding of safeguarding and the processes to follow should concerns arise. All staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training and good information is available to help them understand the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. The designated senior manager responsible for safeguarding has attended advanced training and has a high level of knowledge. The provider maintains a central record of staff checks and follows careful staff recruitment processes. Staff pay good attention to health and safety arrangements, and this ensures apprentices remain safe.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Pathway First 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	3						3		
Outcomes for learners	3						3		
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3						3		
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3						3		

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Early Years and Playwork	3
Administration	3

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of apprentices	16+								
Approximate number of all apprentices over the previous full contract year	230								
Principal/CEO	Mr Safaraz Ali								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.pathwaygroup.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 apprentices (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+			
	35	93	27	49	0	7			
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	N/A								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A. 								

Contextual information

The provider started their own directly funded apprenticeship programmes in 2013/14 after operating as a subcontractor on Train to Gain provision for a number of years. Currently 211 apprentices are in learning following programmes at intermediate and advanced level, predominantly in health and social care and administration. Most learners are located in areas around Birmingham and Leicester. The provision is now in its second year of direct funding.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	John Dunn
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Six additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Operations 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 last 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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