

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Nichola Hay
Director
Outsource Training and Development
5 Exhibition House
Addison Bridge Place
London
W14 8XP

Dear Ms Hay

Short inspection of Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd

Following the short inspection on 24 and 25 January 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in November 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

You and Outsource Vocational Learning's (OVL's) other directors (the management team) have worked hard and successfully to maintain the good quality of the provision since the last inspection. The main government-funded programmes now offered by OVL are intermediate- to higher-level apprenticeships, primarily involving business- and logistics-related programmes.

OVL's management team has made further progress in a number of areas, particularly developing and using well a very wide range of performance data and ensuring good assessment practice which promotes a consistently high standard of apprentices' skills. The quality of teaching and learning remains good. More recently, the leadership team has focused strongly, and your data indicates successfully, on reversing a short-term decline in apprentices' achievement.

The management team is aware, through effective self-assessment, that there are still aspects of the provision which have not improved as much as it would like, for example a few elements of observation of teaching and learning practice and how well themes involving equality and diversity are introduced and explored with apprentices.

Since the last inspection, the management team has further developed strong working partnerships with a range of international companies and government organisations, working in often specialist and demanding sectors, such as aircraft handling and international logistics, media and marketing. These partnerships

provide high-quality job opportunities for apprentices, many of whom subsequently enter full-time employment on successful completion of their programme.

The management team has reduced the number of subcontractors that OVL works with from five to three, although the process of disengaging from some of these relationships had a negative impact on learners' qualification achievement rates in the academic year 2015/16.

In the spring of last year, OVL was acquired by another training organisation in a move planned to enable further expansion and diversification in OVL's training offer, particularly working with national employers. This is work in progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and action is taken to safeguard learners. Apprentices feel safe when they are in the provider's premises, during on- and off-the-job training sessions and at their place of work. Apprentices know who the OVL safeguarding officers are and can recall safeguarding having been discussed during their induction session. Most apprentices speak with confidence about how to report a safeguarding concern or make a disclosure. Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe at work, including when they are working online. Employers ensure that apprentices are made well aware of any specific security and safety requirements of the organisation, for example working in and around commercial aircraft or with specialist technical equipment. OVL assessors reinforce safety messages well during their regular visits.

Apprentices' understanding of fundamental British values is mostly very good in subcontracted provision, but those in OVL provision often struggled to explain what such values meant in practice. This was similarly the case with apprentices' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty, or the risks of radicalisation. In the best cases, apprentices could explain clearly what they had learned about 'Prevent' duty during their programme, what it meant in relation to their lives and work and, for example, how they had become more cautious when using social media.

OVL and subcontractor staff receive safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training during their induction, but a need for further updating in safeguarding for OVL staff was identified, and appropriate training arranged, during the inspection. You accept that you have more work to do to ensure that the 'Prevent' duty is better explained to, and explored with, all new and current apprentices.

Inspection findings

- Teaching and learning are very effective. Employers and assessors provide very effective off- and on-the-job coaching and training for all apprentices; consequently, apprentices develop high-quality work and employability skills which they apply successfully to their job roles. Most apprentices work with large, high-profile companies and organisations; these apprentices are highly motivated and recognise that they have to achieve and maintain high professional and

personal standards. In the course of their regular visits, assessors provide apprentices with the very close support needed to achieve such standards. Pastoral support arrangements are particularly effective.

- OVL and its subcontractors offer a good range of well-attended group workshop sessions which are, for the most part, managed and planned efficiently. In one session observed, apprentices made good progress in manipulating spreadsheet formulae and functions through the tutor's good and varied coaching techniques. Teaching in workshop sessions observed by inspectors was not always tailored well enough to meet individual apprentices' needs.
- Apprentices are able to articulate clearly what they have learned in the course of their programme and how this learning has helped improve their work. For example, an apprentice on a level 2 travel and tourism programme did some additional level 3 units, which helped her sell bespoke travel packages and gain a bonus. IT and marketing apprentices have developed a good range of subject-specific terminology and technical language which inspectors saw being used accurately in the context of their work. Higher-level software engineering apprentices were making very good progress and contributing successfully to their company. More generally, apprentices were developing their self-confidence well, for example through a good understanding of the principles and practice of customer service at work.
- Current apprentices are making good progress towards completing their programmes. Your data for the past 12 months indicates that a very high proportion of them have completed, or will be completing, within their planned timescales. Leaders and managers monitor apprentices' progress very closely and take appropriate action to support any who may be falling behind. Apprentices all have a very good idea of what stage they have reached in their apprenticeship programme and what they need to do to complete. Funding agency data for the full academic year 2015/16 shows a decline in the number of your apprentices who completed their programmes. You report that this was due largely to the cessation of two working relationships in the early part of the academic year, which meant around 100 apprentices transferred out of your control and their subsequent achievements could not be counted.
- Employers work closely with OVL managers and assessors to ensure that apprentices have good opportunities to experience a range of relevant and developmental work tasks and complete their units. All of the employer representatives who met with inspectors were highly complimentary about OVL's very positive impact on apprentices' skills development, and ultimately on their businesses.
- The great majority of OVL apprentices move on to full-time employment on completion of their programmes, with most of the remainder going on to higher levels of education or training. The management team is aware that the data used to show how well apprentices make progress compared to their starting points is unreliable.
- At the previous inspection, the management team's arrangements for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning needed to improve so that all training could become good or outstanding. Some good progress has been made in this respect

and the quality of teaching and learning remains good, but not enough is yet outstanding. In the vast majority of assessments and reviews observed by inspectors, apprentices enjoyed the session and made good progress in their skills development, confidence and understanding. OVL's quality assurance team pays very close attention to ensuring that assessors' coaching and training are effective, so that each apprentice learns what they need to learn and applies it well.

- The quality assurance team's formally recorded evaluations of assessments and reviews generally focus well on whether the session met OVL's detailed expectations and high standards, but the records do not identify good practice. The team currently has no way to ensure that any good practice observed is disseminated to all assessors. Evaluations of workshop sessions are cursory, too descriptive and do not identify the impact of teaching on apprentices' learning.
- OVL's quality improvement arrangements are more effective following the development and implementation of a very extensive, up-to-date dataset which allows the management team to monitor closely the performance of all aspects of the apprenticeship programmes. To ensure that the large volume of data is managed well, the management team has established regular meetings during which the data is analysed under specific headings and improvement actions identified. These headings do not yet include a focus on OVL data which shows an apparently significant gap in achievement between men and women on your programmes. Quality improvement action planning is thorough and extensive. The self-assessment process is also thorough, and largely accurate. Governance is effective. OVL's leadership team is held closely to account by the well-informed boards of your parent organisation.
- Senior OVL managers monitor the three subcontractors routinely and in depth and, as a result, all apprentices receive similarly high levels of support and achieve well; subcontractor staff feel valued and well supported. Subcontractors' quality improvement practices are linked closely with OVL's. OVL uses good-quality performance management data to identify quickly any variance in standards and takes prompt action to tackle any underperformance. Subcontractors are directly involved in their own and OVL's self-assessment process and quality improvement planning.
- Apprentices have an adequate, if generally not extensive, understanding of equality and diversity and are able to answer basic questions about the two themes. Nevertheless, the management team recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that these themes are better incorporated at apprentices' induction and explored more extensively during assessment and workshop sessions.
- OVL's assessors and trainers are providing good support to apprentices who need to improve their English skills and have recently improved the arrangements for developing their mathematics skills. Most apprentices are very articulate and use language well. Tutors and assessors correct apprentices' mistakes in spelling and grammar and identify how they can improve. Workshop sessions to develop mathematics skills have been extended from a single part-day session to three successive days. A group of apprentices observed on this course were making

good progress in calculating ratios and fractions after only two sessions.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a programme of safeguarding training is completed as a priority by all relevant staff so that they are all fully up to date with current practice
- the observation of teaching and learning in workshop sessions clearly identifies the impact of teaching on learning, and the observations of assessment and reviews identify good practice which is then disseminated to all assessors
- equality and diversity themes are introduced and explored in greater depth during apprentices' induction phase and during their subsequent assessment and review visits
- the reasons behind the gap between the achievement of men and women are identified so that the gap can be closed.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Crombie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by you, an OVL director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with managers, subcontractor staff, training coordinators, learners and employers in and around London, and locations in northern England. They observed lessons, assessments and learners' progress reviews. Inspectors reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, quality improvement plans, safeguarding and learners' achievements and progression.