

# VQ Solutions Ltd.

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		23-26 June 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	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:

- VQ Solutions Ltd. has a strong sense of purpose; staff demonstrate the drive to deliver a high quality and innovative apprenticeship in which they exploit the use of technology fully
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and as a result apprentices achieve well; current learners make very good progress, developing the personal and vocational skills which make them valued employees
- apprentices enjoy their programmes which match their needs and the skill needs of local employers particularly well
- apprentices benefit from highly effective and timely advice, guidance and support both before and during their training
- assessors have high expectations of the apprentices; they use their very good technical knowledge well to develop training materials which challenge and stimulate learners to achieve.

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

- assessors do not reinforce the English skills needed for learners to achieve their main learning goals; they are not sufficiently skilled in developing the mathematical competences that learners will need in their careers
- learners are treated fairly; however, assessors do not extend the apprentices' understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding sufficiently during their training programmes
- arrangements to improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are not yet fully developed
- staff do not have sufficient awareness of current requirements and best practice within the learning and skills sector, to enable them to shape and improve their provision further.

## Full report

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

- Ensure that assessors' feedback on apprentices' work is comprehensive, detailed and allows learners to know what they have done well and where to make improvements to their work to achieve higher standards; ensure the effective correction of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors and work with learners to develop their English and mathematical skills throughout their apprenticeships.
- Deepen learners' understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding throughout their programmes, utilising the online modules as part of each apprentice's individual learning plan. Use progress reviews fully to explore and record learners' increasing understanding of these topics.
- Strengthen quality improvement arrangements, particularly observations of learning, to ensure that they evaluate key aspects, such as the teaching and development of learners' skills in mathematics and English, in sufficient detail and provide staff with clear guidance about how to improve.
- Use the quality improvement plan to raise staff awareness of current requirements, drive development across the company and monitor progress closely; seek out best practice from across the learning and skills centre to drive improvement and change.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- VQ Solutions Ltd. offers apprenticeships in information and communication technology (ICT), social media and digital marketing (social media), and business administration. Most learners are advanced apprentices; the majority are aged 16 to 18.
- Outcomes for learners are good. 2013/14 was the first year in which VQ Solutions Ltd. offered government-funded training. The small group of apprentices achieved well and above the national rate; however, too many did not complete their awards within the planned timescale.
- In-year data from the provider indicate that overall success rates are increasing significantly and the proportion of learners completing their programmes within the planned timescale in 2014/15 is growing. Current learners are making very good progress with a very large majority due to complete their programmes both successfully and on time, which for most is in line with their prior educational attainment. There are no significant variations in success rates within the small groups of learners on either ICT or business administration programmes.
- Apprentices enjoy their programmes and produce a good standard of work in the workplace which employers value highly. They quickly acquire the vocational skills that make them capable employees. For example, one school leaver started her apprenticeship with only basic technology skills and after 10 months uses a range of advanced software packages confidently and independently.
- Learners acquire a good range of personal, social and employability skills during their apprenticeships, making the most of the opportunities afforded them by their supportive employers. For a majority of learners, the apprenticeship is their first experience of full-time employment after school. They increase in confidence, motivation and develop their ability to work independently, through their work roles. They also gain a good awareness of broader aspects, such as the importance of good timekeeping.
- A large majority of learners on ICT courses gain additional qualifications which improve their performance in the workplace and enhance their career development prospects. For example,

the CompTIA A+ award and the CIW Web Foundations Associate qualification. Some administration apprentices complete the qualifications needed to become independent financial advisers alongside their main awards.

- Almost all learners have good skills in English and mathematics at the start of their apprenticeships. Through their work roles, they improve their verbal skills, communicating effectively with colleagues and customers and acquire an understanding of technical terminology. However, VQ Solutions Ltd. staff place insufficient emphasis on ensuring that learners' written English and mathematical skills are maintained systematically or, where appropriate, enhanced.
- Progression by learners leaving VQ Solutions Ltd. is particularly good. Since the organisation introduced apprenticeships, a large majority of learners have secured permanent employment, often in positions with additional responsibility at the end of their programmes. The remainder all progressed onto higher level full-time education courses.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Good
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- Good outcomes for learners and apprentices are the result of good teaching, learning and assessment, and particularly effective support for learners. Assessors' expectations of what all learners can achieve are high. Employers and learners' needs are met well and they are very positive about the apprenticeship programmes.
- Learners benefit from good information, advice and guidance, particularly at the beginning of their programmes. Assessors and other staff meet with potential employers to ensure the programme meets learners' needs and aspirations and enables them to make informed choices about future career opportunities. Staff give very good initial advice and guidance at programme entry and, as a result, learners are recruited to the right course, at the right level and the qualification units chosen match closely the interests of learners and their job role.
- Initial assessment is very effective. Staff use a comprehensive set of documents to capture learners' details, learning goals and aspirations, which they transfer onto a useful online learner management system. However, although all learners receive an exit interview to discuss their future plans, progress reviews do not sufficiently focus on ensuring learners are aware of a range of progression and learning opportunities.
- Apprentices engage well in learning and demonstrate good motivation to progress. Assessors have high expectations for learners to progress well in their jobs. Learners work independently using e-resources and have access to high quality materials to support their learning, including visual presentations, practice exercises, webinars and short video clips, which focus on specific matters such as diary maintenance, team-working and use of software.
- Apprentices benefit from enthusiastic employers and improved employability skills. They improve their skills in communication and teamwork. Many employers offer additional job specific training, such as financial planning and opportunities for social media development, which help learners to become more employable and provide the opportunity to complete additional professional qualifications. Apprentices receive good personal support from their assessors that ensures they remain focused and achieve their qualifications.
- The close working relationships between assessors and employers have a positive impact on learners' progress. Employers benefit from good communications with assessors. They are very appreciative of their flexibility around work patterns and workloads. Initial meetings with employers include detailed discussions that help them to select apprenticeship programmes and study components that accurately reflect the day-to-day work of their businesses.
- Assessors are appropriately qualified and experienced. Workplace visits are productive; assessment is regular and most learners enjoy using their e-portfolios to record their evidence so that both they and their assessor can monitor progress.

- Although assessors give good verbal feedback, written feedback to learners is not sufficiently detailed to enable learners to understand why their work meets the required standards, how to improve their skills or to build on their success in future work.
- While most learners develop confidence in speaking and listening skills, the wider development and promotion of English and mathematical skills require improvement as learners do not receive support to progress beyond the level already achieved at the start of their programme. Assessors do not routinely reinforce the English skills learners need to achieve their main learning goals; neither are they sufficiently skilled in developing the mathematical competences that learners will need in their careers.
- Assessors do not extend learners' knowledge and understanding of practices in sessions to enable learners to promote equality and celebrate cultural diversity in their work settings. Discussions to challenge perceptions and develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues are not routinely included in coaching sessions or within progress reviews.

## ICT for practitioners and users

### Apprenticeships

Good

#### **Teaching, learning and assessment in ICT for practitioners and users are good because:**

- apprentices achieve well and develop very good vocational and wider employability skills in the workplace; they gain additional respected professional qualifications and speak confidently at a technical standard
- assessors have high expectations of the apprentices and provide them with very good support to develop the skills needed to function very effectively in the workplace; employers value the support that assessors offer and frequently commit to taking on new learners once their current apprentices have completed their awards and secured full-time employment; all apprentices progress into employment or higher education
- apprentices benefit from their assessors' good industrial experience which adds interest and relevance to their training; the company has developed its own e-portfolio portal which provides learners with access to excellent online materials including visual presentations delivered through webinar and short informative five-minute videos
- apprentices acquire confidence and independence which enhance their effectiveness as employees; employers recognise the extent to which apprentices contribute to their business development; for example, one apprentice has recently carried out complex website development using relevant programs
- information, advice and guidance are good and prepare the apprentices, ensuring that they and their employers have a clear understanding of the expectations and responsibilities involved with the apprenticeship programme; apprentices are matched well to their programmes and their employers; staff invest time into assessing potential apprentices to ensure that they select appropriate programme pathways
- apprentices feel safe; all learners complete health and safety modules which ensure that they have a very good awareness of good working practices and are confident in their approach in the workplace.

#### **Teaching, learning and assessment in ICT for practitioners and users not yet outstanding because:**

- while equality and diversity and safeguarding are discussed with learners during their induction, assessors do not yet make good use of recently purchased online training modules which will allow them to develop apprentices' knowledge further during their training

- assessors do not develop apprentices' skills in mathematics and English sufficiently during the apprenticeships; while they recognise the need to improve learners' technical vocabulary and to develop their oral communication skills, too little attention is paid to developing the accuracy of learners' written communications
- written feedback provided by assessors lacks detail and the verbal feedback they provide during reviews, while comprehensive, is not always recorded well; learners understand what they have to achieve but have no written guidance to which they can refer.

## Administration

## Apprenticeships

Good

### Teaching, learning and assessment in administration are good because:

- most apprentices successfully complete their qualifications; apprentices enjoy their learning, produce work of a good standard and develop strong employability, personal and social skills required to progress in the business sector
- assessors work proactively with employers to ensure apprentices undertake a good range of work across departments; they select units and plan assessment activities that link well to apprentices' job roles and employers' needs; in particular, employers are keen to take forward the social media unit through which learners can help to enhance their businesses
- assessors provide effective guidance that helps apprentices to develop good occupational skills, for example, they develop good telephone techniques; they gain a range of good paper-based and electronic administrative skills covering invoicing and order processing, as well as taking on additional responsibilities for banking and other financial transactions
- assessors provide timely and focused support for apprentices, for personal as well as work-related issues; particularly flexible support for apprentices in response to changes in individual circumstances has led to appropriate and effective programme modifications
- assessors and workplace managers encourage learners to join business networks which facilitate wider contacts with local employers and other professionals
- assessors use technology effectively to support assessment and this helps to increase the pace of progress for most apprentices; apprentices respond well, for example, to the use of online learning resources, recorded professional discussions and DVD recordings, to collect evidence of competence in skills, such as coordinating diaries and events.

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

- assessors do not plan for the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills well enough; learners' starting points are assessed through literacy and numeracy diagnostic and vocational assessments; however, where learners already have the required level of functional skills for the apprenticeship frameworks, they do not routinely develop further mathematics and English skills
- written feedback on apprentices' work lacks detail; comments focus on meeting competencies and do not support apprentices sufficiently to make improvements in their work or challenge them to achieve higher standards; in some cases the comments do not incorporate the effective correction of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors or include references to relevant strategies to eradicate these weaknesses
- assessors promote equality and diversity to apprentices at induction and check their recall during progress reviews but do not plan effectively to develop and extend learners' deep understanding of equality and diversity sufficiently during coaching sessions or through wider discussion.

**The effectiveness of leadership and management****Good**

- VQ Solutions Ltd. is an organisation with a strong sense of purpose; staff demonstrate the drive to deliver a high-quality and innovative apprenticeship programme in which the use of technology is exploited fully. A small company, VQ Solutions Ltd. is in its second full year of offering apprenticeships. In 2013/14, programme planning was ambitious with all learners completing additional qualifications to enhance their employability and vocational skills; this contributed to some learners not achieving their apprenticeships within the planned timescales. Managers recognised and addressed this promptly; current learners are now making very good progress.
- The company's vision and mission statement focus on delivering high-quality apprenticeships that meet the identified needs of learners and employers well. A strategic plan sets out objectives for the year and is supported by concise strategy summaries that outline how key aspects of apprenticeship delivery will be taken forward. Managers recognise the need to develop more detailed guidance so that all staff understand fully what is expected of them when delivering apprenticeships, for example, around the requirement to embed mathematics and English within programme delivery.
- Staff use their technical skills particularly well to develop resources and programmes that are highly responsive to learners' needs and the emerging needs of employers within the technology sector. VQ Solutions Ltd. invests a significant amount of time in ensuring that learners, apprenticeships and employers are matched well. Employers, in particular, value the company's approach and method of programme delivery and recognise their apprentices' progress with increased responsibility and rewarding work roles. Wider working with schools, careers' teachers and local business partnerships is successful in ensuring that learners benefit from impartial advice and guidance while also promoting the wider value of apprenticeships.
- The constantly evolving apprenticeship programme demonstrates how VQ Solutions Ltd. continuously improves the quality of its provision. A self-assessment report completed at the end of the company's first contract year is self-critical and identifies key areas for improvement accurately. Managers have made adequate progress in implementing the required change; however, in some areas this has not yet resulted in sufficient improvement. For example, observations of staff now cover the delivery of all key learning processes; however, they do not evaluate the quality of teaching and staff performance in enough depth and so do not help staff to improve their practices. The small team of staff develop their skills mostly through online courses and seminars; however, they struggle to maintain an understanding of developing best practice within the learning and skills sector.
- Effective arrangements to gather learners' views have been strengthened over the last year; feedback has resulted in improvements including the purchase of new cameras for webinar sessions and improved online support while learners work on their portfolios. Feedback from employers tends to be gathered informally; however, they will soon have the opportunity to provide more regular feedback through an online portal developed by managers.
- Learners are treated fairly; they value, and benefit, from the high levels of personal support they receive throughout their apprenticeships. Induction introduces them to the company's approach to equality and diversity; information is reinforced in both learner and employer handbooks. However, staff do not use opportunities during progress reviews or training to reinforce this knowledge sufficiently. Managers have challenged successfully the traditional gender stereotyping that can occur within administration and ICT apprenticeships through offering social media units and qualifications which have appealed to both males and females.
- Safeguarding arrangements for apprentices are good. Learners feel safe in their workplaces where staff monitor their health, safety and welfare carefully. VQ Solutions Ltd. checks the records of its staff with the Disclosure and Barring Service as part of their conditions of employment. Induction informs learners appropriately about safeguarding and the role of the designated safeguarding officer. They also receive information about online safety to promote the safe usage of electronic and social media. Staff have completed safeguarding training at an

appropriate level, however, further training is scheduled to raise their awareness of how to identify and tackle extremism.



## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Provider name

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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
ICT for practitioners	2
ICT for users	2
Administration	2



Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	30								
Managing Directors	Mr A Gilmour and Mrs A Gilmour								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	vqsolutions.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+			
	1	0	25	16	0	0			
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		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	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"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>								

## Contextual information

VQ Solutions Ltd. is a small private training provider based in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Formed in 2008, the company originally focused on supporting the development and implementation of e-learning and e-portfolio systems. VQ Solutions Ltd. was awarded a contract to offer apprenticeships in May 2013 and now offers programmes predominantly in ICT and administration to learners, who are mostly employed in the Harrogate area. In 2014, 61% of 16-year-olds in North Yorkshire achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. This is above both regional and national averages. Unemployment in North Yorkshire is below comparative averages.

## Information about this inspection

<b>Lead inspector</b>	Judith Hamer
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Three additional inspectors, assisted by the Managing 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. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements since 2013 to help them make judgements. Inspectors used 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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