

Pearson PLC

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

12–13 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		Inadequate	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Strong governance and leadership support a well-organised staff team who provide good apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers have implemented successfully a broad range of actions that have improved provision significantly.
- Staff provide high levels of support and challenge that enable apprentices to make good progress.
- Apprentices develop new skills proficiently and apply them well as a result of effective teaching, learning and assessment.
- Apprentices are positive in their attitude to learning, take pride in their work, attend sessions well and are motivated to learn.
- Too few apprentices achieved within their planned timescales in 2015/16. Too many left the programme early with few achievements.
- Aspects of teaching and learning require improvement. Individual learning targets are not always set with precision or clarity. Not all written feedback provides sufficient detail to enable apprentices to understand what they need to do to improve.
- Planning for apprentices' programmes does not start with an accurate analysis of the jobs they carry out.
- Leaders and managers do not collect sufficient information on the progression of apprentices after completion of their programmes, in order to evaluate fully the impact of the provision.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Pearson PLC is part of the multinational Pearson Education group employing over 36,000 people in 70 countries. It provides educational materials, technologies, assessments and related services to teachers and students. Pearson PLC supports operations across the wider Pearson group, including areas such as customer services, finance and human resources.
- Pearson PLC has 10 employees participating in apprenticeships based at four regional offices across England. All apprentices are adults and they study programmes in customer service, team leading and management, with the majority at advanced level. Pearson PLC changed the subcontractor in September 2015 to a sister company, Pearson TQ, which provides teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of apprentices who complete their framework within the planned time, by:
 - planning precise training programmes carefully with managers and apprentices
 - setting clear short-, medium- and long-term learning targets for apprentices to master the skills required to progress in their chosen career
 - reviewing apprentices' progress regularly and thoroughly
 - taking swift action to support apprentices who are at risk of not achieving their targets on time.
- Ensure that staff set apprentices specific learning targets at the start of their programme based on accurate analysis of their jobs. Make sure that all staff set specific targets for apprentices that relate to skills development and not just the requirements of the qualification. Make sure staff mark apprentices' work accurately and provide precise feedback that enables them to improve their work.
- Collect information routinely about the progression of apprentices after the completion of their programme in order to evaluate fully the impact of the provision and to improve the initial advice and guidance provided for apprentices.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers responded rapidly to the last inspection report and have ensured that the apprenticeship provision fully meets the standards for the apprenticeship entitlement. Strong governance and leadership support a well-organised staff team to provide apprenticeships that meet the needs of individuals and the business. Since the previous inspection, managers and staff, including those of the subcontractor, have adopted a rigorous and thorough approach to quality and standards from which apprentices benefit.
- Leaders have implemented a broad range of improvement strategies that work effectively. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and conduct the 'Prevent' duty fully. They monitor the performance of the programme closely and set out clear objectives for its operation. Leaders place good emphasis on defining clearly the contribution the apprenticeship programme makes in meeting the present and future needs of the business. Training managers monitor the progress of apprentices effectively and intervene in a timely way where further support is required.
- Since the previous inspection, all apprentices make good progress and most complete on or before their revised planned end dates. Training managers and staff now ensure that apprentices who previously lacked motivation and support are very positive and enthusiastic about their experience and progress. However, the impact of historical failings in the management of the provision resulted in poor levels of timely achievement in 2015/16, and too many apprentices left the programme without achieving their apprenticeships.
- Performance management is effective. Training managers collect and use data well to monitor performance and to assess the quality of the provision. Leaders of Pearson PLC hold the subcontractor rigorously to account for performance. They rigorously follow through all the actions identified, and this leads to rapid improvement in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers and staff in the various work settings provide good support for apprentices to make progress. They contribute well to reviews of progress by commenting on apprentices' standards of work. They work closely with training staff to enable apprentices to achieve personal and job-related skills valued by the company.
- Leaders' use of self-assessment to secure improvement is thorough and accurate. Staff and apprentices provide feedback and make suggestions for improvements. For example, managers respond constructively to apprentices' suggestions about the location and timetabling for off-the-job training. The current draft self-assessment report provides an accurate and suitably self-critical review of the provision. The process in place to manage quality improvement planning is particularly good and has enabled senior managers to assess accurately the extent to which improvements for apprentices are proceeding.
- Leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity and diversity well, ensuring a positive environment for learning. Training managers monitor the progress and achievement of different groups of apprentices thoroughly and ensure that any gaps in

performance are narrowing. Apprentices and staff work safely and well together, showing mutual respect; staff promote apprentices' understanding of British values well.

- Until very recently, leaders and managers did not collect data to record the destinations, added responsibilities, job types or promotions that apprentices achieved after completion. As a result, leaders are not able to evaluate the impact of the curriculum. Managers have now put in place arrangements to secure the appropriate information on apprentices' progression that will enable them to evaluate effectively the impact of the apprenticeships provision and inform further improvement.

The governance of the provider

- Leaders direct the provision very well, setting out clear objectives for standards and performance. A senior internal group of staff monitors and challenges performance rigorously to ensure continuous improvement.
- Leaders have made a significant investment in resources recently which has benefited apprentices directly and enhanced the quality of the provision.
- Leaders implement fully their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding apprentices and in carrying out the 'Prevent' duty.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have put in place a comprehensive safeguarding policy for apprentices which they review and monitor to ensure it operates effectively.
- A dedicated and well-qualified lead member of staff is responsible for overseeing implementation of the policy and appropriate procedures are in place and working well. The awareness and understanding of safeguarding by staff and apprentices are good.
- Managers have ensured that all staff and apprentices have taken part in relevant training to reinforce understanding of what their responsibilities are for keeping safe and to be fully aware of the threats from radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff ensure that apprentices benefit from well-planned sessions with a good range of stimulating activities in which they engage enthusiastically. Apprentices value the off-the-job training they receive, and their new skills and knowledge enhance the contribution they make to the workplace. For example, they apply newly acquired skills to create and manage complex data by introducing bespoke spreadsheets to aid the work of their team.
- Apprentices both value and benefit from the knowledge and expertise of training staff. Training staff work effectively with apprentices using a range of teaching methods well. They use questioning techniques adeptly to check and extend apprentices' understanding and skills development. They use effective coaching techniques highlighting apprentices' potential and challenging them successfully to achieve more.
- Training staff communicate effectively with department managers to provide additional challenging tasks in the workplace that broaden apprentices' skills. For example, apprentices plan webinars in response to specific customer requirements that reinforce

their speaking and listening skills and enable them to produce a good standard of work to set time periods.

- Managers are involved fully in reviews of apprentices' progress. They contribute well to assessment and they provide a good level of informed feedback to enable apprentices to improve their work. Managers set high standards to challenge apprentices to excel.
- Assessment of learning is good. For example, training staff use peer feedback adeptly and promote successfully reflective learning that is built into learning objectives for projects in the workplace. As a result, apprentices develop deeper learning and understanding. For example, apprentices achieve a mature understanding of the distinction between internal and external customers and are able to use this successfully to inform their approach when dealing with customers.
- Training staff make good use of information on the starting points of the large majority of apprentices to plan training that meets their learning needs. However, a minority of apprentices' targets do not focus sufficiently on how they will develop their English and mathematics skills further.
- Training staff provide apprentices with verbal feedback on their work that enables them to make progress in their learning and work. However, not all written feedback provides sufficient detail to enable apprentices to understand what they need to do to improve. Managers aware of this weakness have recently implemented improvements to ensure that all staff feedback is thorough.
- The promotion of equality and the celebration of diversity is good in teaching sessions and reviews. Training staff make good use of planned activities, as well as naturally occurring situations as they arise. Apprentices develop a good understanding of diversity and British values. They understand well the importance of mutual respect, tolerance, fairness and personal safety.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices are positive in their attitude to learning, take pride in their work and attend sessions regularly and punctually. They are motivated to learn and they take responsibility for their own learning increasingly as they develop and make progress.
- Apprentices are confident in their approach to work and learning. They demonstrate high levels of respect for one another and develop good teamworking skills. For example, they develop a robust understanding of the skills and attributes required to motivate colleagues, and they work successfully in teams to achieve positive outcomes to projects.
- Apprentices learn to use technical language confidently. Training staff improve the large majority of apprentices' English and mathematics skills well. For example, apprentices in administration calculate profit and loss based on income and expenditure adeptly from consumable course materials. However, a minority of apprentices do not develop their English and mathematics skills to the extent of which they are capable.
- Apprentices learn and use additional skills to those required for their qualification. For example, they improve their higher-level thinking skills by analysing questions critically for meaning and understanding in order to better respond to customer requirements. Apprentices in customer services develop a good understanding of production operations

outside of their work role and take part in external visits to extend their knowledge and understanding of their job roles and future developments in, for example, the application of innovative office technology.

- Apprentices say that they feel safe and know who to contact if they do not. They demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of British values and the dangers of extremism. Managers have ensured that apprentices' induction and regular reviews extend their understanding of equality and diversity.
- Apprentices benefit from specific individual sessions on completion of their programmes that focus well on career development options within the company. However, the provision of information, advice and guidance is not impartial.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Apprentices enjoy their learning, make good progress and most now complete their programmes successfully. Too few apprentices achieved their apprenticeships within the planned timescales in the contract year 2015/16. Apprentices who commenced their programmes in 2014 and 2015 made slow progress and a minority left the programme without completion.
- The rate of improvement in the proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes is increasing rapidly. Almost all the apprentices retained since the previous inspection have completed within their revised planned timescale or are very likely to in the near future. The proportion who complete successfully has improved since the previous inspection to around the national rate.
- Apprentices produce work of a good standard. They apply and extend their skills and understanding in work beyond the requirements of their programmes by taking on responsibilities for innovative tasks and engaging in new projects. For example, apprentices develop and implement quality assurance systems which their teams use to monitor customer service standards and which managers value highly.
- The large majority of apprentices develop their English, mathematics, and information and communications technology skills well. Apprentices use technical language confidently. For example, apprentices in administration calculate profit and loss accurately using examples of income and expenditure of consumable course materials.
- The majority of apprentices who have completed in the calendar year of 2016 have progressed to take on added responsibilities in their job roles, and a minority gain promotion. The destinations of the majority of apprentices who have left since the programme commenced in 2014 are unknown.

Provider details

Unique reference number	57951
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	82
Principal/CEO	Rod Bristow
Telephone number	01279 621 170
Website	http://uk.pearson.com

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+		
	-	4	-	6	-	-		
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:	Pearson TQ							

Information about this inspection

The human resources manager as nominee assisted the inspection team. 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; the report reflects these. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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