

Inspection dates

3–6 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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Apprenticeships	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their framework is high.
- The large majority of apprentices secure or maintain permanent employment at the end of their programme.
- Tutors and assessors make good use of their knowledge and experience to enhance the progress of learners.
- During visits, assessors check the learning of apprentices well to ensure that they understand all aspects of their programmes and this supports the good overall outcomes for these learners.
- Apprentices develop a good understanding of diversity themes and this prepares them well for working life.
- Apprentices and learners undertaking traineeship programmes develop their vocational and personal skills well and this enables them to make a valuable contribution to their workplaces.
- Leaders and managers have improved provision rapidly and have invested significantly in resources despite sector-wide financial constraints.
- Managers support assessors to improve and develop their performance through good professional development and effective performance management. This has led to significant improvements for apprentices.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Tutors and assessors do not make use of the information they have about learners' starting points in English and mathematics early enough to plan learning to meet their individual needs.
- The proportion of apprentices who complete their framework within expected timescales, although in line with other providers nationally, is not yet high enough.
- A minority of the small number of learners undertaking the newly introduced traineeship programmes are not sufficiently close to being job-ready to benefit fully from the programme.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Release Potential Limited is a private training provider founded in 2008 and located in the Tyne Valley. The company provides education and training across the north-east region. Unemployment in the region is higher than the national rate. The largest employment sectors are health and social care, wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing.
- Release Potential Limited provides apprenticeship training in a range of subject areas, especially health and social care, hospitality and catering, administration, and business management. It also provides a range of short qualifications, particularly in health and social care, and a range of programmes to help adults secure employment. It has recently introduced a traineeship programme aimed at helping young people secure an apprenticeship.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Train and support tutors and assessors to make earlier and more effective use of the information that is available about the existing English and mathematics skills of learners and apprentices. Ensure that all staff involved in teaching, learning and assessment develop individual learning programmes in these subjects for all learners undertaking traineeship programmes, and apprentices. Monitor the impact of this and support staff to improve their practice.
- Adjust the focus of apprenticeship delivery so that apprentices begin to develop at an early stage the specific English and mathematics skills they need to be successful in their chosen career, and so that this does not become a barrier to their completing their framework on time.
- Help apprentices to access information on their own learning, such as assessment feedback, targets and completed work so that they are able to understand their own development and can take more responsibility for their own learning and make better progress as a result.
- Work closely with all stakeholders involved in traineeship programmes to ensure that only those learners who are able to benefit from these programmes are enrolled on them.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- In the relatively short time since the last inspection, senior leaders have taken effective action to meet the priorities for improvement and continuously develop provision. Against a background of sector-wide financial constraints, they have invested significantly in high-quality resources for teaching and learning.
- The Chief Executive Officer and her senior team relentlessly and successfully strive to develop and maintain a supportive, inclusive working and learning environment. This is particularly notable in a period of major turbulence for the company following a malicious whistleblowing incident.
- Collaboration with a range of partners, identified as particularly strong at the last inspection, remains so. Assessors and managers work alongside employers to develop new programmes and units of learning that meet the changing needs of businesses. Assessors use partners well to enhance the learning programmes of apprentices and, in particular, to provide a choice of work placements for learners undertaking traineeship programmes and those on the 'It's for me' employability programme.
- In response to feedback from employers and apprentices, the timing and structure of off-the-job training and assessment are frequently reviewed and changed. To meet workplace demands, all off-the-job training takes place on employers' premises. Assessments take place throughout a 24-hour period; learning activities take place from early morning to late evening. This is particularly useful for the large number of care apprentices.
- Managers monitor closely the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through a well-considered programme of observations, monthly meetings, outcomes monitoring and learner tracking. The performance of staff is well managed and, where staff struggle to meet the required standards, managers provide prompt and well-focused support. Staff speak positively about the process.
- Managers provide wide-ranging professional development opportunities, including subject-specific short courses, funding for access to higher education programmes, and progression to higher levels of learning. There are many examples of staff progressing from assessor qualifications to leadership programmes at Level 4 and beyond.
- Managers have given increased attention to equality and diversity, a priority for improvement at the last inspection, and these topics are generally promoted well in teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices. Although there remains further work to be done to embed diversity themes in other types of learning programme, an equality and diversity working group is developing further training and support for tutors and assessors to help them to prepare learners for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and managers place a high priority on developing the English and mathematics skills of apprentices and learners undertaking traineeship programmes. They have made changes to the timing and delivery of the functional skills elements of apprenticeship frameworks and as a result, attendance and outcomes are improving.
- Recognising that the management of the new traineeship programme required changes to ensure good outcomes for all learners, the Chief Executive Officer has recently taken responsibility for direct management of the programme. However, this recent change has yet to have demonstrable impact.
- The draft self-assessment report is broadly accurate, reflecting most, but not all, of the findings of the inspection team. However, the evidence to justify judgements is not always sufficient.
- Improvement and development plans supporting the self-assessment do not clearly identify and record the expected and actual impact of action. It is therefore difficult for managers and senior leaders to accurately monitor the effectiveness of their actions. However, the more focused individual meetings with departmental managers are increasingly capturing progress and impact appropriately. A few recently introduced initiatives, such as the quarterly reporting of learners' progress to the senior team by departmental heads, are yet to have measurable impact.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The Chief Executive Officer makes use of well-considered arrangements to provide external challenge to senior leaders so that the pace of improvement is maintained.
 - Two independent external consultants scrutinise finance and performance and provide structured feedback that challenges and supports the senior team well.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Detailed safeguarding arrangements are in place and are integrated well into the work and lives of learners and staff.

- Records of incidents are detailed and demonstrate prompt and appropriate responses to concerns raised.
- The provider carries out appropriate checks on staff and workplaces and keeps up-to-date records.
- All staff have received training in radicalisation and extremism and assessors are well informed of the duties specified in the recent legislation about terrorism. They are already beginning to use this knowledge in learning sessions to reinforce learners' understanding of the risks.
- Senior leaders are fully committed to the safety and well-being of staff. For example, they provide well-maintained company cars and high-quality and regularly tested equipment and resources, and have implemented excellent lone-working procedures.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Assessors and tutors have good vocational skills and use these effectively to assess and develop the skills of learners and apprentices. Many assessors and tutors bring relevant industrial experience to their roles to further enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a consequence, the large majority of apprentices enjoy their learning and successfully complete their apprenticeships. Many take on additional job responsibilities and a few gain promotion. Most apprentices remain with their employer at the end of their programme.
- Assessors plan and deliver effective induction programmes for apprentices. They ensure employers and apprentices are well prepared for the demands of the programme. Assessors focus well on the further learning the apprentices will need to undertake to help them progress in their jobs.
- Assessors coach and support apprentices well during visits, and use effective questioning to develop their understanding. For example, in one coaching session, the assessor used her experience of working with adults with learning disabilities very effectively to develop the learner's knowledge of quality standards. In a small minority of cases, assessors and tutors do not set tasks that are challenging enough, especially for more-able apprentices or those with significant prior experience of work.
- During visits, assessors check thoroughly the progress of apprentices. They manage assessment effectively so that most apprentices remain on schedule with their vocational qualifications. Assessors make good use of recorded discussions to question learners extensively about their experience and understanding. However, not all employers have sufficient involvement in the progress review process and this limits the extent to which on- and off-the-job training are coordinated.
- Learners work well independently and produce detailed and well-written assignments, demonstrating a professional approach to their work. Assessors carefully review this work during visits. Most assessors provide good and encouraging verbal feedback but for a minority of apprentices, written feedback is not detailed enough to help learners make improvements. Where apprentices use paper-based portfolios, they are unable to access them to review marked work and feedback as assessors retain them between visits. The recent introduction of an electronic portfolio as a means of tracking progress and providing apprentices with access to their work is not yet effective as apprentices are not all confident in how to use it.
- Tutors ensure that learners following traineeship and employability programmes receive appropriate guidance and develop the skills they need to be more confident when applying for jobs. However, learners are not always aware of the specific skills required for their chosen career. Adult employability learners particularly value having a job interview with a local employer that is currently recruiting staff. Apprentices receive effective information and advice about career progression. For example, an apprentice interested in progressing to work in end-of-life care was given good advice by her assessor on appropriate optional units to choose.
- Learners undertaking traineeship programmes benefit from interesting sessions in the classroom and the vast majority enjoy this experience. As a result, they become more willing to participate in further education opportunities. Employability courses are interesting, engaging and purposeful.
- Assessors develop apprentices' understanding of diversity topics well during reviews and coaching sessions. For example, in one session an assessor helped a learner to understand the wide range of situations in which discrimination might occur in the workplace. In another, an assessor used current news issues and research findings to raise an apprentice's awareness of modern slavery. As a result of this work, apprentices are well equipped to deal with a range of people from different backgrounds and with different needs. However, learners undertaking traineeship programmes receive insufficient guidance on these important topics.

- Apprentices make good use of readily available revision books and paper-based activities to develop their skills in English and mathematics and to prepare for tests. The large majority successfully complete functional skills qualifications. However, in a small minority of cases, assessors do not consider apprentices' starting points sufficiently when planning learning and do not always effectively plan for extra support at the start of their programme. As a consequence, a few apprentices struggle with English or mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Apprentices and learners undertaking traineeship programmes develop confidence in their ability to be successful learners and to play an important role in their employers' business. They take pride in the quality of their work and the contributions they make to their workplace. For example, one apprentice described how her growing knowledge of her workplace had enabled her to improve her telephone skills and resolve a range of customer problems without needing to refer to colleagues.
- Learners undertaking traineeship programmes benefit from work placements that are carefully chosen to match their aspirations. In most cases, these work placements help trainees develop a range of skills that increase the chances of them securing an apprenticeship. However, tutors do not give sufficient consideration to the specific skills trainees need to develop when securing placements and planning activities for them.
- Most apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills well. They receive effective support for improving their writing from assessors, who correctly identify errors in their work and help them to improve. However, assessors do not always identify the vocationally specific skills apprentices need to develop in English and mathematics until late in their programme. In these cases the development of English and mathematics specific to the apprentice's vocational context is not well integrated into the rest of their programme. Consequently, in a small minority of cases, apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Learners undertaking traineeship programmes develop their wider personal and social skills well and become more independent learners. They develop a range of employability skills such as curriculum vitae writing, searching for jobs and making effective use of social media. Although trainees improve their English and mathematics skills, tutors do not establish clear targets in these subjects and consequently are unable to measure the progress trainees make or ensure that they are challenged to reach their full potential.
- Apprentices receive clear information, advice and guidance from their tutors that help them choose appropriate optional elements of their programmes and plan their next steps in employment and learning. Although the small number of learners undertaking traineeship programmes have discussions with tutors about the types of career they would like to pursue, the advice and guidance they receive are insufficient to help them make informed choices about their future progression.
- Apprentices and learners undertaking traineeship programmes receive useful guidance about how to keep themselves safe in learning centres, in the workplace and in their personal lives. This includes information on online safety and how to deal with bullying. They also receive guidance on the signs of neglect, abuse and radicalisation; however, trainees are unclear as to whom they should report any concerns. Apprentices and trainees feel safe and are safe.
- The large majority of apprentices are focused on achieving their framework, complete work on time and keep appointments with their assessors. Learners undertaking traineeship programmes participate well in learning activities, but the attendance of a minority of trainees is low and this limits their progress in developing the skills they need for employment.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Apprentices undertake learning programmes that are appropriate to their existing skills and experience. The large majority of current apprentices are making progress that at least matches expectations, given their starting points.
- Since 2013/14, there has been a substantial improvement in the proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their framework. The large majority successfully complete their full framework and this proportion is well above that of similar providers nationally. The majority of apprentices complete within expected timescales. Outcomes for health and social care and business administration apprentices, who make up the very large majority of apprentices, are particularly strong.

- Apprentices produce work that is of a good standard. They develop a good range of vocational skills that help them become an asset to their employer. They produce well-written and detailed documentation that demonstrates a good grasp of subject knowledge.
- Apprentices are beginning to benefit from improved support to pass their functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics, and they make effective use of good-quality learning materials. As a result, the large majority successfully gain these qualifications. Tutors encourage apprentices to study these subjects at a level beyond that required by their framework and a few take up this opportunity.
- The large majority of apprentices secure permanent employment with their existing employer at the end of their apprenticeship and a few gain promotion as a direct result of their apprenticeship. However, the proportion who progress to a higher level of learning is low. More adult learners who complete employability programmes secure employment compared with those who study elsewhere.
- Too many individuals who embark on traineeship programmes are not sufficiently close to being ready for work when they commence their programme. As a result, the short traineeship programme is insufficient to prepare them for their next step and, although the programme has only recently been introduced and the number of trainees is low, too few have so far successfully made the transition to employment.
- There are no significant variations in the performance of different groups of learners.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,530
Principal/CEO	Gaye Hutchinson
Website address	www.release-potential.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)	1	17	0	36	0	0	0	0
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	10	283	6	337	0	45		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	9		53		62			
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:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Russell Henry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Elaine Clinton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Catharine Jackson	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Sharpe	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Stella Owen	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the head of curriculum and quality, 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 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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