

Positive Outcomes Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

21–24 June 2016

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Managers take great care to ensure that they only work with employers that offer good learning and progression opportunities for apprentices. As a result, the large majority of apprentices take on additional responsibility or receive promotion at the end of their programme.
- Managers ensure that the qualifications offered match local and national employment needs. As a result, apprentices develop vocational skills that equip them well for their future careers and consequently, their employers retain almost all of them.
- Many apprentices who are required to complete English and mathematics qualifications take them at a higher level than required by their framework and most are successful.
- The large majority of apprentices successfully complete their frameworks and most complete on time; current apprentices are making good progress.
- Training advisers provide one-to-one learning sessions that quickly develop apprentices' English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills; apprentices apply these skills well in their job roles.
- Training advisers work well with apprentices to develop short-term targets that advance their progress very effectively.
- The large majority of training advisers develop apprentices' understanding of a broad range of themes well, including health and safety, equality and diversity, and safeguarding. This helps apprentices to become more effective employees.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Managers and senior leaders do not make good use of the available data to form a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of provision that they use to make improvements.
- Too few apprentices progress to higher level learning on completion of their programmes.
- Training advisers do not do enough to develop further the occupational English and mathematics skills of apprentices who have already gained the requisite qualifications.
- Feedback to a minority of apprentices following assessments does not provide them with sufficient information to help them improve the standard of their work.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Positive Outcomes Limited is a private training company, established in 1997 and based in South Normanton, Derbyshire. It has offices in Nottingham, Birmingham, Bristol, London and Manchester. The provider offers apprenticeship training in ICT, warehousing, retail, estate agency, business administration, customer service, management, sales and hospitality. It also provides a very small amount of other training for adults.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the extent to which senior managers analyse data about the progress of apprentices so that they can:
 - use this information effectively to develop carefully targeted interventions to raise standards
 - set clear milestones against which they can measure progress
 - monitor the effectiveness of their actions and quickly adjust plans when they are not working.
- Develop the skills of training advisers so that, following assessment activities, they all give clear feedback to apprentices. This feedback must enable apprentices to recognise the aspects of their work that they can improve and to understand the actions that they need to take to produce subsequent work to a higher standard.
- Ensure that training advisers observe and discuss at progress reviews the work activities of apprentices that involve the application of English and mathematical skills. They should use the information this provides to plan further learning that helps all apprentices, including those who already hold the necessary qualifications in these subjects, to further develop their skills in the context of their work.
- Introduce impartial and effective advice and guidance at the end of apprentices' programmes to enable apprentices to understand fully the range of options available to them, so that a greater proportion progress to higher level learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have taken appropriate actions to maintain the strengths identified. For example, new training advisers undergo an extensive and supportive staff development programme; a revised and effective induction process for apprentices helps to ensure they fully understand expectations; and training advisers continue to provide good support, particularly for young apprentices.
- Managers carry out frequent quality monitoring activities to check that teaching is good, that training advisers assess and support apprentices well, and that apprentices enjoy their learning. Through these quality assurance activities, managers identify areas of good or weaker practice, provide professional development that helps staff share and promote good practice, and improve weaker aspects of provision. As a result, most apprentices are making at least the expected progress.
- Staff work well both with long-established and newly recruited employers to place apprentices in appropriate job roles within companies that share Positive Outcomes' ethos that an apprenticeship should be the first step on a successful career path in the most appropriate occupational area. Staff take considerable care when interviewing potential apprentices to match them to the employer in the best position to support them. This includes checking that the apprenticeship will lead to a permanent position and that employers will help their apprentices to achieve their qualifications.
- Managers make good use of information about national skills priorities, supplemented by their links with the two local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) to plan apprenticeship programmes and identify suitable employers. As a result, almost all apprentices gain permanent employment, often at the start of their programme.
- Senior leaders and managers do not make good use of the extensive range of data available regarding apprentices' progress. They do not routinely receive useful summary reports and are unable to form a clear view of how well particular groups of apprentices are progressing, where they need to concentrate improvement activities, or what specific impact improvement actions have.
- Although many quality improvement activities lead to improvement, they do not link sufficiently clearly to self-assessment. Senior leaders' evaluation of their programmes places an over-reliance on progress and improvement since the previous inspection, rather than the current quality of provision. Detailed quality improvement plans are useful, but they do not include helpful progress milestones, and in a few cases, it is not clear how managers will measure the success of an action.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Board members participate in monthly detailed scrutiny meetings where they analyse how well the company is doing against its key performance indicators. They use headline data on achievement rates, information about learners causing concern, and feedback from employers and learners to hold senior managers to account. However, the lack of detailed analysis of data limits the effectiveness of their support.
 - Board members communicate their aspirations clearly and staff across the company understand well how their personal performance supports the company's overall achievement of its targets.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Safeguarding arrangements are thorough, well established and effectively help apprentices keep themselves safe. Safeguarding discussions feature in most apprenticeship progress reviews. A senior safeguarding officer makes good use of links with outside agencies to provide support for apprentices whose needs Positive Outcomes staff cannot meet. Apprentices feel safe and most understand well the importance of health and safety in the workplace and the need to protect themselves when using online or social media sites.
 - Managers have developed good links with regional 'Prevent' duty coordinators to support the introduction of staff training in line with their duty to protect apprentices from the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Those training advisers who have been through the training introduce these important topics well in discussions with apprentices and as a result, their apprentices have a good understanding of the subject. Apprentices can clearly explain the relevance to their job roles of equality legislation and valuing diversity. A minority of apprentices struggle to explain clearly their understanding of fundamental British values.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Training advisers set high expectations for apprentices and as a result, the large majority progress well. Apprentices participate enthusiastically in their learning and produce high-quality work. Training advisers use their valuable commercial, subject and training experience and skills to support apprentices very well.
- Apprentices receive very effective teaching and coaching through monthly meetings in their workplaces. During these well-planned and highly relevant learning sessions, training advisers extend apprentices' technical knowledge, enabling them to make good contributions to their employers' businesses. For example, management apprentices learn how to make use of appropriate analysis tools to carry out an assessment of the wider business context.
- Apprentices negotiate clear, short-term action plans at their monthly progress review meetings with their training advisers; they use these well to schedule their learning. Apprentices undertake a variety of learning activities in their own time, including research projects on the internet, the completion of work books, writing assignments and creating new resources, such as customer surveys, for use by their employers. They complete these on time and maintain a good rate of progress.
- Training advisers help apprentices to present a diverse range of evidence about their work performance through their effective and thorough use of a wide range of assessment methods that include workplace observations and witness testimony from their managers. This helps most apprentices to learn at a rapid pace throughout their programme.
- Training advisers work very effectively with the majority of employers, small and large, to involve them in supporting their apprentices. They discuss apprentices' work roles carefully with managers to ensure that they select appropriate optional units for each apprentice. Employers provide apprentices with good opportunities to develop their skills in the workplace and often provide additional responsibilities that help apprentices to develop the full range of skills required by their qualifications.
- Staff accurately gauge the extent of apprentices' existing English and mathematical skills when they first join their programme. Training advisers provide high-quality one-to-one coaching and support during monthly meetings. This is very effective in helping apprentices to develop their skills in preparation for functional skills tests. Newly introduced group lessons and specialist individual support are providing effective learning opportunities for those apprentices who need extra help. Apprentices apply their English and mathematical skills well to a variety of workplace tasks and activities. Examples include the use of advanced spreadsheet formulas and charts to track tyre maintenance costs on hire vehicles, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative customer feedback, and the review of invoice statistics about environmental product ranges.
- Apprentices and training advisers do not consider sufficiently the range of further English and mathematical techniques that apprentices encounter at work where these do not form part of functional skills qualifications. Training advisers do not do enough to help apprentices recognise and develop these occupationally specific English and mathematical skills. Consequently, apprentices, particularly those who have already gained the required English and mathematics qualifications, do not develop their skills in the context of their work roles and do not recognise the importance of these skills in their future development.
- A minority of training advisers' feedback to apprentices lacks the detail required to help them improve their work, thereby missing an important opportunity to increase further the rate of apprentices' progress. The use of an online portfolio system enables apprentices to have instant access to assessment decisions and this helps them understand the extent of their overall progress. Apprentices make good use of the facility to request additional work between their monthly sessions. Operational managers use the system well to monitor apprentices' progress and to manage the performance of individual training advisers.
- Training advisers do not make good use of available learning resources to broaden apprentices' vocational knowledge and, in a minority of subjects, there are not enough resources for training advisers to use. For example, in a session about documents, the absence of samples of business letters and agendas made the learning less effective. In a few cases, learning resources do not reflect the current qualification requirements.
- Apprentices are not sufficiently involved in long-term planning of their vocational learning. Although training advisers develop apprentices' knowledge to meet framework requirements, they do not sufficiently address apprentices' broader vocational development needs in the context of their employment and personal aspirations.
- For a small number of businesses that employ several apprentices, the links between on- and off-the-job training are not well developed and this slows apprentices' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Apprentices are enthusiastic and the majority take pride in their work. Most apprentices develop good occupational skills and grow in confidence as a result. They enjoy learning and make good use of their newly acquired knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to their employers' businesses, producing work of a high standard and showing great diligence and attention to detail. They develop good interpersonal and teamwork skills.
- At the start of their programmes, apprentices receive good information, advice and guidance from staff that help to ensure that they join a programme that matches their needs and aspirations. Staff take great care to ensure that optional units match the aspirations of apprentices and the specific requirements of their jobs.
- Training advisers use focused questions during monthly progress reviews to assess and develop apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity, health and safety and safeguarding themes and the impact these have on their working life. Most apprentices prepare well for these questions and give comprehensive and well-considered answers that demonstrate a clear understanding.
- Apprentices feel safe and follow safe working practices in their respective workplaces. They can explain how their employers keep them safe while they are at work through, for example, the use of coded entry keypads and buzzers in reception areas, CCTV monitoring in car parks, blocking of inappropriate internet sites and the use of visitor badges and identity cards.
- A minority of training advisers do not promote British values sufficiently or help apprentices understand the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism. However, current apprentices undergo a thorough induction process that incorporates these themes in detail. Recently recruited apprentices have a good understanding of these important themes and a few incorporate this learning within their workplace. For example, one apprentice has recently contributed information on radicalisation and extremism to his employer's staff induction programme.
- Information, advice and guidance at the end of programmes do not help apprentices to explore the full range of options available to them and as a result, few apprentices progress to higher level learning.
- Warehousing apprentices, who make up around one in 20 apprentices, are safe, but during training sessions their training advisers place insufficient emphasis on the importance of the correct wearing of personal protective equipment, particularly safety boots, when undertaking manual handling procedures.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Almost all apprentices undertake programmes that are challenging and build on their prior learning; most make good progress from their starting points. The large majority of current apprentices who are due to finish their programme in the current year are on, or ahead of, schedule.
- Apprentices are enthusiastic about their learning and can describe clearly the skills they have learned and the extent to which these have helped them to become more productive in the workplace. They produce written and practical work that meets or exceeds the standard expected in their particular sector.
- Almost all apprentices follow programmes that equip them well for their chosen career, and consequently they secure permanent employment at the end of their apprenticeship. Most apprentices are given increased responsibility or promotion during or at the end of their programme. However, only a few progress to higher level learning once they have completed their apprenticeship.
- The proportion of apprentices who completed their qualifications on time fell in 2013/14 and was well below the rate for providers nationally. However, managers have made effective progress in reversing this trend. Because of their efforts, timely success rates improved in 2014/15 but nonetheless remained below the national rate. Managers have continued to make improvements, and for the current year's apprentices, timely success is in line with the national rate. The overall proportion of apprentices who complete their framework is high.
- Apprentices are encouraged to undertake English and mathematics qualifications at a level higher than their apprenticeship framework requires. A significant minority take up this opportunity and most of them are successful. A minority of apprentices who commence higher level qualifications find them too challenging and staff support them well to take qualifications at the lower level required for them to complete their apprenticeship. Almost all are successful.

There are few apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds, but in 2014/15 these apprentices did markedly less well than their peers. Similarly, apprentices with dyslexia, of whom there are very few, are far less likely than other apprentices to achieve their qualifications on time. Although actions have been successful at an operational level to improve outcomes for these learners, senior managers did not identify the problems or their causes and consequently did not focus on actions to close these achievement gaps. There are no significant variations in outcomes for other groups of apprentices.

- The small number of apprentices following programmes in warehousing and distribution make slow progress and although most eventually complete their qualifications, the proportion who do so within the planned timescale is low and, for advanced apprentices, very low.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,699
Principal/CEO	Chris Longmate
Website address	www.positiveoutcomes.org.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+
	0	0	0	26	0	17	0	5
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	1,258	724	170	1,031	2	30		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
	■ None							
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
Nick Gadfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steven Sharpe	Ofsted Inspector
Dilys Taylor	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Cadman-Marks	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the managing director, 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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