

# APM Learning and Education Alliance

Independent learning provider

**Inspection dates**

8–11 November 2016

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>	16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>		
Outcomes for learners	<b>Requires improvement</b>		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too few learners participate in work-experience placements or relevant work-related activities to prepare them effectively for the next steps in their careers.
- Too few learners achieve their main qualifications in employability, English and mathematics, although this is improving.
- Too few learners progress onto apprenticeships, further education or work.
- Managers have been too slow at implementing all aspects of study programmes, such as the provision of work experience.
- Senior managers in governance roles do not receive sufficiently detailed reports on the performance of study programmes to enable them to challenge managers effectively to make rapid improvements to the provision.
- Too few learners have the opportunity to do additional work-related qualifications to enhance their employment prospects.
- A minority of tutors do not make consistently good use of the findings of initial and diagnostic assessment to ensure that all learners make rapid progress according to their potential.
- Tutors do not set learners specific and measurable targets for the completion of units and elements of qualifications; as a result, learners are not consistently clear about the progress they have made towards their learning goals.
- Leaders and managers do not collect and use data and other management information well enough to identify with sufficient precision key areas for improvement in the provision.
- Staff do not reinforce the pre-existing, basic knowledge of learners in relation to e-safety, British values or the dangers of radicalisation and extremism; as a result, learners do not fully appreciate the dangers present on the internet and how to protect themselves sufficiently.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Learners feel safe and very well supported with a range of welfare services, many of which are used regularly to support learners' progress.
- The provider offers an inclusive, supportive environment for learners who face a range of barriers to learning and progress; this helps motivate learners.
- Learners are well behaved, courteous and respectful of each other; they develop essential personal and social skills.
- Recent management action is beginning to improve the quality of the provision.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Advanced Personnel Management Group UK Ltd (APM) is a privately owned training provider. The main administration centre is in Newtown, Birmingham. The recently appointed director of skills, along with 18 staff, is responsible for the management and delivery of study programmes and two further publicly funded contracts that were out of scope for this inspection. APM acquired this contract from Pertemps Learning and Education Alliance in July 2015. APM also provide learning and support for unemployed adults under a separate contract with the Department for Work and Pensions.
- At the time of the inspection, 129 learners attended study programmes at centres in Nuneaton, Chelmsley Wood and West Bromwich in the West Midlands, and at Thorntree and Darlington in the north of England. All learners follow a programme of accredited qualifications in employability skills, and in English and mathematics. Most learners have previously failed to participate successfully in full-time education, training or employment. Over 73% of learners receive bursaries, as they are entitled to free school meals, are care leavers or come from families with low household incomes.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of data and management information to evaluate the learners' experience at all stages of the programme and take necessary steps to ensure that learners gain qualifications, benefit from appropriate work experience and progress to positive destinations, such as apprenticeships.
- Ensure that the executive team members undertaking governance functions receive sufficiently detailed reports on the performance of the programme and learners' experience, so that they can support and challenge middle managers to make rapid improvements to the programme.
- Ensure that programmes meet in full the requirements of study programmes, including the provision of work-experience placements and work-related learning.
- Increase opportunities for learners to undertake short, work-related qualifications to improve their employment prospects.
- Equip tutors with the skills and confidence they need to be able to:
  - set clear short- and long-term targets for learners so that they can make rapid progress according to their ability
  - provide specific written feedback to enable learners to improve their work further
  - make effective use of the findings of initial assessment to provide a programme of learning that matches learners' prior attainment and aspirations and challenges them to achieve their potential.
- Ensure that learners are well prepared for life in modern British society, by:
  - enhancing and consolidating their understanding of fundamental British values, e-safety and the risks of extremism and radicalisation
  - ensuring that learners can apply this knowledge and understanding in practical ways in their daily lives

- incorporating these topics in lessons, preparation for work experience and progress reviews, so that tutors and learners alike see these as a part of core learning, rather than additional topics.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- The operational management of the study programmes requires improvement. Managers have not responded swiftly enough to meet in full the requirements of study programmes. The executive management team was slow to appoint some key staff to support and manage tutors and administration staff. As a result, managers have not secured sufficient work placements for the learners, to help them develop the skills they need. Managers have expanded the provision to a new centre, with limited support for staff. This has meant that the quality of provision for learners across the range of the provider's centres is too variable to be good.
- Leaders and managers do not monitor well enough the quality of provision, learners' progress, their rates of staying on and their achievement of qualifications. This limits managers' capacity to act quickly to improve learners' experience.
- The self-assessment report, written in July 2016, is overly descriptive and lacks sufficient focus on the study programme, as it was written to cover aspects of the provision that were not in scope for the inspection. However, managers broadly identified the current areas for improvement and had devised and implemented a clear quality improvement plan.
- Senior managers have a clear sense of purpose and determination to continue the significant improvements they have introduced during recent months. These include the reintroduction of a more rigorous and purposeful quality assurance cycle, the appointment of new staff to strengthen teaching, learning and assessment in study programmes, and the sharing of good practice across centres. Managers have taken swift action in a very short period with some success. They have achieved a measure of impact in improved progression rates for learners and their higher rates of achievement of qualifications. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of these actions on the learners' experience.
- The executive management team is developing a culture of continuous improvement. This includes regular surveys of learners, frequent observations of tutors and many development opportunities for staff, so that they can improve their practice to provide high-quality learning experiences.
- Leaders and managers support their staff well through training and regular observations of teaching and learning. Observers are skilled at identifying strengths in learning and areas for further development. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the observers during joint lesson observations. After each observation, observers provide purposeful reports to tutors that are used as a basis for support and improvement actions. This improves tutors' confidence and helps develop their skills in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders and managers have located their training centres in among the communities they serve, enabling learners to easily gain access to education. Managers have worked hard to bring much-needed support organisations, such as credit unions and drug and alcohol advisory services, into centres to make their services easily available to learners with high pastoral and welfare support needs.

## **The governance of the provider**

- The governance of the provider requires improvement.
- The board members get limited information on the performance of study programmes and the quality of learners' experience against the key criteria of study programmes. This limits their capacity to challenge and support staff appropriately to make the desired changes rapidly.
- In recent months board members have developed a purposeful data dashboard that enables them to review the performance of several programmes on a weekly basis and report to the parent company in Australia. However, this is focused mostly on the financial aspects and provides too little of an overview of the quality of the provision and its impact on learners' progress and success.
- The executive management board members have a strong commitment to 'enabling better lives' through learning opportunities for all learners. They are knowledgeable, experienced and well-qualified to provide strong challenge and support through their governance role.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers provide a safe and welcoming environment for learners.
- Staff are appropriately checked to ensure that they do not present risks to learners' safety.
- They have received informative training in safeguarding and counter-terrorism and know how to identify issues and report concerns. Staff are particularly aware and vigilant of their vulnerable learners and take effective actions swiftly to protect learners from the risk of radicalisation.
- The designated safeguarding officers and tutors receive suitable and timely training. Managers maintain strong links with other local organisations to ensure that they receive appropriate information about any emerging risks that might have an impact on learners' welfare. Effective links are in place with local agencies to ensure that vulnerable learners are well supported.
- Staff pay appropriate attention to health and safety, conducting frequent compliance assessments of the training centres. They use this information effectively to make improvements and keep learners safe.
- Managers conduct useful risk assessments of employers' premises where learners on work placement are located. These risk assessments identify risks and alert employers to APM's expectations of the management of learners, but do not raise employers' awareness of safeguarding, extremism or radicalisation in sufficient detail to enable them to protect learners.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- A minority of tutors do not make good enough use of results of initial and diagnostic assessments to plan activities to match the prior attainment and potential of learners so that they can progress quickly according to their ability. In classes, most learners work in groups on the same topics and at the same pace, irrespective of their starting points and potential to make progress. As a result, the most able learners wait for other learners to complete tasks before they can move on. This slows their progress. A few less able learners lose their confidence as they try to catch up with the rest of the group.
- The large majority of learners have almost identical targets to achieve and similar end dates for achieving qualifications. The targets are often too broad and general with few interim targets to support the measurement of their progress. This does not give learners sufficient motivation to progress rapidly and to achieve their targets in timescales based on their ability. For example, the time allowed for work experience is not sufficient and it is not always clear when the learners will undertake this and to what effect. Similarly, learners are not clear if they can take tests and qualifications at an earlier stage, rather than waiting until the end of their time in learning.
- In group sessions, a few tutors do not use questioning well enough to check learners' knowledge effectively. This means that tutors create a false sense of learners' progress and acquisition of skills, when learners do not feel confident and secure in their learning. In such cases, learners are unclear about their progress and skills development.
- Tutors provide useful verbal feedback. However, the quality of written feedback does not provide sufficient guidance to enable learners to improve their standard of work further.
- A few tutors make good use of real-life examples to reinforce learning. For example, a tutor used portions of cake to explain fractions well. She further encouraged learners to look for examples during their lunchtime while buying their food.
- Learners benefit from a good range of support. Learning coaches work well with subject tutors to provide learners with timely and effective support at the start of their programme. Tutors create a supportive and sensitive learning environment in which learners feel safe, and comfortable to disclose their personal barriers to learning. Consequently, learners feel ready to participate in and enjoy learning.
- Learners work well together in groups with staff. A culture of inclusion and celebration of diversity are fully part of the provision. Learners and staff from different minority groups treat each other with respect. Managers have developed useful support for learners' understanding of British values, clearly linking them to APM's values and learning ethos. A minority of tutors are not sufficiently confident to explain the risks of radicalisation or promote useful discussions in ways that are meaningful to learners, so they can apply their knowledge to their daily activities.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Requires improvement

- Limited opportunities for work experience mean that many learners do not develop skills relevant to their career aspirations. Where external work placements exist, these are not consistently linked to learners' career goals. As a result, learners do not develop the specific skills required for their chosen career, although they develop core employability skills such as teamwork, communication, good attendance and punctuality.
- The proportion of learners who make progress and achieve qualifications in English and mathematics to support career progression is low but improving. In addition, too few opportunities are available for learners to achieve short, work-related qualifications such as basic food hygiene, manual handling and first-aid that increase learners' chances of securing employment.
- Learners' standard of work on programmes is appropriate to their level of study. However, tutors do not challenge learners sufficiently to produce a higher standard of work to match their potential.
- Learners feel safe and know who to go to for help and to raise concerns. They have a basic awareness of e-safety, radicalisation, extremism and grooming; however, their understanding is not sufficiently thorough about the risks and how these can present themselves in their daily lives.
- Learners are made aware of and use opportunities to learn independently outside lessons. This increases their motivation and opportunities to consolidate their learning. Learners without access to personal computers at home make good use of publicly available facilities, such as libraries, to support their learning. They frequently make use of the drop-in sessions in learning centres to enable them to progress.
- Learners develop confidence through a range of learning activities. They speak confidently on participating in learning and their next steps into employment.
- Learners gain a good understanding of employment and career opportunities through the promotion of a three-step approach, 'get **A** job', 'get a **B**etter job' and 'get a **C**areer'. Regular one-to-one meetings with employment coaches enable learners to understand pathways into further learning or work. In addition, learners attend 'Next Steps' weeks. In these, visiting speakers, including local employers, youth advice teams, and successful learners from previous cohorts inspire learners, sharing their positive experiences. This raises awareness of a wider range of career and further learning opportunities.
- Learners gain a deeper understanding of social and ethical issues in society through taking part in carefully planned enrichment activities. Learners participate in the National Citizenship Service programme and become effective team members, as they work together to raise funds to support local charities. Learners also complete projects for elderly and disabled residents in care homes.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Learners have a good understanding of the centre's guidelines for behaviour, are courteous, respectful of each other and work well with their tutors.

## Outcomes for learners

## Requires improvement

- In 2014/15, less than half of the learners that started completed their programme. Relatively more learners stayed on the programme in the previous year. In the current academic year, most learners are staying on the programme and attending classes well.
- Too few learners achieve qualifications in employability skills, English and mathematics. Rates of achievement are improving but are not yet good.
- Learners are not fully prepared for their next stages of employment, training and careers. For example, staff do not work with learners early enough to identify their long-term aims and do not set them interim targets to achieve these aims. Learners are not sufficiently challenged to set their career and employment aims at the outset. As a result, most learners join further education at the later stages of learning, missing opportunities to take up apprenticeships or employment.
- Most learners make expected progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. However, inspectors saw little evidence of ongoing development of skills in these subjects for those who already have achieved GCSE grades at C or above.
- There is no clear trend of progression into positive destinations. Although the rates of progression are good for learners who left in 2015/16, most of them progressed to further education, with a small percentage of learners joining apprenticeships and gaining employment.
- Learners from different groups achieve their outcomes equally well with no significant differences. Rates of achievement and progression across centres, however, are too variable to be good. Learners' punctuality and attendance are good.



## Provider details

Unique reference number	59174
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	247
Principal/CEO	Mr Alan Cave
Telephone number	0121 359 3024
Website	<a href="http://apm-uk.co.uk">apm-uk.co.uk</a>

## 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+
	91	2	36	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
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:	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of skills, 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

Harmesh Manghra, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Hughes	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alun Maddocks	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Barker	Ofsted Inspector
Stella Owen	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Murrie	Ofsted Inspector
Tracey Baron	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Learner View**

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to [www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Employer View**

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to [www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2016