

Pearson PLC

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Pearson PLC following the inspection which took place between 8–10 December 2015 and publication of the inspection report on 27 January 2016. The provider's overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate.

At the time of the monitoring visit, 21 apprentices were on business administration, customer service, team leading and contact centre frameworks, with two apprentices taking a break from learning.

While first steps are normally reported on following a first monitoring visit, a progress judgement for the safeguarding theme has been made on this occasion.

Themes

What progress has been made to ensure that all apprentices are safe and that robust procedures for safeguarding apprentices are in place? Reasonable progress

At the inspection in December, health and safety procedures for Pearson employees in general were in place, but leaders and managers had not ensured that these extended to safeguarding apprentices. Leaders and managers have taken appropriate action since the inspection to ensure that apprentices are safe and that staff are aware of their responsibilities. The new policy usefully covers students, children and vulnerable adults to ensure a duty of care towards all learners in the company.

A designated management lead is now in place for apprenticeship safeguarding, mentored by the organisation's corporate lead in safeguarding. This has been communicated to key staff and apprentices through recent inductions, so that they are clear who to contact to report concerns. Training for staff, to be completed by the end of February, is underway so that they better understand their roles and responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Clear processes for staff to report concerns, related to levels of risk, have been established.

Plans for assessors to develop apprentices' knowledge and understanding of safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and British values in their four-weekly reviews, through probing questions, are in place, but it is too soon to measure the impact. Line managers and apprentices have ready access to policies and procedures via the new apprenticeship webpage: 'NEO'.

Priorities for improvement

- Gather feedback from apprentices on how safe they feel and take action to address any concerns raised.
- Consider the impact of reviews of organisational policy on apprentices routinely.
- Complete the 'at risk flowchart' so that line managers, coaches and assessors have clear guidance on the interventions they should take regarding concerns relating to safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and/or British values as part of your approach to managing risk.

Improving the quality of provision and ensuring that the required components of the apprenticeship framework are in place

The transition of apprentices from the previous subcontractor to Pearson TQ, a sister company that delivers training, has been completed. A rigorous and thorough analysis of the apprentices remaining in learning has provided leaders, managers and staff with a much more accurate picture of apprentices' starting points, their progress to date and their performance by key groups, such as ethnicity, gender and location.

A monthly steering group has been established, the Pearson Apprenticeship Advisory Group (PAAG), attended by a senior leader in the organisation, to monitor contract performance and apprentices' progress and support needs. Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the provision. While a detailed action plan is in place, with some actions already completed, it is not yet possible to gauge overall success or progress due to the significant number of individual actions.

A monthly data dashboard captures and reports performance to enable leaders, managers and staff to review progress and identify issues fully. For example, managers have identified poor performance of apprentices in the customer contact centre in Manchester. Consequently, assessor capacity has been increased in this location. Managers interview all apprentices at risk of leaving to encourage them to stay in learning. English, mathematics and information technology progress and achievement are not currently included in the monthly review.

Arrangements to meet apprenticeship requirements, with prioritisation of English and mathematics and sufficient off-the-job learning to complement their skills, are being implemented, although it is too early to measure their impact.

Priorities for improvement

- Review progress and success in functional skills in management reviews to identify potential areas of risk and actions required.
- Refine the action plan to include top-level key performance measures to provide a clearer analysis of success.
- Implement and monitor the effectiveness of arrangements for off-the-job learning and English and mathematics across the provision locations.

- Consider how to capture information on apprentices who succeed well, building on the current award system for both managers and apprentices who exceed their targets.

Improving teaching, learning and assessment and developing apprentices' English and mathematics skills

Line managers have undergone training and have a clearer understanding of their role in supporting apprentices in their framework achievement and skill development. Standardisation meetings are taking place every two months to review how well functional skills are being developed through apprentices' job roles, and best teaching and coaching practice. Managers are in the process of analysing assessors' skills, including their levels of English and mathematics, so that bespoke training can be arranged.

Assessors' four-weekly reviews of apprentices' progress now include their line managers routinely. Contract managers plan to conduct joint observations of assessors and coaches to assess standards and identify training needs.

While arrangements are in place to improve teaching, learning and assessment, it is too early to measure their impact.

Priorities for improvement

- Managers to undertake joint observations of teachers, coaches and assessors so they are clear about what needs to be done to improve their performance and improve apprentices' progress.
- Teachers, coaches and assessors to undertake timely training so they can better support apprentices to make more rapid progress.

Improving apprentices' progress and skill development

A thorough review of apprentices' skills levels has been carried out to identify skills gaps and key priorities for training. Outcomes from this analysis are used in two-weekly functional skills workshops, although these have yet to start in the Manchester location. Line managers are now routinely part of the review process, to better support specific skills development and assessment.

Managers recognise that more work needs to be done to develop apprentices' skills beyond those required of the framework. They are considering using work-based projects to stretch and challenge apprentices and develop learning through the 'NEO' webpage, although work is at an early stage.

Apprentices' and assessors' review documentation is being developed to include more meaningful targets for apprentices to complete between review periods.

Managers are not yet clear of apprentices' destinations when they complete their framework.

Priorities for improvement

- Focus on the quality of target-setting for apprentices to ensure targets are precise and meaningful for them in their work roles and involve their line managers fully.
- Ensure the destinations of apprentices completing their framework are captured and monitored, to inform future planning.
- Implement ways in which apprentices can develop their personal learning and thinking skills and so extend their current skills and knowledge.

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