

Inspection dates

8–11 March 2016

Overall effectiveness**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Summary of key findings**This is a provider that requires improvement**

- Action to improve apprenticeships since the last inspection has been slow and too much of the provision is not yet good.
- Too many health and social care apprentices are making slow progress and are not completing their programmes quickly enough.
- Self-assessment processes are not sufficiently effective and are not used well enough to inform quality improvement planning.
- Data on the progression and destinations of apprentices are insufficient.
- Too many apprentices do not have a good enough understanding of equality and diversity.
- Too many assessors do not ensure that apprentices receive sufficiently challenging targets to support their progress.
- Too many assessors do not do enough to ensure that apprentices improve their skills in mathematics and English in all aspects of their programme.
- Assessors do not routinely ensure that employers are sufficiently involved in planning learning and reviewing apprentices' progress.
- The majority of assessors do not use a broad enough range of evidence to assess apprentices' competency.
- The majority of assessors do not provide apprentices with sufficiently detailed feedback to ensure that they understand how to improve their work.
- Assessors do not do enough to promote apprentices' understanding of British values, radicalisation, extremism and cyber-safety.

The provider has the following strengths

- The new management culture is open, inclusive and committed fully to improving the provision. Managers now take decisive action to tackle underperformance.
- The majority of apprentices receive good induction and individual support. Those who need additional help to complete their work make good progress.
- Achievement rates are improving and pass rates in functional skills are now good.
- Assessors provide apprentices with increasingly effective information, advice and guidance to help with their next steps in learning and employment.
- Managers have established effective systems that are used to record and monitor apprentices' progress.
- Managers have successfully established strong links with large national businesses because they understand their training needs.

Full report

Information about the provider

- PDM Training and Consultancy Ltd (PDM) is a large, national independent learning provider that delivers work-based teaching, learning and assessment services to many employers. PDM was founded in 2000; following a period of financial difficulty, the business changed ownership in April 2015. At that point PDM had a large number of apprentices who had not completed their training in the expected timescale. Many of these learners are continuing their training under the new company arrangements.
- Significant changes to the provider have taken place since the previous inspection. The adult classroom activity has been discontinued. PDM provides training for learners through apprenticeships. The majority of current learners are in business support and financial services sectors, with a reducing number on health and social care apprenticeships. Almost all of the learners are aged over 19 years. The senior management team is almost entirely new to post within the last year.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, so that apprentices make consistently good or better progress, by:
 - ensuring that all assessors have the highest expectations of what apprentices can achieve, and that they demonstrate this by promoting good skills in English and mathematics, providing detailed feedback on how apprentices can improve their work and by more detailed promotion of British values, equality of opportunity and diversity
 - collecting a more thorough and broad range of evidence to demonstrate progress and identify where further progress could be made
 - setting more challenging targets for apprentices
 - involving employers in more frequent meetings to plan learning and review apprentices' progress.
- Improve self-assessment and improvement planning so that they involve staff at all levels, and promote a more systematic approach to quality improvements.
- Improve the collection of data on what happens to apprentices at the end of their programme to establish their progression routes and destinations.
- Address the issues of continuing slow progress surrounding apprentices in health and social care whose funding has ceased, by developing more rigorous individual targets and action plans.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Action to improve the provision following the last inspection has been too slow due to the financial difficulties, which led to the acquisition of the company by the current Chief Executive in July 2015. Financial uncertainty led to staff losses, which resulted in a lack of continuity for apprentices due to assessor changes. In the worst cases, apprentices had no contact with their assessors for weeks or months, causing slow progress and too many apprentices to leave their programmes early.
- The new management team has clearly set out its ambitious performance targets that are well understood and fully supported by staff. Action to address the weaknesses identified at the last inspection has gathered momentum in recent months, although the impact of improvements is not yet evident consistently well throughout the provision.
- The new management culture is open, inclusive and committed fully to improving the provision rapidly. Managers empower staff to make decisions and take responsibility for their work. Staffing is now more stable and assessors' workloads are managed actively to try to ensure that they have sufficient time to support apprentices effectively.
- English and mathematics provision, which was a significant weakness at the last inspection, has improved. Specialist staff have developed a good range of high-quality resources to support assessors and apprentices and to facilitate independent learning. Specialist functional skills staff are in place to develop the skills of assessors and teach apprentices with high support needs. As a result, pass rates for functional skills assessments have risen and are now above the national rates.
- Managers have established a new system to record and track apprentices' progress. They inherited information on apprentices and their progress that was mainly inaccurate and incomplete. Managers introduced a new electronic portfolio system for apprentices starting their programmes from July 2015 onwards, which provides them, and assessors, with an effective tool for managing learning and monitoring progress accurately.
- Leaders and managers have established effective systems for communication to ensure that staff at all levels are clear about their responsibilities and priorities. PDM holds frequent regional staff meetings and candid discussions about the success of its improvement strategies. Managers recently established a quality committee to oversee the operational challenges, concerns and suggestions for further improvement. Where needed, staff take decisive action to identify and resolve problems.
- Self-assessment processes require improvement. The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan, written in July 2015, were produced without consultation with staff, employers or apprentices. However, during the inspection, managers produced an accurate, updated self-assessment report. The quality improvement plan is not updated or used as a working document to plan and review improvement action.
- Leaders and managers do not do enough to gather and analyse data on the progression and destinations of apprentices. However, they do capture information on apprentices who have progressed to higher level programmes with PDM. Managers do not have data on other aspects of progression, such as promotion, taking on increased responsibility at work, pay increases or entry to higher education.
- PDM has particularly productive links with a range of large national employers and trade unions. Successful collaboration, particularly when planning provision, is carefully tailored to meet business needs and enhance apprentices' work performance and career prospects. The range of provision offered also meets national priorities, including for health and social care and financial services. However, links with some smaller employers are less effective and employers are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing the progress made by individual apprentices.
- Managers set staff clear targets, hold them accountable for their work and take decisive action to deal with underperformance. Managers keep staff performance under constant review by monitoring the achievement of targets frequently and summarising achievements at twice-yearly staff appraisals. A process for observations of teaching, learning and assessment is in place and observers provide staff with useful feedback to improve their performance. However, the staff team has not been sufficiently stable to benefit fully from the observation system.
- Staff benefit from well-considered training to update their knowledge and develop their expertise further. For example, managers provide vocational topics such as dementia awareness and deprivation of liberty safeguards training for health and social care assessors and training on functional skills for all staff.
- Although managers and staff promote a culture of mutual respect and tolerance, the specific promotion of fundamental British values is underdeveloped.

■ The governance of the provider

- The Chief Executive provides good challenge and support to staff and has created a strong culture of continuous improvement.
- Managers monitor staff targets effectively and review carefully those learners at risk of not completing their qualifications.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Managers ensure that all staff who have contact with apprentices undergo appropriate checks during recruitment.
- Managers deal promptly and effectively with any concerns that arise.
- All staff have received safeguarding and Prevent duty training and are well aware of their responsibilities.
- Most apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe but too many are not sufficiently aware of the specific dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The majority of current apprentices, especially those in the financial services sector, are making at least expected progress. Too many apprentices in health and social care make slow progress. However, effective plans are in place to re-engage these apprentices with good support to ensure that they achieve.
- The integration of English and mathematics is not yet sufficiently developed within the delivery of training and assessment. Assessors do not routinely identify spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' work or provide advice on how to make improvements. This limits the development of apprentices' skills.
- Feedback to apprentices, both oral and written, does not provide sufficient detail to inform them of what they need to do to make further improvements. For example, health and social care apprentices receive feedback that confirms their achievement of units but has no guidance on how to improve.
- Assessors do not do enough to ensure that employers are sufficiently engaged in planning and reviewing learning. Employers do not routinely participate in meetings to discuss apprentices' progress and to set new targets for their achievement. For example, a few employers in the health and social care sector are not fully aware of the full apprenticeship programme, believing that their employees are following a national vocational qualification (NVQ) programme. However, for the large number of apprentices in the financial sector, good arrangements have been developed.
- Target-setting is underdeveloped and does not consistently provide sufficient momentum for apprentices to make good progress. The most-able apprentices often find their work too easy and are not provided with additional activities to extend their learning. For example, some business administration apprentices complete their work books very quickly and are left until the next assessor visit before being provided with further tasks. As a result, the lack of further work limits their progress.
- The majority of assessors do not use a broad enough range of sources to gather evidence of apprentices' competence and achievement. They rely too heavily on gathering evidence through work books. As a result, some apprentices do not develop new skills or improve existing skills sufficiently.
- New arrangements ensure that the majority of apprentices receive effective information, advice and guidance. These help to inform them of the requirements of their programme and potential progression opportunities. Staff carry out initial assessment effectively, informing assessors of the apprentices' starting points. Assessors use this information well to identify apprentices' support and skill development needs.
- Assessors provide good individual support for apprentices, which is flexible and responsive to their needs. Most apprentices receive regular visits and make at least the progress expected of them. Apprentices comment that they are able to email or phone their assessor outside traditional delivery hours and responses are quick and supportive. However, in health and social care, time gaps between support visits have been too long and this has resulted in slow progress for too many apprentices.
- PDM has a good induction process for new starters which outlines expectations and commitment from the apprentices clearly. Discussions surrounding current job roles are extensive and staff help apprentices to select the right units of qualification to support long-term employment and progression most effectively. For example, apprentices are able to select financial units tailored to potential future job roles.
- Assessors do not do enough to ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of equality and diversity. They do not use progress reviews consistently well to promote apprentices' understanding of differences such as those found in faith, culture and ethnicity. However, apprentices demonstrate respect for those around them.

- Assessors prioritise safeguarding and ensure that apprentices remain safe and adopt safe working practices. However, apprentices do not have a thorough enough understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism, as these are not sufficiently included within the review process.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

- Too many apprentices make slow progress towards the completion of their qualifications and, as a result, not all apprentices are able to make their expected career progression. The majority of apprentices on health and social care programmes take part in training provided by their employers and achieve relevant additional qualifications at work, organised by their employer.
- The majority of apprentices develop good skills at work, become more confident and a minority take on additional responsibilities at work. For example, business administration apprentices use their skills well to complete complex activities using bespoke customer relationship management software. Health and social care apprentices have learned new skills, including dementia care and how to communicate with clients with dementia. However, a small minority of health and social care apprentices have become disillusioned and disengaged due to lack of contact by assessors.
- The majority of apprentices receive good careers advice and guidance, which help them make informed choices about their future career goals. For example, health and social care apprentices are aware of progression opportunities through to nursing degrees, and those wanting to follow careers in banking are guided appropriately to follow apprenticeships in financial services. However, a few apprentices are not sufficiently well informed at the start of their programme about the content of their apprenticeship or the required commitment to independent study.
- Apprentices receive effective support from specialist functional skills staff to improve their skills in English and mathematics. Apprentices recognise the value of improving their English and mathematical skills. However, assessors do not support apprentices sufficiently well to enable them to improve their English and mathematical skills to help them make progress in their qualifications, at work and in their daily lives.
- Too many apprentices do not have a good enough understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity, how to stay safe when using the internet, or the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns to their managers at work. Apprentices are respectful and develop an appropriate understanding of their rights and responsibilities as an employee through the completion of employment rights and responsibilities work books.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Outcomes for learners have improved significantly since the last inspection but are not yet good. Most apprentices complete their courses successfully, although the majority take longer than expected to complete the full framework. The provider has increased apprentices' achievement rates successfully on many of its courses for the last three years. Leaders and managers have responded effectively to make improvements so that even more learners are successful. Success rates for classroom-based learners on short-qualification courses, such as security and taxi services, have remained high.
- Health and social care apprenticeship programmes have many examples of good skills development and a significant number of these apprentices now receive carefully planned support because they have been particularly slow to complete their qualifications. Employers, especially those in the health and social care sector, value the work of their apprentices because they can recognise improvements in the quality of their vocational skills.
- Apprentices' work is of a good standard. Business and administration apprentices provide effective secretarial support; for example, they use electronic storage and retrieval of data to ensure that businesses operate efficiently. Health and social care apprentices gain a thorough understanding of the importance of guidance and legislation when following individual care plans.
- A large minority of apprentices are known to make progress into further or higher levels of study, take on increased responsibility and gain promotion within their employment. Almost all of the health and social care apprentices study for additional qualifications with their employers, such as first aid and moving and handling. However, processes for collecting this information are not yet fully effective. Apprentices who receive additional learning support make progress at the same rate as their peers.
- Too many apprentices do not make sufficient progress in developing their skills in mathematics and English. Only a small proportion of apprentices extend their learning beyond the minimum required for their qualification. Data show no significant gaps in the achievement of different groups of apprentices over time.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,875
CEO	Robert McNamara
Website address	www.pdmtc.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	47	0	135	0	0	0	0
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	62	1,253	13	1,065	0			191
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 sub-contractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Dan Grant, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Pat Hornsby	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Aslett	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Scanlan	Ofsted Inspector
Jonny Wright	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqueline Shopland-Reed	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the quality manager as nominee. 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 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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