

The Derbyshire Network

Independent learning provider

**Inspection dates****10–13 November 2015****Overall effectiveness****Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Directors, senior managers and subcontractors have created a culture of high expectations and have improved leadership and management, teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for learners to good levels since the previous inspection.
- The network managers provide high-quality staff training and support to improve trainers' skills in providing good teaching, learning and assessment.
- Senior managers support and develop the subcontractors well, through timely intervention and support, so they are able to offer learning across many subject areas in safe learning environments.
- Leaders and managers from the network and subcontractors work closely to identify employers' needs, and offer a good range of provision to meet the priorities set by five local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) across England.
- Learners enjoy their learning and improve their personal and vocational skills; they add good value to their employers' businesses, and gain valuable qualifications that enhance their future prospects.
- All learners receive useful careers guidance and advice that helps them to plan their next steps in learning or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding provider because

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently high across all subcontractors.
- Managers do not conduct sufficient analysis of management information to give an accurate account of learners' progress during their courses, and destinations afterwards.
- Not all employers are fully engaged in providing good experiences of learning to their apprentices; and trainers do not make good enough use of training provided by employers to enrich apprentices' skills development.
- The quality of written feedback to learners requires improvement.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Derbyshire Network (TDN), based in Ripley, Derbyshire, is a membership organisation of 60 independent learning and skills providers. It is led by a chief executive officer who is supported by 10 staff whose work is overseen by a board of directors. Through 17 subcontractors, TDN provides apprenticeships, including higher apprenticeships, and adult learning programmes for employed and unemployed adults. Although most learners are based primarily in the East Midlands, the learners and subcontractors are spread across five LEPs. TDN supports training in eight subject areas, with the largest numbers in health and social care, business, animal care, horticulture and forestry and employability programmes. Since the previous inspection, TDN has rebalanced its work by increasing the numbers of apprentices, reducing the numbers of learners in health and social care and on NVQ- and classroom-based learning, and has reduced the subcontractor numbers by 11.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Take robust action to ensure that all subcontractor staff are providing good-quality learning to all learners by:
 - spending more time getting to know each subcontractor's work more closely, and supporting them in their development
 - widening the scope of lesson observations beyond a single visit and
 - sharing good practice from within the network more widely.
- Analyse and evaluate management information, including data gathered from subcontractors, on learners' progress during their courses and their destinations afterwards; ensure that managers use this information to accelerate improvements throughout the subcontractor network.
- Communicate clearly to all employers the network's commitment and contribution to the planning, provision and review of apprentices' training.
- Equip trainers to make good use of additional training provided by employers so that learners make more rapid progress and consolidate their learning further.
- Insist that all trainers provide high-quality written feedback to learners so that they are clear about the standards expected, what they have achieved and what they need to do to excel at their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is good

- Leaders and managers are highly committed to giving their learners a successful learning experience, and have made concerted efforts to improve the quality of training. They communicate clearly to subcontractors their ambition for learners to achieve, and this has led to a marked increase in the number of learners who complete their qualifications within the planned period. Consequently all but one of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have improved.
- Leaders and managers conduct a thorough review of the performance of each of the subcontractors. They hold the subcontractors to account as they review their performance on a monthly basis, and act accordingly to encourage and support them. This process has improved the rates of achievement of qualifications within the planned time. Managers show a high level of respect for subcontractors' expertise; they work closely with them to reduce the burden of administration and to enable subcontractor staff to focus on improving the quality of the learners' experience.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved as a result of extensive staff training that is valued by all staff. The large majority of staff now have at least an introductory or higher teaching qualification. This training has sharpened the confidence and competence of the large majority of trainers. As a result they are more clearly focused on learning, and plan sessions by considering the impact on the learners. Teaching, learning and assessment have much improved since the previous inspection.
- Observers, while evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, focus clearly on identifying the impact of sessions on the learning of individual learners. In most cases observers set well-focused action plans that help trainers to improve their practice further. However, TDN managers do not analyse the strengths and areas for improvement identified across the range of observations. As a result they are unable to plan network-wide staff development and sharing of good practice. Observations are limited to a single visit by a TDN observer which does not provide a clear enough picture of the quality of provision.
- TDN managers have a firm grasp of the strengths and areas for improvement of the total provision. The self-assessment report is based on a broad range of evidence including data and the views of learners, employers and subcontractors, and is largely accurate in its judgements. TDN managers still do not analyse and evaluate sufficiently well data on learners' rates of progress during their courses, or on their progression to further study or employment afterwards. These weaknesses were identified at the previous inspection. They fully understand what they need to do to improve the situation and have recently appointed a staff member to do this.
- The quality improvement plan is cumbersome and unduly detailed, as it covers not only the actions identified through self-assessment, but also actions relevant to TDN's wider membership. This makes it difficult to measure progress made by subcontractors to improve the experiences of learners.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have put considerable effort and resources into developing staff confidence in their own use of English and mathematics, and in ways of promoting these skills in their learners. Most staff have achieved at least one of the functional skills to level 2, or have higher qualifications. This process has enabled staff to reinforce English and mathematics confidently and has resulted in improved outcomes for apprentices.
- Leaders and managers are strong advocates of work-based learning and align the provision closely to the needs of LEPs in the geographical areas that they work in. For example, in close partnership with the subcontractors, TDN managers have established provision in logistics and transportation, fashion and textiles, print industry, customer service or administration as well as higher apprenticeships in London, Leicester, Luton, Sheffield, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire LEP areas. Employers benefit from the range and quality of the training provided by the network.
- All learners have an equal opportunity to achieve success because managers ensure that subcontractors identify learners' needs and aspirations at the start of their programmes, and provide timely and effective support.
- Diversity is promoted well, both in discussions and through a range of materials, including a regular newsletter, produced by staff at TDN. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work, and of how to protect themselves and others from bullying and harassment through social media. However, they have less information about how to identify more subtle forms of face-to-face workplace bullying and how to deal with it.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board of directors have a stake in the success of the network as all of them are either members or subcontractors of TDN.

- They have a sound understanding of work-based learning and employers' needs.
- The directors provide robust challenge to the senior managers regularly, as well as highly effective support that has led to improvements in the provision. They understand and use the data on learners' outcomes well and ask pertinent questions to seek further improvements.
- TDN managers benefit from the wide range of experience and sector knowledge the board directors bring to the organisation.
- Under the guidance of directors, TDN managers have diversified the range of apprenticeships, reduced the scale of classroom-based learning, and identified new subcontractors to provide learning after undertaking 'due diligence' procedures.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Safeguarding is effective and complies fully with the current government guidelines. Learners understand how to keep themselves safe at work and use safe working practices.
- Directors, leaders, managers and subcontractors have a good understanding of extremism and radicalisation. They are well equipped and trained to identify learners at risk of extremism and radicalisation, and have used this training well to safeguard learners.
- The promotion of British values is in its infancy, but managers work well with subcontractors to identify a range of work-based learning scenarios through which these values can be explored.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is good

- Teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices and those on adult learning programmes is good. Learners enjoy their learning and achieving valued qualifications. Individual coaching in the workplace is particularly effective, although it is not of consistently high quality across all subcontractors' provision.
- Well-qualified and experienced trainers use their subject expertise well to plan individual coaching sessions that motivate and interest apprentices effectively, and help them to make good progress. As a consequence, retail apprentices can skilfully and confidently demonstrate their comprehensive product knowledge and improved communication skills. Trainers check learning effectively, using good questioning techniques to assess understanding and to consolidate and reinforce learning.
- Assessment is good. A large majority of employers are involved effectively in the planning of assessment. This helps learners to link work-related activities well with their qualification. Apprentices produce a wide range of evidence of their skills in their portfolios.
- Trainers provide apprentices with immediate, constructive verbal feedback which helps them to improve their practice and ensures that they understand assessment judgements clearly. However, written feedback on apprentices' work is often too descriptive and does not identify clearly what learners have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Trainers provide learners with highly effective personal and pastoral care, particularly for those on adult learning programmes, many of whom have significant difficulties which act as barriers to learning and employment. This care helps learners to regain their confidence and start learning in safe and welcoming learning environments with good preparation to seek jobs.
- Trainers make good use of email and text messages to provide individual support for apprentices between sessions, which helps them to make good progress. Apprentices gain confidence in the workplace and quickly become valued employees, contributing well to their employers' businesses. As a result of the good support provided by trainers, apprentices develop job- and employment-sector specific skills and interpersonal skills well. For example, business administration apprentices respond confidently and professionally to their clients' needs.
- A large majority of employers provide job-specific training that is not an essential part of the apprenticeship framework. Only a minority of employers and trainers make effective use of this learning to extend apprentices' knowledge and understanding; they do not use good opportunities to develop learners' skills beyond the level required for their qualification.
- The development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills is effective. Apprentices enjoy developing skills in the context of their work, such as using their newly gained mathematical skills to calculate areas occupied by materials on pallets, and invoicing clients for services. Trainers also provide effective additional coaching for apprentices with specific learning needs that helps them to achieve qualifications and develop skills on a par with those of their peers.
- Through detailed initial assessment, staff robustly and accurately evaluate apprentices' occupational skills as well as their starting points in English and mathematics. Apprentices receive a thorough induction session in their workplace, which helps them to prepare well for the demands of the apprenticeship

programme as well as opportunities to gather evidence to demonstrate their competence.

- Apprentices benefit from a thorough introduction to equality and diversity at induction. Trainers often refer to current affairs and news reports to prompt useful discussions of relevant equality and diversity topics in coaching sessions, and in progress reviews with those on adult learning programmes. This helps learners to understand how these topics relate to their work. In health and social care provision, apprentices reflect their understanding of the individual needs of their clients well in their personal care plans.
- Trainers provide good impartial information, advice and guidance about future learning and career opportunities, which encourages apprentices at an early stage to plan for the next step in their learning. For example, all learners are given an easy-to-understand leaflet that helps learners to consider and plan their career paths.
- The monitoring of apprentices' short-term progress is effective. At monthly reviews, trainers set assignment tasks for apprentices related to the achievement of units of qualifications, as well as objectives for their work tasks. This process helps to maintain the momentum of learning and enables the apprentices to complete their framework in the planned period. However, trainers do not set and record skills-related targets in individual learning plans. This limits the apprentices' ability to improve their work performance, demonstrate competence against the broader job role and prepare them well enough to secure higher positions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Learners develop good attitudes to learning and improving their future prospects. They aspire to higher-level jobs and qualifications. For example, one learner who previously disengaged from school education has discovered a new appetite for learning through a taster course, and has now progressed to an apprenticeship in animal care at a local community farm.
- Learners develop skills that benefit them in their job roles and their future employability. They develop interpersonal and employability skills well. Learners work productively with colleagues and others. For example, retail learners become aware of the needs of a wide range of customers from different cultural backgrounds, and those with specific needs such as impaired hearing, and learn how to meet them well.
- Learners effectively apply knowledge gained through study to their working practice and have a good work ethic, tackling job tasks with commitment. Employers recognise the skills that learners contribute to the workplace and value the fact that learners adapt easily to changing roles to meet their organisation's needs.
- Trainers tailor learning well to support learners' work tasks. Learners benefit from a wide range of opportunities at work where they apply and extend their skills. For example, one health and social care learner works on reception at a day centre for vulnerable adults, and gains an understanding of how to arrange appropriate transport for adults who visit the centre. However, not all learners recognise the skills they are developing, as trainers emphasise the completion of units rather than confirming the skills and knowledge gained.
- Across all programmes, learners improve their English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills well within the context of their job roles. For example, learners following a level 3 print-finishing apprenticeship practise mental arithmetic to calculate quotations for customers, and quantities of stock. However, a small number of learners do not have regular opportunities to develop their functional skills beyond the requirements of their qualifications.
- Learners benefit from good care and support from their trainers who know their learners and their work contexts well. They adopt high degrees of flexibility to support their learners' personal, employment and academic needs; this care enables learners to continue with their learning. For example, trainers rearrange training or assessment visits to fit in with learners' work rotas which may change with little notice, or with learners' personal needs such as childcare commitments.
- A significant number of learners do not learn quickly enough to become independent in their learning. They rely on trainers to provide instructions and information for them to progress, with too little opportunity for them to develop appropriate independent study skills. Trainers often provide answers to questions too quickly without allowing the learners to reflect, solve problems and learn from their mistakes.
- Learners show a good awareness of, and give very high priority to, safeguarding and health and safety practices in the workplace and in their personal lives. For example, learners keep themselves safe on social media by adjusting privacy settings, and know how to protect their identity online. Learners have an adequate understanding of fundamental British values. They have basic awareness of the dangers and risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and how to raise concerns if they do not feel safe.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Outcomes for learners have improved across all age groups since the previous inspection. Success rates for apprenticeships have seen a step-change improvement in 2014/15 and are above national averages. Success rates are high for intermediate, advanced and the newly introduced higher-level apprenticeships. The rates and the timescale within which the 16–18-year-old and 24+ apprentices achieve their qualifications have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Learners in employment on adult learning programmes make rapid progress and achieve trade-related single qualifications in sectors such as health and social care and construction. These qualifications open up many opportunities for them to apply for varied jobs in the sectors, often commanding better pay with enhanced promotion prospects.
- Unemployed learners improve their employment prospects. Most face a range of barriers leading to a significant period of absence from the employment market. A few secure jobs soon after completing the training. A good percentage enter further study. These learners achieve substantial personal growth, and improve their self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem. They enjoy learning, form friendships and overcome social isolation. Learning helps their concentration and enables them to overcome anxieties. Although the goal of securing employment immediately may be too ambitious for some of these learners, they undertake voluntary work to prepare them for employment.
- Unemployed and employed learners undertake qualifications in English and mathematics and achieve well. These courses improve their skills and open up many opportunities to apply for jobs and/or study. Learners gain strong awareness of the employment market and develop sound job-seeking skills such as reading job advertisements, job evaluation, preparation of a curriculum vitae, and identifying transferable personal and people skills that are useful in most jobs.
- The standards of learners' work on fashion and textiles courses is very high. They make good-quality, desirable products such as well-designed T-shirts, soft toys, and wreaths for Christmas, with due consideration to health and safety regulations. Learners gain knowledge and apply the skills to produce stencils for printing as well as block and screen printing.
- Apprentices produce the work expected for the industries that they work in, enjoy their learning and raise their aspirations. Apprentices in animal care quickly become competent in trimming the hooves of goats and develop a good understanding of how to take care of the emotional and physical health of the pigs on a farm.
- Apprentices become more reflective when performing tasks at work and have a better understanding of the purpose and impact of these tasks. They also take on extra responsibilities and make valuable contributions to their employers' businesses.
- TDN managers do not collect and analyse information to give a reliable account of learners' progression to further study or employment after the end of their apprenticeships. Anecdotal evidence suggests that apprentices stay in their job roles and make progress.
- Staff accurately identify learners' starting points and they make at least the progress expected based on their prior achievements, and often better. However, TDN and subcontractor managers do not have a commonly agreed, reliable process or tool to measure progress. The current 'learner journey' process is too basic and relies solely on the learners' progress against units of qualification, thus often under-estimating their progress in other aspects of their life and work.
- All groups of learners achieve equally well: no significant differences exist between the levels of achievement of male and female learners. Similarly, disabled learners and learners with learning difficulties achieve as well as their peers. The numbers of minority ethnic learners are too small to make any meaningful comparison between their achievements and those of their peers in majority groups.

Types of provision

Apprenticeships

are good

- The Derbyshire Network (TDN) provides learning to apprentices through its subcontractor network. Some 1,037 apprentices are in learning, almost equally split between intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, with the largest volumes on health and social care and business administration programmes. In addition, 119 apprentices are undertaking higher apprenticeships.
- TDN managers ensure that the requirements of the apprenticeships are fully met with teaching of theory through regular visits. Apprentices work at least the minimum hours and often more; the majority, depending on the results of their initial assessments, are studying English and mathematics at the

appropriate level. Some 80% of the apprentices do not have a GCSE in either English or mathematics. They develop skills in both subjects and gain relevant qualifications to achieve their framework. Apprentices receive monthly one-to-one visits from assessors on days and at times to fit round work and personal commitments.

- The large majority of employers are well engaged with the training. Trainers help apprentices choose units that reflect their job roles, and provide apprentices with a good range of opportunities to demonstrate their skills and competency. However, very few assessors make good enough use of training provided by employers. Some of the examples are care certificate standards, health and safety and safeguarding training. In many cases apprentices view the two strands of training as completely separate, as they do not recognise the close link between theory and practice. As a result, they miss chances to produce rich evidence of progress and competence.
- The majority of assessors have excellent relevant vocational backgrounds. Significant staff development has helped to raise the skills and competency of trainers to deliver effective training, often across several apprenticeship subjects. Apprentices and trainers have strong mutual respect for each other. For example, in accountancy, a trainer used her vast experience to explain the different financial roles in a complex organisation although some of her learners worked for small businesses. This information widened the apprentices' horizons as they considered the various roles they can aspire to. However, managers at TDN do not use the performance management process to ensure that assessors participate in vocational updating in order to remain up to date.
- Apprentices value the importance of their training to their future careers and receive appropriate careers advice from their assessors. They raise their aspirations to progress on to more advanced levels of study and into higher-level careers in level 4 accountancy, level 3 digital marketing and social media, as nursery managers or in nursing. This helps employers with their workforce planning, thus enabling apprentices to take on a senior management role.
- Apprentices develop well in their job roles by taking extra responsibilities. For example, a level 2 business administration apprentice has developed the company's social media page and, as part of this, he monitors other learners' comments and provides a professional response to them. Other apprentices develop technical skills to conduct audits, prepare end-of-year figures, provide quotations to customers, and take accurate telephone messages. Another works as a music technician in a school; he acts as a good role model for school pupils who may want to choose a creative apprenticeship route.
- Although verbal feedback is good, written feedback from trainers on apprentices' marked work is generally too brief and descriptive. Trainers do not record development points and the advice for the apprentices on how to improve their work further. This makes it difficult for apprentices to refer back to it and make required improvements.
- Apprentices develop good level of skills in mathematics, English and ICT. Trainers equip them with strategies to improve their literacy independently, for example through the use of online dictionaries, making a glossary of misspelt words, and using United Kingdom (UK) English spell check on the computer. Learning resources, including laptops, are generous and of high quality. Just over half the apprentices develop their ICT skills by using the loaned laptop during trainer visits. This opportunity speeds up the apprentices' skills development and competence while they complete their e-portfolios. Accountancy apprentices also make use of the Association of Accountancy Technicians (AAT) examination body online portal as part of their training to research topics and demonstrate knowledge and understanding.
- Apprentices develop professional attitudes and behaviour and show respect for their colleagues at work. One employer described how an apprentice had developed her self-confidence and become more assertive, taking initiative rather than being directed. Trainers are beginning to use central resources and their own training to raise apprentices' awareness of the 'Prevent' agenda and the potential risks of becoming radicalised.

Adult learning programmes

are good

- TDN provides training and learning through single qualifications to employed and unemployed learners in a range of subject areas to meet employers' needs. During the week of the inspection, 94 employed learners were studying for qualifications in a range of subjects including construction, engineering and health and social care. In addition, 75 unemployed learners were studying ICT, fashion and textiles, and employability skills including English and mathematics. This work constitutes 13% of the total provision and is a declining area as TDN's leaders have chosen to focus on apprenticeships in line with government priorities.

- Subcontractors meet skills needs effectively; they collaborate closely with organisations that work with vulnerable and hard-to-engage learners and specific employers. For example, a subcontractor developed bespoke courses for the unemployed, which helped them gain employment as well as helping the jobcentre to achieve their employment targets.
- Strong partnerships between TDN, its subcontractors and voluntary groups have been extremely successful at helping learners recovering from poor mental health, drug and alcohol abuse to re-engage in learning and society. Learners overcome their difficulties with learning, attend classes regularly, make friends, gain confidence and progress rapidly through their qualifications. They take charge of their lives and reduce their dependency on other services such as the National Health Service (NHS), probation and the other support services.
- Employed learners' achievements in the main subject areas of health and social care, engineering and construction are high. They expand their skills base through studying single qualifications in these sectors, which significantly widen their choices for employment. For example, construction workers who refresh their health and safety awareness and qualifications often gain better-paid employment. They feel secure in their jobs and become multi-skilled; they are able to apply successfully for employment in diverse sectors and remain in regular employment.
- Trainers' support and care for learners are good. They create a positive learning environment, which helps learners overcome their difficulties with learning and increase their confidence. As a result they make rapid progress and develop an extensive range of skills from their often low starting points.
- Well-experienced and qualified trainers set high expectations for learners. Learners benefit from well-planned and engaging activities; trainers use effective questioning to challenge learners to apply their learning to work-related tasks and understand the relevance of key topics. For example, a learner on a level 2 customer service course was delighted by the help from an assessor in the efficient use of mobile telephones. This support enabled the learner to obtain rapid responses from customers through texting in order to improve the company's service.
- Learners effectively develop their employability skills. They behave professionally, displaying punctuality, attentiveness and courtesy to employers and their peers. Learners fully understand the importance of personal skills and how these could be used to good effect in a range of employment sectors.
- Learners' understanding of diversity is good. Trainers plan meaningful professional discussions and deepen learners' understanding of this issue well. For example, in a classroom-based lesson for adults the trainer led a thought-provoking discussion on how 'Jedi' came to be recorded as a 'religion' in the census in 2011.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,669
Principal/CEO	Stephen Meadows
Website address	www.thederbyshirenetwork.org

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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	61	0	107	0	1	0	0
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+	
	78	434	24	501	0		119	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ JB Management (Scotland) Ltd							
	■ The Vocational Learning Centre							
	■ Excell for Training							
	■ Portland Training							
	■ NSPP Vocational Training							
	■ Sutton Coldfield Training Ltd							
	■ The Priory Trust							
	■ Ultimate Performance							
	■ KTL							
	■ Learn 2 Print							
	■ CBD Training							
	■ The Apprentice Team							
	■ Shaping Skills							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Harmesh Manghra, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gerard McGrath	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pauline Hawkesford	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Hartmann	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the quality manager, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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