

Training for Today

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

4–7 July 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
Traineeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers set out high ambitions to use training and employment to help people progress in their lives, despite the disadvantages they may face.
- Staff use their strong partnerships with other agencies and employers very well to recruit learners to programmes and generate good work placements and employment opportunities.
- Support for learners is very good, enabling them to overcome personal difficulties and barriers to learning and employment.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and based upon very accurate identification of learners' starting points.
- Learners have a very good knowledge of equality, diversity and safeguarding that prepares them for life in modern Britain well.
- Information, advice and guidance are good and ensure that trainees start on the right programme and support them in developing clear career plans.
- The large majority of apprentices achieve their intended qualifications and remain in employment.
- Current learners are making good progress in developing the skills and knowledge they need to progress.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- The proportion of apprentices who complete their qualifications on time is not yet high enough.
- English and mathematics provision is not fully effective in supporting and challenging all learners to develop these skills.
- Trainees' attendance and achievement of functional skills qualifications are still too low.
- Classroom-based learning sessions do not always challenge the most able learners.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Training for Today (TfT) is part of the Babington Group, which was acquired by new investors in 2016. It shares a board of directors, executive team and senior management team with the Derby-based Babington Business College. Training advisers and other staff work across the whole group. TfT's head office and main training centre is in a converted mill building in Bolton. It has several other centres in the North West, Leeds and Nottingham. At the time of the last inspection TfT delivered apprenticeships and study programmes for young people. Study programmes are no longer delivered; the provider introduced the traineeship programme in August 2014.
- Around a quarter of Bolton's population is from minority ethnic groups, within which the Indian community is the largest ethnic group. The proportion of young people in Bolton achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C was 66% in 2015, which is slightly lower than the national rate.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Continue to increase the proportion of apprentices who complete in the planned time by:
 - improving the quality of targets, so that apprentices are very clear on what they need to learn, how and by when
 - enhancing the quality of tutors' and assessors' feedback to apprentices so that it provides clear advice on how to improve further and ensures that all apprentices make rapid progress
 - ensuring that planned programme durations are realistic and take into account apprentices' starting points and opportunities for assessment in the workplace.
- Further improve learners' English and mathematics achievements by:
 - developing the skills of staff so that they are more confident and competent in their own abilities and promote good practice with their learners
 - ensuring that staff encourage learners to continue to develop their English and mathematics skills beyond the minimum requirements of the programmes
 - continuing to place a strong focus on improving trainees' attendance at lessons.
- Improve the quality of classroom-based sessions by ensuring that staff plan learning to meet individual needs, including providing sufficient challenge for the most able learners.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the future built around well-considered strategic objectives. Their ambitious focus, which is effectively communicated throughout the group, is to work with employers and other stakeholders to use training and employment to help individuals progress in life, including those who are disadvantaged. The introduction of the traineeship programme exemplifies this. The large majority of the young people on this programme progress into employment and further training, often overcoming significant educational and personal barriers to do so.
- Staff at all levels work very well with employers and stakeholders to ensure that the provision matches what is needed in an area. Partnership working is especially effective, with a number of the new traineeships specifically tailored to the needs of companies. In addition, apprenticeship programmes are designed to ensure coverage of particular units of qualifications, which most benefit employers and apprentices. These initiatives lead to high rates of progression into sustained employment for apprentices, with a majority progressing to higher-level training, gaining promotion or taking on additional responsibilities at work.
- Staff work very well with trainees and apprentices to prepare them for life in modern Britain and to promote their understanding of equality and diversity. Staff use opportunities in lessons to develop learners' understanding of ideas relevant to their vocational learning, such as how to meet the needs of customers and clients with a variety of disabilities. In addition, staff use monthly theme days and national, regional and local events, such as world mental health day and religious festivals, to explore broader concepts of equality and diversity.
- Leaders and managers use an effective system of performance management for staff with monthly one-to-one meetings, quarterly reviews and annual appraisal, providing support and challenge as required. Managers identify weak practice quickly and put in place effective processes to improve. They also identify and share examples of strong performance. As a result, many staff have achieved internal promotion or have been given increased responsibilities. Staff access a very well structured programme of continuous professional development which links to performance management. They are proud of their achievements, such as the successful completion of the talent management programme. These activities support improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, as does the observation system.
- Quality improvement arrangements are good. Staff know their organisation well, including its strengths and areas for development. They constantly monitor the quality of provision and liaise within and across divisions to share good practice and identify emerging issues to prevent them from becoming problems. However, summary documents such as the self-assessment report do not always clearly reflect the sound evaluation and improvement activities that take place. Leaders and managers know that some strategies, such as the introduction of distance learning, although progressing, have yet to be fully implemented. Strategies to improve timely completion rates for apprentices, including more realistic agreements with employers over programme durations and access to apprentices for assessment, have already had a positive effect this year, but further improvements are required.
- Staff track learners' progress to ensure that they put in effective interventions where needed. This information is shared across teams and with managers to ensure that they have an overview of progress. For trainees, tracking is undertaken at each individual training centre and training advisers have detailed information about their current and past trainees. Recently, as numbers of trainees have grown, a centralised system for tracking the destinations of trainees has been introduced, but it is too early to see the full impact of this.
- Leaders and managers have a detailed strategy in place to support trainees and apprentices to achieve the qualifications they need in English and mathematics. This has already led to improvements in the achievement of English and mathematics qualifications for trainees, but from a low base. Staff are aware that further improvement is needed and are ensuring that this remains a key focus. For trainees and apprentices who have already achieved the required qualification in English and mathematics, staff do not consistently challenge them to continue to develop these skills.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Board members have a clear understanding of the aims of the organisation, its strengths and areas for development. In regular meetings board members are kept up to date with financial and operational issues, enabling them to provide appropriate support and challenge to senior leaders.
 - The new investors have provided strategic input and additional resources, which have supported developments, such as expanding the quality team to support the increased numbers in traineeships

and appointing a commercial director. Board members understand and support the five-year business plan, to grow in areas of strength while maintaining quality.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Senior leaders have placed a very strong focus on the 'Prevent' duty, setting up a steering group to ensure that all aspects are covered well.
- Managers follow effective practices for the safe recruitment of staff, including all necessary checks followed up by helpful training on safeguarding.
- Staff have had relevant training and have access to a good range of resources for use with apprentices and trainees.
- Learners feel safe and know who to contact if they have a concern. Apprentices and trainees have a good understanding of health and safety and how it relates to their work environment.
- Learners have a good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism at work and in their everyday lives.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The vast majority of apprentices and trainees enjoy their learning and appreciate the training they receive from their tutors, training advisers and workplace colleagues. Learners' motivation is good. They are keen to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding and to obtain permanent employment or to proceed to further study.
- Staff accurately identify learners' starting points and training needs when they join the programmes. For example, all learners complete suitable assessments in English and mathematics to assess the levels at which they are working. Optional units from National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are carefully selected to correspond with learners' job roles to ensure that they have adequate opportunities to develop job-specific competencies and collect relevant evidence.
- Staff plan apprentices' learning programmes very effectively. Group and individual coaching sessions focus specifically on apprentices' learning needs and enable them to make good progress. Coordination of on- and off-the-job learning on the apprenticeship programme is good. As the provider acknowledges, while good progress has been made in developing distance-learning resources, further work is required before they are fully implemented.
- A good range of relevant training on the traineeship programme enables learners to increase their knowledge and understanding of the world of work in addition to improving their English and mathematics. However, classroom learning is not always closely matched to each individual trainee's needs, with the result that it is too difficult for some learners and too easy for others. Not all tutors are sufficiently skilled at questioning trainees to assess their knowledge and understanding.
- A good, and increasing, range of work placements in local, national and international organisations is available to trainees. In the best placements trainees gain experience in a variety of roles and are then able to make an informed decision about the role most suitable for them. Most learners make a good contribution to their workplaces.
- Staff are enthusiastic and have very good vocational knowledge which they readily share with their learners. They have a good understanding of the occupations in which learners are placed. Not all staff are yet sufficiently confident and competent to help learners improve their English and mathematics skills.
- Assessment is good. Staff efficiently assess learners' vocational competency through unobtrusive observation and through oral questioning to assess their related knowledge. Apprentices' portfolios contain a range of relevant evidence, which confirms their increasing competency and developing knowledge. Learners' targets are not always precise enough and are too often limited to unit completion. Learners do not improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar quickly enough as staff do not routinely point out the errors contained in learners' written work.
- Support for learners is very good. In addition to regular personal contact with staff, learners telephone, text or email their tutor if they require extra information or support. In addition to regular workplace visits, staff make extra visits to learners whose progress is too slow. Staff accurately identify learners' additional support needs. Staff provide good support for learners when they need help with personal issues, for example homelessness, financial difficulties and drugs or alcohol misuse. TfT provides additional financial support by paying for learners' pre-employment checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service.
- Learners benefit from good information, advice and guidance when they start the programme and during their time in learning that enable them to clarify their career goals and the strategies needed to fulfil

them. Staff in referral agencies work collaboratively with the staff at TFT to ensure that programmes link closely to learners' needs and future plans.

- Learners' knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity, safeguarding and British values are good. They know how to keep themselves safe in the training centre and in their workplaces. Many learners have a good awareness of how to stay safe online and the potential hazards of social media. If problems arise, they know to whom they should be reported.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Apprentices and trainees demonstrate a strong commitment to learning and are ambitious to do well in their chosen careers. They speak confidently about their work and make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Portfolios of assessment evidence are well organised and learners take pride in presenting their work.
- Apprentices develop good vocationally relevant skills that their employers value, enabling most to successfully secure permanent employment at the end of their apprenticeship. Work places are of a high standard and apprentices work well with their employers and colleagues. They present themselves appropriately attired and equipped for the workplace. Hairdressing apprentices are confident and apply good communication skills when carrying out consultations with clients. They develop a wide range of skills in cutting, different colouring techniques, blow-drying, setting and perming. Administration apprentices speak confidently on the telephone, dealing with customer queries competently. Social care apprentices learn to identify the signs of early onset dementia and to manage service-users' needs well.
- The large majority of trainees are either completing purposeful work experience or have clear plans to do so with carefully selected and supportive employers. As a result, most learners develop valuable work-related skills that benefit them when planning their career pathways.
- Apprentices benefit from good individual coaching and support to develop their English and mathematics skills. English and mathematics are integrated well in vocational learning. As a consequence, apprentices can apply these skills effectively in their work. For example, warehousing apprentices use their mathematical skills to measure and cut carpets precisely, minimising waste and ensuring cost-efficiency for their employers.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Apprentices and trainees benefit from impartial careers guidance to enable them to make informed choices about their future work and study options. As a result, most learners have clear plans for progression.
- Apprentices and trainees adhere to strict health and safety practices in the workplace, and training advisers reinforce regularly the importance of doing so. Most learners have a good awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Apprentices develop independent study skills and increasingly take responsibility for their learning. For example, hairdressing apprentices conscientiously find their own models so that they can complete their assessments promptly. Many are keen to accelerate their progress and move on to more complex hairdressing skills and treatments and actively seek out opportunities to do so. Apprentices' attendance and punctuality are good.
- While there has been a steady improvement over time as a result of incentives and initiatives to encourage trainees to attend learning, attendance on the traineeship programme remains too low.

Outcomes for learners are good

- The vast majority of current apprentices are making good progress towards their qualifications and are on track to complete their programmes by their intended end date. Staff monitor apprentices' progress closely and swiftly provide additional support and workplace visits, to speed up their achievements should they fall behind. Apprentices rapidly develop confidence, vocational knowledge and work skills.
- The proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes is high and has been above the national rate for the last two years. The provider's own data for the current year indicates that the high levels of overall achievement have been maintained.
- Achievement rates vary across subject areas, with very high achievements for the current year in the main areas of hairdressing, barbering and business administration, which have the largest number of apprentices. In contrast, achievements for the relatively small number of apprentices in other areas such as warehousing and customer service are lower and in line with national rates. Learners' achievements are above national rates for all levels of apprenticeships and age groups.

- The proportion of apprentices who completed their qualifications on time in 2014/15 was low. Management actions to increase the timely achievement of qualifications have resulted in improvements in the current year, but further improvement is needed.
- Since Tft introduced the traineeship programme in August 2014, progression has been high, with over three quarters of leavers progressing positively into apprenticeships, employment or further education. The very large majority of these leavers progressed to apprenticeships and jobs despite their low starting points. The programme supports disadvantaged learners very effectively, including those who have a history of offending, care leavers and those with mental health problems.
- The proportion of learners who were retained on their programmes and achieved their qualifications on the 16 to 19 study programme was low in 2014/15; study programmes are no longer delivered by Tft. Trainees' achievement of qualifications and learning aims in the current year, including in functional skills English and mathematics qualifications, has increased but requires further improvement.
- Managers monitor data on the performance of different groups of learners closely. Overall, there are no significant achievement gaps. Each vocational and programme area has an action plan to promote diversity and address any emerging differences in achievements. For example, the traineeship programme is aiming to increase the participation of under-represented ethnic groups by revising its marketing materials and enlisting the help of learner ambassadors to represent the organisation at recruitment events.
- Upon completion of their apprenticeships, the vast majority of apprentices remain in employment. Where work roles allow and supervisory experience is available, employers encourage apprentices to progress to higher-level programmes.

Types of provision

Apprenticeships

are good

- Tft has 794 apprentices, with the largest groups in management, business administration, health and social care and hairdressing. Apprenticeship programmes are very well managed. Apprentices develop a range of new skills through well-planned on- and off-the-job training; most current apprentices are making good progress.
- Staff work closely with a wide range of local, national and global employers to ensure that they provide the most suitable opportunities for apprentices to develop their skills to a high standard. Employers provide good career progression and promotion opportunities.
- Training advisers have good vocational experience that enables them to train and assess apprentices to the current industry standards required by employers. As a result, apprentices receive good training for their job roles.
- Apprentices develop their English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively. Assessment of learners' starting points is thorough and identifies learners' development needs well. Training advisers use the results of initial assessments skilfully, to plan learning that enables most apprentices to make good progress. Training advisers provide good individual coaching that prepares learners well for external assessments in English and mathematics. Apprentices speak clearly and confidently and use technical terminology accurately.
- Training advisers incorporate English, mathematics and ICT learning into vocational lessons well, enabling apprentices to apply these skills effectively to a work-related context, for example providing quotes for car rental contracts and using data to identify key customers to target for marketing based on employee numbers. However, too few training advisers challenge apprentices to develop their English and mathematics skills beyond the minimum levels required by the apprenticeship framework.
- Training advisers deliver good individual coaching in the workplace. They plan coaching sessions effectively and use a good range of activities and resources, including video clips and quizzes to deepen apprentices' knowledge. Most training advisers are skilful at questioning to check apprentices' understanding, challenge their thinking and encourage participation. They provide frequent and constructive oral feedback, which helps to consolidate apprentices' understanding of new concepts. In a few cases, training advisers resort to giving information without checking apprentices' understanding fully.
- Training advisers plan assessments carefully. They are enthusiastic, provide positive role models for apprentices and use their good occupational knowledge and experience effectively to deepen learners' knowledge and understanding. Apprentices work purposefully, and produce good standards of practical work. For example, administration apprentices speak authoritatively on the telephone and deal with customer queries efficiently. Hairdressing apprentices consult with clients confidently and cut and style clients' hair to high industry standards.

- Staff support apprentices well and provide good advice and guidance that ensures that they are enrolled on suitable programmes and have clear information about their future career options. Apprentices with additional learning needs receive good specialist support that enables them to achieve well. The vast majority of apprentices remain in employment and, where appropriate, gain promotion and progress to higher-level training on completion of their programmes.
- Apprentices have a good awareness of health and safety risks in the workplace and demonstrate safe working practices such as the correct use of sharps boxes to dispose of needles in a care setting. Apprentices feel safe and know whom to contact should they have any safeguarding concerns. They have a good awareness of how to stay safe online, including when using social media.
- In a few cases, apprentices' targets are not specific enough. Training advisers check the progress of apprentices frequently during assessments and progress reviews, not all set detailed targets and feedback so that their apprentices know exactly what they need to do next to enhance their progress.

Traineeships

are good

- Tft has 134 learners on the traineeship programme, developing skills and experience to help them progress into employment or an apprenticeship. Programmes are designed to meet the requirements of traineeships well and include high-quality work preparation and work experience. The large majority of the 142 trainees who have left the programme since it was introduced in August 2014 have progressed to an apprenticeship or employment.
- Tft staff have very strong links with referral agencies and these good relationships result in efficient recruitment processes. Staff assess trainees' starting points, provide an induction to the programme and find appropriate work placements for new trainees swiftly.
- Programmes are designed carefully to take into account trainees' individual starting points and career preferences. For example, one trainee who had previously enjoyed working in a restaurant was found a placement in the hospitality sector to extend his experience and skills for a long-term career in the industry.
- Staff plan programmes well and ensure that, in the initial stages, they place a strong focus on developing trainees' English, mathematics and employability skills. As the programme progresses, the focus moves to detailed planning for the trainees next steps.
- Staff use a good range of work placements involving many small and large employers from the community and business sectors. It works with employers to design bespoke programmes for groups of trainees, which often lead to permanent jobs. For example, Tft has worked collaboratively with a large international courier and shipping agent to recruit and train three cohorts of trainees. Tft staff deliver English, mathematics and employability training for two days each week on the employer's premises. Staff support trainees to overcome personal difficulties and transform their lives by helping them to progress into full-time employment with career prospects.
- Tutors deliver a good range of relevant classroom-based employability sessions to increase trainees' confidence and develop the appropriate attitudes and behaviours required in the workplace. For example, in one lesson a detailed discussion helped trainees to understand the risks and benefits associated with using social media, and the impact that inappropriate use can have on future employment prospects.
- Tutors meet individual trainees' needs well in the majority of lessons. For example, in an English lesson the tutor carefully planned techniques for improving spelling and writing paragraphs for each individual level to ensure that all could participate and benefit fully. However, a minority of lessons include activities for the whole group that do not meet the individual needs of learners, including the most able.
- Trainees benefit from good advice and guidance, both before and during their programme. Staff give impartial and helpful information on all progression options and support trainees to achieve their career goals.
- Trainees feel safe at Tft and in their work placements. Staff promote safeguarding, including the dangers of extremism and radicalisation, very effectively. For example, through discussions about the inappropriate use of social media tutors skilfully cover the potential of unintended consequences on tolerance and respect for others.
- As a result of management initiatives the quality of English and mathematics provision is improving but the proportion of trainees who achieve their qualifications requires further improvement.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	850
Principal/CEO	Carole Carson
Website address	www.trainingfortoday.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)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	114	345	39	275	2	19		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	108		26		134			
Number of learners aged 14–16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
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

Pat Hornsby, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Barnett	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gerard McGrath	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
David Sykes	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the quality 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 students 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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