

BC Arch Limited

Independent learning provider



23–26 February 2016

Inspection dates

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Arch apprentices develop excellent high-level digital, information technology (IT) and employability skills, which ensure that they are exceptionally well prepared for employment and their future careers. The vast majority become employed and a few progress to higher education and training.
- Leaders and managers are dedicated to designing and developing relevant qualifications and learning opportunities to meet the needs of employers and the IT and digital workforce. Apprentice advisers carefully select units and additional qualifications that will most benefit the apprentices and employers.
- Governance and leadership are outstanding. Ambitious objectives are achieved through detailed management processes and very effective monitoring of the quality and performance of staff and apprentices.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Staff plan training exceedingly well and apprentices learn through a wide variety of very effective approaches including study weeks, webinars, tailored online materials, masterclasses and face-to-face coaching.
- Recruitment and selection processes are extremely thorough and staff match carefully applicants' aspirations and ambitions with suitable local employers.
- Inductions reinforce the professional standards expected and prepare apprentices particularly well for their apprenticeships.
- Apprentices are enthusiastic, confident young people with very good attitudes to learning. They make a positive contribution to their employers' businesses from the start and are justifiably proud of the work they do.
- Regular assessments and feedback from knowledgeable apprentice advisers ensure that apprentices make very good progress. Everyone involved is clear about their role in ensuring that apprentices develop the skills they need to do well.
- Apprentices develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.

Full report

Information about the provider

- BC Arch, trading as Arch Apprentices, is part of the Blenheim Chalcot Group. It is a specialist independent learning provider delivering digital and IT apprenticeship frameworks to large corporate employers, local authorities, and small- and medium-sized enterprises. BC Arch has training centres in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol. Arch started in 2012 as an employer provider to address skills shortages within Agilisys and to lead on an Employer Ownership pilot to develop a digital marketing apprenticeship that would meet employers' needs. More recently, Arch has been involved in developing digital and IT trailblazer standards.
- BC Arch works with employers to recruit and select young people for apprenticeships in a variety of workplaces and job roles, where they can develop high levels of digital and IT skills. At the time of the inspection, there were three intermediate apprentices, 286 advanced apprentices, 37 higher apprentices and four on trailblazer standards. The vast majority are aged 16 to 18.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that apprentice advisers, in collaboration with employers, explore and develop more thoroughly the wider aspects of apprentices' personal development and behaviours; make sure that apprentices understand and appreciate how to apply the principles of equality and diversity to their jobs and workplaces.
- Share good practice in improving apprentices' English skills by:
 - agreeing with employers how best to ensure that apprentices develop high standards of technical and business language in all their communications
 - making full use of the corrections identified when marking assignments to improve spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leaders and managers have extremely high expectations and work very closely with their staff and employers to achieve outstanding outcomes for apprentices. Arch works very effectively in collaboration with leading digital businesses and other employers. It is recognised as a high-quality specialist organisation within the IT and digital sector.
- Leaders and managers have an incredibly strong focus on the design and development of qualifications and learning programmes that meet the rapidly changing skills needed by the digital and IT workforce. They have been instrumental in developing appropriate and relevant frameworks, and more recently trailblazer standards. Managers and staff carefully plan and constantly improve the training programmes to address employers' skill gaps and to develop young people's skills ready for a future in digital marketing, IT or creative digital media.
- Staff at all levels have excellent training and/or industry expertise that have contributed to the rapid improvements to critical aspects of the apprenticeship programmes during a time of significant growth and changes. Particularly effective improvements include the comprehensive arrangements for recruiting and matching apprentices to employers; effective training for apprentices' line managers; and a thorough induction to prepare apprentices for the workplace.
- Managers make excellent use of management information systems to scrutinise the progress of apprentices and quickly identify any barriers to learning. Regular discussions with staff and reviews with employers ensure that interventions are timely and well managed. Apprentices' achievements within the planned timescales are increasing rapidly.
- Leaders and managers set very high standards and challenging targets for themselves, employers and apprentices. The quality assurance arrangements, performance management of staff, continuing professional development for staff and a focus on continuous improvement permeate all the management processes. Managers make very good use of employers' and apprentices' surveys, reviews of apprentices' progress, and observations of teaching, learning and assessments to achieve and maintain high-quality provision.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board provides outstanding support and challenge to leaders and managers through very regular and detailed scrutiny of management information and key performance indicators relating to learner recruitment, employer engagement, outcomes and finance.
 - Board members have excellent knowledge of employers' digital and IT requirements, extensive experience of further education and skills, and very strong finance and business acumen.
 - Early identification of the need to improve the quality assurance arrangements and redesign the curriculum led to the board appointing strong and experienced leaders and managers.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Apprentices' welfare and safety are extremely important to managers and staff who adopt effective individual approaches to supporting apprentices, their parents or carers and employers when needed. Managers involve external organisations such as police and healthcare professionals when required.
 - Apprentices and employers make good use of the confidential email and telephone number for safeguarding, and subsequent records provide a clear summary of actions taken and their impact.
 - Managers have completed a suitable 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan in partnership with the London 'Prevent' coordinators. All staff, including board members, have completed training to raise awareness of the duty. Training for apprentices is now included in induction.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Training is very accessible and particularly well planned to meet individuals' and employers' needs. Apprentices benefit from a broad range of learning options including workshops, online, face-to-face and individual delivery. A wide choice of optional units and additional qualifications ensures that learning programmes meet individual job roles exceptionally well. Apprentices and employers value this highly, and find that the range of choices add relevance to learning and are motivational.

- Apprentice advisers and employers have very high expectations of apprentices. Staff use their high levels of expertise well to challenge apprentices and develop their skills. Processes for review are excellent with very effective action planning and monitoring, leading to very good progress and the development of high standards of skills.
- Assessment for learning is thorough, accurate and effective. Apprentices receive useful verbal and written feedback that informs improvements very effectively. Employers also receive extensive feedback in order to ensure that they challenge apprentices suitably to achieve industry standards. Apprentice advisers manage assessments very well, ensuring that interventions are timely and supportive allowing apprentices to remain on target.
- Additional bespoke technical training enables apprentices to produce high-quality work and demonstrate outstanding skills that consistently exceed expected standards. For example, the production of email marketing and social media articles targeted at specific audiences resulted in increased client engagement for one employer.
- Excellent additional resources provide different contexts and support for learning to extend the apprentices' knowledge and skills outside their own workplace. Apprentice advisers challenge apprentices to broaden their awareness and understanding very well. This often leads to extended opportunities in the workplace. Employers value and encourage the insights that apprentices bring to their businesses.
- Apprentice advisers and employers support apprentices very well at all stages of their apprenticeship and they make rapid progress as a result. Effective communication between the apprentice, employer and Arch ensures that everyone works to the same high expectations and standards. Apprentices are motivated and enjoy their learning.
- In the majority of instances, apprentices' development of English and mathematics skills helps them understand the importance of these in the workplace. Employers are diligent in correcting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar because they understand the impact a poor presentation has on the company image. In digital marketing, apprentices regularly use their knowledge of mathematics to interpret and analyse data about the impact of their marketing campaigns on consumer behaviours.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

- Apprentices are extremely confident and very respectful of each other, their line managers and apprentice advisers. They take considerable pride in their work and their behaviour is professional. Staff expect apprentices to dress appropriately and represent themselves and Arch in a positive manner. These high standards and expectations are major contributory factors to apprentices' achievements and progression.
- Many apprentices complete relevant additional qualifications that enhance their expertise in IT and digital marketing, are highly valued by employers and contribute to good career progression.
- Staff very carefully consider applicants' welfare and ambitions when matching them to prospective employers. During recruitment, significant valuable information is gathered about learners such as travel times to work, their preferences and specific needs. Staff use this information very well to ensure that learners have the appropriate potential to develop within the culture of a particular employer. Consequently, learners settle quickly into their studies and jobs, enjoy their learning and make an early contribution to the employers' businesses.
- An excellent and extensive induction ensures that apprentices understand how to behave and know what to expect in the workplace. A tailor-made induction for employers is similarly very well organised and ensures that line managers understand fully how to integrate apprentices effectively into their teams. Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are very well defined and therefore all stakeholders understand what is required of them for apprentices to succeed. This is a significant factor in the development and success of apprentices.
- Levels of attendance and punctuality are very high and these contribute very well to effective learning and rapid and timely progress. Staff are very effective at challenging any lateness by relating the impact of this to the apprentice and their employer.
- Apprentices often undertake additional activities to develop their personal skills such as volunteering on local community projects and charitable activities. One employer encourages apprentices to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold award scheme. These additional activities enhance apprentices' understanding of British values and help them develop as active and thoughtful citizens.

- Apprentices feel safe, understand the arrangements for safeguarding well, and know what to do if an incident should occur. They demonstrate good safe working practices. Apprentices have a detailed understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe online through their work in digital and IT technologies. However, they are less familiar with the 'Prevent' agenda in terms of what is meant by radicalisation and what to do if they have any concerns. Many do not recall having any training on this topic.
- Apprentice advisers do not fully explore equality and diversity with apprentices to ensure that they understand good working practices. Although many digital marketing apprentices can explain clearly how they can alter their approaches to attract different groups of consumers, and a few can explain how to alter marketing products to meet needs of all users, a significant minority do not have good understanding of terms such as 'discrimination' and 'harassment' and their application in the workplace.
- In a small minority of instances, apprentice advisers do not fully develop or extend apprentices' English and mathematics skills to ensure that they understand their importance and relevance to the workplace and their future careers.

Outcomes for learners

are outstanding

- Arch apprentices develop exceptional industry skills and complete high-level tasks for their employers such as redesigning local authorities' websites, planning digital marketing campaigns on social media, and maintaining IT systems and security.
- Arch prepares apprentices extremely well for their future careers. On completion, the overwhelming majority progress onto meaningful high-level jobs often gaining promotion with their current employer or moving to another employer to enhance their skills. Other positive progressions include higher education or higher apprenticeships. The majority of apprentices who leave early without completing their apprenticeship programme gain sufficient skills and knowledge to progress into employment.
- Achievement rates during the first year of delivery in 2013/14 were high, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT) and creative and digital media. However, achievement rates declined in the second year with too many apprentices leaving early due to weaknesses in the quality and management of the programmes. Leaders and managers have successfully made substantial improvements and achievement rates in the current year are improving. In the last nine months, the number of apprentice starts has increased significantly while the proportion of early leavers has declined from a quarter to less than one in 10.
- All apprentices are making very good progress and know exactly what they need to do to complete within the timescales planned.
- Achievement of the business administration qualification has been low so managers have introduced a digital business pathway based on the digital marketing framework, which better meets the needs of employers and learners. Achievement of these qualifications, which were developed and delivered as part of the Employer Ownership Pilot is high.
- Managers have eliminated variations that existed in achievements for male and female apprentices during the first year of delivery.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	310
Principal/CEO	Jason Moss
Website address	www.archapprentices.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	3	0	216	70	14	23		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	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"> None 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Joy Montgomery, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Julie Gibson	Ofsted Inspector
Asfa Sohail	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector
Ray Walker	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the director of operations, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners 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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