

British Telecommunications (BT) PLC

Employer

Inspection dates

6–9 December 2016

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have rectified effectively issues relating to low achievement rates two years ago with insight and integrity, thus ensuring a high proportion of apprentices make good progress and achieve their information and communication technology qualifications in the timeframes expected.
- Apprentices benefit from a wide range of good training opportunities, which help them prepare and plan for their future careers in one of the many businesses that make up the BT group.
- Enthusiastic and highly motivated apprentices quickly assimilate into their job roles and are able to tackle new and challenging tasks, becoming valued team members early in their apprenticeship programmes.
- Line managers and coaches support the apprentices particularly well, ensuring that they have sufficient time away from their jobs to study, attend training courses and develop the high standards of technical skills required.
- Apprentices develop excellent personal and social skills. Their effective communication skills and high levels of self-confidence are enhanced through participation in many varied volunteering activities.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate great commitment to supporting young people to developing skills for employment, so they can secure a career in the telecommunications industry, by designing learning programmes that meet learner and industry needs.
- Trainees benefit from good-quality work experience and the effective development of employability skills, although not enough go on to gain employment or training.
- Higher-level apprentices mostly achieve high grades in their foundation degrees of software engineering or networking design.

Full report

Information about the provider

- BT offers a wide range of apprenticeship programmes from intermediate to degree level across all parts of its businesses and products. Funded and unfunded apprenticeships are delivered in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. This inspection was for funded apprenticeship in England only.
- BT delivers its own advanced- and higher-level apprenticeships in information communications technology (ICT), telecommunications, engineering, financial services, customer services and business administration. These are delivered by specialist in-house apprentice development teams of coaches, trainers and assessors, with some technical knowledge training sub-contracted to colleges and universities. Intermediate-level qualifications in retail and supply chain, and advanced-level in vehicle maintenance, power and retail, are outsourced to external training providers.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the strategic planning applied to the management of the provision by:
 - ensuring that data is analysed comprehensively to inform managerial decisions with regards to the performance of all groups of apprentices and the attendance by trainees
 - strengthening the improvement planning processes so that the key drivers for continuous improvement of outcomes and the quality of the provision across both programmes are prioritised.
- Ensure that trainers, coaches and assessors take full account of learners' starting points so that they can target and plan the development of learners' workplace skills, English and mathematics skills and training activities to challenge the most capable.
- Increase the external scrutiny of the learning programmes to ensure that leaders and managers responsible for the provision are held to account, ensuring that they deliver teaching, learning and assessment of the highest standards that leads to excellent outcomes for all learners.
- Managers should ensure that staff are equipped to develop the learners' understanding of what the local risks of extremism and radicalisation are in their communities while reinforcing the role that all fundamental British values play in modern society.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following a decline in the achievement rates for apprenticeship qualifications since the previous inspection, significant and prompt improvement has taken place. Managers at all levels maintain a particularly good focus on the operational issues affecting the performance of the learning programmes. This consistent attention and support in the last two years has been one of the contributory factors towards the good timely completion rates apprentices now enjoy.
- Leaders and managers have continued to develop and improve the long-established apprenticeship programmes to ensure that the recruitment of apprentices meets the future needs and succession planning of the organisation. A comprehensive policy for the programmes is particularly well informed by learners' needs and preferences with regards to their career aspirations within BT.
- Leaders and managers at BT display great commitment to inclusivity by supporting young people and adults in the community to prepare for employment across different industry sectors. A wide range of development opportunities, including traineeships, work experience and return to work initiatives, exist to meet the needs of learners who may encounter barriers to engaging with education and/or employment. These initiatives, and the apprenticeship programmes, have the active support of the highest levels of the leadership in the organisation, meeting both BT's corporate agenda and the government's employability objectives.
- Good partnerships with sub-contractors have resulted in high-quality, tailored learning programmes that meet the particular needs of BT's employees very well. Frequent communications, supported by information gained from robust teaching observations, enable managers to understand well the quality of the teaching and learning and the progress learners make. Regular reviews of the programmes with sub-contractors allow managers to improve the learning programmes, ensuring that they continue to meet their high expectations.
- Performance management of staff is effective. Managers have a good understanding of the individual performance of their coaches and assessors. They focus well on reviewing the contribution staff make to securing and maintaining the good rates of progress that learners make. However, they do not always highlight staff's strengths and weaknesses with regards to teaching and assessment. In the very few cases where underperformance has rightly been identified, managers agree a series of constructive and developmental actions to bring about improvements to staff's practice.
- Managers make good use of a variety of quality improvement interventions that allow them to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment well across the provision. Managers gathered much learner feedback last year that has helped them make improvements to the selection and induction processes. Systems for observing teaching, learning and assessment are thorough and proportionate according to staff's developmental and professional practice needs.
- The newly enlarged training team has placed great emphasis on planning, executing and maintaining good operational standards, thus securing the considerable improvements in the last two years. Managers of the provision have not yet deployed sufficient strategic

planning to develop the provision further. For example, the analysis of the extensive data managers receive is insufficient to inform their decisions with regards to the progress and achievement different groups of learners make. Similarly, on the traineeship programmes managers do not focus enough on monitoring and analysing attendance of learners in their lessons and work placements.

- BT's evaluation of their provision in the self-assessment report for apprenticeships is appropriately critical, broadly accurate and well informed by their stakeholders, learners and staff. However, the self-assessment report for the traineeships lacks critical evaluation. Quality improvement planning processes across both programmes are under-utilised to plan effectively for further improvement.

The governance of the provider

- Managers of the learning programmes receive appropriate support and challenge from the senior leaders exercising the governance role. The apprenticeship and traineeship programmes are well supported by leaders at the highest level in BT who are also involved in securing the improvement and success of the programmes.
- BT ensures challenge on the robustness of the learning programmes is further provided by external training and educational consultants. However, the external scrutiny part of the governance of the programmes requires further improvement to ensure leaders and managers are held to account to deliver excellent standards of learning.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place to safeguard apprentices who are also BT's employees. Clear safeguarding roles exist within the learning programmes to support and protect learners. The attention and adherence to safe working practices is excellent. The arrangements for safeguarding traineeship learners are particularly effective, with good identification and management of safeguarding risks among the most vulnerable young people undertaking these programmes.
- Staff and managers have undertaken training with regards to the government's 'Prevent' duty agenda. However, coaches, tutors and assessors need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge to raise learners' awareness of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation in the communities where they operate, providing a useful contextualisation for developing further their understanding of all fundamental British values.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Good teaching, learning and assessment ensure that apprentices make good progress towards their qualifications and develop the high standards of skills needed to make an effective contribution to their workplace teams. Apprentices and trainees enjoy their learning and receive very good support from trainers, assessors, mentors and line managers. Apprentices are very well prepared for their future careers in BT.
- Staff with successful careers in the industry adeptly bring classroom theory to life, which

both inspires and enthuses the trainees. Classroom training is well planned and delivered by experienced lecturers or practitioners. Trainers encourage apprentices to experiment and learn from mistakes within the training environments, which improves their confidence and effectiveness in the workplace.

- Resources for learning are outstanding and offer opportunities to put theory into practice and this motivates apprentices and develops their skills very well. For example, a well-designed workshop provides a realistic work environment with cables from a telecoms exchange to a house. Apprentices can practice blowing and connecting optical cables while learning how to use diagnostic tools to confirm the network is robust.
- Apprentices are very positive about the value of their workplace training. Strong support from managers and mentors ensures that they quickly become operational, with encouragement to practise skills and to take on new challenges and opportunities. One apprentice detailed how he was supported in his initiative to design a replacement tool on a computer-aided design package and another designed a new app for the business.
- Higher-level apprenticeship qualifications are customised to align with workplace activities and provide added relevance to classroom teaching. On one course lecturers changed the programming language to Java in order to meet the company need. However, a minority of advanced-level apprentices with previous experience or qualifications in information technology find the classroom elements of the programmes too easy and do not progress as quickly as they could.
- Learners on traineeship programmes improve their understanding of work and the vast majority are successful in gaining employability skills, which will help them to prepare for an apprenticeship or employment. However, across locations, the types of work placements and activities vary and do not always align with the trainee's career intention.
- Staff assess accurately apprentices' starting points with regards to English and mathematics. Most apprenticeship qualifications involve a mathematics element and apprentices access additional workshops for individual help when needed. Development of English skills focuses on the standard required in the job role and too little attention is given to developing English skills further for future career progression.
- Assessors provide good constructive feedback to apprentices on how to develop their skills. The effective use of applications on mobile devices which automatically map assessment evidence to relevant parts of the qualifications ensures apprentices know exactly what they need to do to improve and within what timescale.
- Trainers and coaches have regular reviews with apprentices to monitor their progress closely and take swift action to ensure apprentices make good progress. However, line managers are not sufficiently involved in reviews in order to enable coaches to better coordinate workplace development with the off-the-job training and assessments.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Apprentices thoroughly enjoy being part of BT, are incredibly enthusiastic and demonstrate exemplary and professional attitudes to learning. They gain a detailed understanding of the company and their own work area. They talk confidently about the acquisition of new work and technical skills, their role in the team and career aspirations.
- Information, advice and guidance about the programmes are very comprehensive and

managers respond promptly to applicants' feedback, revising and updating the content regularly. Staff successfully match each apprentice's strengths with suitable job roles and as a result, satisfaction levels with the programmes are exceptionally high. Managers and coaches provide excellent opportunities to ensure that apprentices gain a wide experience of the business to aid their career progression.

- All apprentices receive a comprehensive induction, which introduces them to the breadth of the business and issues specific to their apprenticeship pathway. Many gain excellent insight into the business through visits to BT's satellite infrastructure, TV studios and archives. Apprentices have access to the full range of support and online training as enjoyed by permanent employees, including 24-hour access to a confidential well-being helpline.
- Many apprentices take part in volunteering activities and in doing so gain a full understanding and appreciation of the diverse communities in which they live and work. Staff promote company values such as tolerance and mutual respect particularly well. Apprentices develop very good self-confidence as they deliver careers talks in local schools or arrange activities to support new apprentices.
- Learners on traineeship programmes receive very good guidance on the application processes and assessments for in-company positions. Trainees can also access ongoing advice and guidance after their programme is complete. On apprentice programmes, managers arrange excellent work experience in different areas of the company's business to support progression and career decisions.
- Most apprentices complete additional courses and qualifications which enhance the apprenticeship programmes. Much of this additional training is recognised within the industry and improves future employment prospects, within and outside of the company. For example, engineering apprentices benefit from extra skills training and accreditation including wiring regulations, diagnostic and testing methods, inspection and testing certification and gas certification.
- Considerable attention is given to health and safety and safe working practices. In addition to the requirements of the programmes, apprentices receive ongoing support specific to their job role and successfully take the initiative in resolving potential hazards such as the replacement of worn climbing equipment.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The decline in achievement rates for advanced apprentices has been rectified and in the last year a very large majority of apprentices completed all their qualifications in the timeframes expected.
- Achievement rates for higher-level apprentices remain well above national averages and the majority achieve a distinction or merit in their software or networking foundation degree courses.
- Apprentices quickly settle into their job roles, getting involved in projects within the first few months that challenge and motivate them to make good progress. They develop high standards of information communications technology (ICT) knowledge and skills.
- Apprentices' standard of work is excellent and much of what they do is highly valued by managers and contributes to ongoing projects across the different businesses in BT.

Almost all apprentices remain employed by BT on completion of their programmes and around one fifth gain promotion immediately.

- Managers are unaware of the variations in the achievement rates for different groups of apprentices as the data is not fully analysed or explored.
- Progression for traineeships, although improved, is not yet good enough with less than a third going into employment, apprenticeship or other training, usually with other organisations. Although most achieve basic work skills qualifications, too few achieve qualifications in English and mathematics.

Types of provision

Apprenticeships

Good

- Of the 919 funded apprentices, 30% are aged 16 to 18. There are 805 funded apprentices on advanced apprenticeships, of whom 545 are working towards frameworks in telecommunications. One hundred and fourteen higher-level apprentices are working toward frameworks in ICT. Apprentices spend most of their time in the workplace, often experiencing different roles and responsibilities, with time off for studying and attending training at a local college, university or a specialist training organisation.
- Staff have very high expectations of apprentices and are good role models in setting standards for work, mutual respect and professional behaviours. Apprentices are given challenging tasks and are encouraged to experiment within a controlled environment, which improves their confidence and effectiveness in the workplace.
- Apprentices are well motivated and value the high-quality technical skills and broader knowledge of the telecommunications industry that they gain. For example, apprentices are quickly given responsibility for installing routers in customers' homes or jointing copper and fibre. Managers and mentors support apprentices to develop high levels of competency such as planning for complex fibre network installations.
- Most apprentices benefit from an extensive range of secondments, buddying opportunities and additional training across the business that enables them to further broaden their telecommunications skills and employability. This allows apprentices to develop flexible skills and equips them with the knowledge to apply for interesting job roles that meet their career aspirations.
- Apprentices develop their personal and social skills exceptionally well by taking part in a wide range of volunteering activities. For example, apprentices take part in activity days working with disadvantaged young people and help answer the phones during Children in Need. A few apprentices become ambassadors for science, technology, engineering and mathematics and a few undertake activities with the Army to develop their leadership skills.
- Coaches make effective use of information to monitor apprentices' progress and all apprentices understand what they need to do to complete their programme. Useful feedback following assessments helps apprentices recognise the skills and knowledge they have gained and understand how they can improve further. However, reviews of progress do not ensure workplace skills development is planned and linked to other elements of the apprenticeship programmes.

- Apprentices develop and apply their English and mathematics skills well in the context of their particular job roles. They analyse and present data, produce high-quality technical reports and communicate effectively. However, coaches do not routinely encourage or target apprentices to develop their writing skills further to meet other job roles or their future careers.
- Most coaches make good use of the information they have about apprentices' starting points. However, in a minority of cases programmes are not always planned sufficiently well to meet an apprentice's specific job role or individual ability. The most talented apprentices are not always challenged to progress as quickly as they are capable.

Traineeships

Good

- BT's funded traineeship programmes are for unemployed 16 to 24 year olds and are part of a range of unfunded courses BT runs to help young people to become ready for work. Trainees spend on average two days per week on work experience and three days per week studying a Level 1 certificate in work skills and business administration and developing English and mathematics skills. Each course lasts seven weeks.
- Trainees develop a good range of employability skills. The good work placements enable learners to experience the breadth of services offered across BT and develop basic skills in customer service, communications, team-working and problem-solving.
- Participation in the employability programmes helps learners increase their confidence and self-belief and prepares them for employment. Good support and coaching helps learners overcome barriers to employment such as accessing public transport to travel to work.
- Learners benefit from good coaching to prepare them for job interviews. Constructive feedback following interview practice helps learners refine their behaviours and improve their responses. Learners develop appropriate interpersonal skills and understand the effects of their body language on others' behaviour.
- Trainers plan learning sessions well and link employability effectively with the application of knowledge and vocational skills, such as the impact of good customer service on a business's long-term sustainability. However, trainers do not always take full account of learners' prior experience and attainment to plan a sufficiently individualised programme.
- Learners make reasonable progress in developing their English and mathematical skills. They improve their speaking and listening skills through group discussions and mock job interviews. Trainers provide constructive feedback on grammatical and spelling errors in written work so learners know how they can improve. Learners develop mathematical skills by calculating work-related costings in order to achieve budgets. However, very few learners achieve qualifications in English or mathematics.
- Most learners enjoy their work placements but a few do not find the work interesting and it does not align with their career intention. Trainers ensure learners understand and demonstrate good work behaviours expected of employees, including good time-keeping, team-working and showing respect for others. Managers monitor learners' attendance, but do not analyse attendance rates to understand if it is high or low for different groups of learners.
- Learners have high aspirations and several plan to progress onto an apprenticeship.

Careers advice and guidance forms an integral part of the programmes, enabling learners to identify potential career paths and types of employers they aspire to work for. However, progression into employment and apprenticeships is not yet good enough.

Provider details

Unique reference number	57752
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,218
Director, leadership, learning and talent	Stephen Cunningham
Telephone number	020 8726 1098
Website	www.btplc.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	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+		
	-	-	229	576	50	64		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	10		13		23			
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:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stoke on Trent CollegeUniversity of SuffolkRavensbourne College De Montfort University							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of BT apprenticeships, 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 and telephone calls to gather the views of learners, trainers, coaches and managers; these views are reflected within the report. Inspectors observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
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