

Pathway First Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

4–7 October 2016

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Apprentices make good progress and the vast majority achieve their apprenticeships within the planned timescales.
- Collaboration with local communities and employers to align the range and content of provision to meet local, regional and national needs and priorities is exceptional.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection and is now good.
- Vocational tutors are knowledgeable and experienced, and provide very good support for apprentices in the workplace.
- Good working relationships with employers allow apprentices to develop valuable workplace skills.
- The use of initial assessment to plan learning and ensure that apprentices make progress from their starting points is good.
- A high proportion of apprentices successfully progress into employment or further education.
- Apprentices' understanding of modern British values and awareness of the 'Prevent' duty are not consistently strong.
- Most apprentices have access to a broad range of learning resources and benefit from the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning.
- The information, advice and guidance for apprentices in the subcontracted provision do not prepare apprentices consistently well for their next steps.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Pathway First Limited (Pathway) started their own directly funded apprenticeship programmes in 2013/14 after operating as a subcontractor. In 2015/16, they took on the role of a prime contractor working with eight apprenticeship delivery subcontractor partners. Subcontractors provide approximately half of Pathway's apprenticeship provision across the areas of health, public services and care, education and training, warehousing, and business administration and law. There are currently 659 intermediate, advanced and higher apprentices in learning. The vast majority of apprentices are in health and social care, and business administration based in Birmingham and Leicester.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all apprentices have a good understanding of modern British values and of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Ensure that all apprentices have access to a broad range of learning resources and all subcontractors share examples of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that all apprentices have access to good-quality, impartial information, advice and guidance that prepare them well for their chosen career paths.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior managers have responded effectively to recommendations identified at the previous inspection. Key changes to the governance and leadership roles within Pathway have ensured that targeted improvement actions and impact measures are in place and monitored well. As a result, senior managers have resolved the majority of areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- For example, analysis of apprentices at risk of not completing their apprenticeships led to the earlier introduction of functional skills in programmes. Consequently, the number of apprentices leaving with no qualifications declined and the achievement rate for apprentices completing within agreed timescales improved significantly.
- Collaboration with communities and employers is exceptional. Pathway is highly proactive with the Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities of Birmingham. Senior managers are successful in bringing together local communities and employers through a range of networking events that they run throughout the country aimed at exploring future developments and training opportunities. For example, they use networking to promote a better understanding of the new apprenticeship levy. Through strong links with the Asian community, leaders and managers have recently introduced the first Asian 'Apprentice of the year' award, which is focused on raising the status of apprenticeships within the Asian community nationally and is supported by World Skills UK.
- The management of the apprenticeship programmes is good. The subcontracted provision, now nearly half of the apprenticeship programmes, has grown significantly since the previous inspection and is good. Regular quality assurance visits ensure that all key performance indicators for the quality of provision are monitored effectively. Consequently, subcontractors have a good awareness of their targets and the progress their apprentices make.
- The introduction of a new data management system has resulted in more focused and detailed management reporting that is shared well with subcontractors. This provides all managers and staff with a clearer understanding of the performance of apprenticeship programmes on a monthly basis. As a result, apprentices, vocational tutors and employers have a good understanding of the activities needed in the workplace to enable apprentices to make good progress and improve their vocational skills and knowledge.
- Observations of teaching, learning and assessment focus on evaluating learning and thorough action planning for improvement. Observations of vocational tutors' performance are standardised well to a consistently good quality throughout the subcontracted provision through joint observations of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff and apprentices benefit from the use of the 'Pathway Direct' portal for improved communications and access to important documents and training materials. However, leaders and managers do not use this system systematically to share good practice across the apprenticeship programmes.
- Managers monitor the performance of different groups of learners effectively to identify differences in achievement. They plan successfully to eliminate any gaps. For example, the performance of white British males has improved through changes in the delivery of functional skills. Managers and staff promote fair treatment of individuals and respect for differences well.

- Staff are held to good account through effective performance management. Underperformance is identified and suitable support promptly provided. Leaders take robust action where staff performance continues to fall below the company's expectations.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive. Pathway produces its self-assessment report from subcontractors' self-assessment and input from stakeholders, employers and apprentices. Its self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of the provision and inspectors awarded similar grades.
- Staff are appropriately qualified and have benefited from regular professional development and mandatory training, including in equality and diversity, the 'Prevent' duty, modern British values and health and safety. They use their awareness of these issues well to protect and safeguard apprentices. Apprentices in subcontracted provision do not always have a good enough awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and modern British values.

The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection, senior managers have strengthened Pathway's board. Board members have an improved oversight of all activities through more detailed reporting and analysis. They hold managers to good account for improving the effectiveness of provision. Board members have been successful in ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. They have a good understanding of the achievement of different groups and the actions taken to eliminate gaps in performance. Pathway's business development plan 2016/17 identifies clearly the provider's mission, values, strategic aims, success measures and risk assessments, and staff understand these well. Board members ensure that the curriculum continues to evolve to meet very well the needs of apprentices and employers, and national, regional and local priorities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive appropriate recruitment and background checks. All vocational tutors received enhanced checks. Up-to-date detailed records of all employees and subcontractor staff are in place.
- Appropriately trained staff carry out comprehensive assessments of health and safety in the workplace. Vocational tutors promote safe working practices very well. Consequently, apprentices' understanding of health and safety is good.
- Apprentices feel safe and have a sound awareness of what to do if they need to report any concerns.
- Apprentices are vigilant as to how they can protect themselves while online from the dangers of cyber-bullying, online grooming and access to inappropriate materials.
- Apprentices' appreciation of modern British values and the relevance of these to their current and future job roles needs further strengthening.
- Suitable safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and updated to include reference to radicalisation and extremism. The designated safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty officer is trained and experienced appropriately.

- Staff are aware of the need to protect learners against radicalisation and extremism and have received 'Prevent' duty training and updated professional development regarding safeguarding. However, apprentices' appreciation of the 'Prevent' duty is not of consistently good standard.
- Managers and staff take effective actions to counter incidents of bullying and harassment. They record incidents systematically and manage them effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Apprentices acquire very well the technical and theoretical skills required in their work. Consequently, the vast majority achieve their apprenticeships within agreed timescales and a high proportion progress into employment or to higher-level qualifications, a significant number from low starting points.
- Tutors are knowledgeable and experienced in their vocational areas. They have high expectations of their apprentices who benefit from good coaching and support in learning sessions. They plan learning well to meet individual needs and programme requirements, and reinforce this effectively in the workplace and during off-the-job training sessions.
- In learning sessions, vocational tutors use questioning effectively to promote discussion, enhancing learners' understanding. They make good use of a range of learning resources, including video clips. Apprentices learn effectively through participating in this range of interesting learning activities. In a minority of sessions, apprentices are less enthused and engaged in their learning. These sessions demonstrate where leaders and managers have been less successful in sharing good practice and in encouraging the use of available learning resources.
- Programmes are carefully adapted to meet individual needs and employers' requirements. Employers value the flexibility of the vocational tutors in delivering at times to suit their business needs. This allows employers to participate in reviews and identify suitable activities in the workplace to support learners' progress and apprenticeship requirements well.
- Initial assessment for all apprentices is thorough ensuring the accurate identification of each apprentice's skills level and support needs. As a result, vocational tutors provide good personal support for all apprentices throughout their programmes. They ensure that apprentices have good access to support between visits. Apprentices are confident that concerns they raise via email or by telephone are dealt with promptly. Consequently, apprentices with negative experiences of school re-engage with learning and achieve well.
- Monthly reviews and assessments of apprentices' progress are very effective. Vocational tutors use feedback from employers to set relevant targets that are specific, measurable, and understood by both the apprentice and the employer.
- Vocational tutors provide good verbal and written feedback with clear annotations on apprentices' work ensuring improvement. Apprentices are motivated to improve and produce portfolio work of a high standard.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, particularly in care and early years settings. Vocational tutors routinely include topics regarding equality and diversity in learning sessions, and apprentices are able to apply their knowledge both at work and in their everyday lives. However, warehousing apprentices do not consistently benefit from the inclusion of these topics in their meetings.

- Apprentices make good progress and demonstrate good skills development. For example, a warehouse apprentice was able to demonstrate improvement in mathematics skills that he applied in the workplace. Another apprentice working in customer service had progressed to managing a small group of staff and subsequently enrolled on a team leaders' course.
- Apprentices improve their English and mathematics skills well through learning activities in one-to-one sessions and through independent learning. Apprentices progress through their English and mathematics qualifications early in their programme and the vast majority achieve well. Learners benefit from continual reinforcement of their English and mathematics, and the development of their skills throughout their programme.
- Initial information, advice and guidance are variable in quality. Most apprentices have clear pathways for progression. However, a small minority of apprentices are not following programmes that lead directly to their preferred job.
- The promotion of British values and the raising of awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism are good in Leicester but need further development across the provider as a whole.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. Apprentices grow in confidence and self-esteem throughout their programmes and thoroughly enjoy their learning. They engage in purposeful work which suits their individual needs and interests well. Apprentices assisting in primary schools enjoy opportunities to work collaboratively as a member of a team, and teaching colleagues value their teamworking skills.
- Apprentices develop good work-related skills and demonstrate valuable employability skills. They gain good interpersonal skills at work particularly through positive interaction with customers. One learner put into practice strategies she had learned in a training session for dealing with difficult customers. Consequently, she handled incoming enquiries so well she is now the preferred contact point for customers. Another used strategies learned on her course to improve her supervision of children at lunchtime.
- Vocational tutors ensure the continuous development of apprentices' English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in work and in training sessions. They identify particular topics for revision and offer additional support on a one-to-one basis. For example, an apprentice with GCSE grade C in mathematics received additional help to understand fully the VAT calculations she needed at work.
- Apprentices achieve well. Employers within pharmacies provide good opportunities for their apprentices to gain additional, vocationally relevant, qualifications in dispensing and checking. Consequently, their opportunities for future employment and career advancement within the sector are improved.
- The standard of apprentices' work within their workplace is good. Their attendance is good. Employers value their work and support their progress well. Careers guidance is successful for most apprentices. However, some are not clear about realistic progression routes beyond their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices have a very good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work and conduct themselves well both in learning sessions and in the workplace. Apprentices have the opportunity to engage in charitable fundraising and participate in community events, widening their horizons.

- Apprentices feel safe and are safe. They have a good awareness of safeguarding issues and know how to report concerns. Vocational tutors emphasise safety online and identify clearly whom to approach if apprentices feel harassed or bullied at work or in their personal lives. They demonstrate a high level of care. For example, they regularly monitor the safety and care of any female apprentice working within a largely male environment.
- Apprentices, particularly those based with a Leicester subcontractor, know how to identify and withstand attempts at radicalisation. However, not all apprentices are as well informed. The vast majority of apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of the application of equality and diversity in their work, and can give examples of action to address customers' concerns. For example, a learner working in a pharmacy researched the use of gelatine in vaccinations for a customer averse to its use, and researched appropriate alternatives successfully.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The overall achievement rate for apprentices is above the national rate. The achievement rate for apprentices completing within agreed timescales has improved from a low base over the last two years. From the 2015/16 data provided by Pathway, the overall success rate continues to be above the national rate. The achievement rate for apprentices who complete within agreed timescales is now significantly above the national rate.
- Vocational tutors make good use of initial assessment to plan learning sessions. Consequently, apprentices make good progress from their starting points. The vast majority of apprentices remain in sustained employment or training at the completion of their apprenticeship.
- The monitoring of achievement of groups by gender, ethnicity, disability and age is systematic. Action planning to reduce gaps in performance of groups of learners is effective.
- The overall rate for apprentices passing their functional skills test in English, mathematics and ICT at the first attempt has improved since the last inspection. Apprentices are gaining their functional skills early in their programme and understand the benefit of these skills in furthering their careers.
- Initial information, advice and guidance for apprentices are too variable in quality. As a result, a small minority do not have a good understanding of their chosen career paths.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59176
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	881
Principal/CEO	Mr Safaraz Ali
Telephone number	01217 070 550
Website	www.pathwaygroup.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 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	55	258	19	214	-	113		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Pathways Advantage Ltd t.a Care Training Partnership Learning For Futures Ltd Oasis Care and Training Agency AJC-Training Solutions Ltd Learning into Employment Academy Ltd Telematics Business Solutions Ltd Solvo Vir Ltd (Green Energy Advisors Ltd) PET-Xi Training Ltd							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality and delivery 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.

Inspection team

Bob Hamp, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Helen Scott	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector

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