

Nottingham City Transport Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

14–16 February 2017

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Apprentices are very slow to achieve the full apprenticeship framework.
- Staff place insufficient focus on developing apprentices' literacy and numeracy skills, and on helping them achieve their English and mathematics functional skills qualifications.
- Self-assessment does not provide a precise enough view of the quality of the provision; action plans lack sufficient focus to support managers in bringing about rapid and secure improvement, or in measuring the impact of actions taken.
- Staff do not provide feedback to apprentices on the written work in their portfolios that is sufficiently detailed to enable them to improve the quality and presentation of their work.
- Staff direct apprentices too much in their compilation of technical portfolios; as a result, apprentices do not consistently demonstrate that they have fully understood all of the components of the programme.
- Apprentices do not have a precise enough view of the progress they are making across all elements of their programme or of what they need to do next.

The provider has the following strengths

- With excellent practical facilities, instructors provide outstanding practical skills development for apprentices, leading to sustained employment.
- Apprentices receive comprehensive instruction, care and support, enabling them to develop as confident and competent drivers.
- Leaders actively and successfully promote high levels of investment, and a comprehensive programme of continuous professional development for all staff.
- Apprentices' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good; they are keen to learn and develop a very professional approach to their work.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of equality and diversity and how these apply to their work.
- Managers are actively involved in helping to shape future developments of sector-specific apprenticeship qualifications, so that apprenticeship training meets their needs closely.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Nottingham City Transport Ltd (NCT) is a privately operated, former municipal bus company. The company has around 1,100 employees, approximately 830 of whom are drivers. It operates 350 buses across an extensive Nottingham city-wide network, providing around 50 million passenger journeys each year.
- The company has around 80 apprentices, all of whom are training to be bus drivers, undertaking a level 2 apprenticeship in passenger-carrying vehicle driving.
- The rate of unemployment locally is higher than the national rate. The profile of apprentices and employees at NCT from a minority ethnic heritage is similar to that within the local population.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should review the schedule for delivering both the theory and practical elements of the apprenticeship; they should ensure that apprentices are able to achieve the full framework within a suitable length of time. In particular, they should liaise with those staff responsible for drawing up the driving roster, to enable apprentices to attend English and mathematics functional skills sessions where required, as a priority.
- Leaders and managers should increase the level of objectivity of quality review processes, and sharpen resultant action plans, to focus more on those strategies that are most likely to help raise the quality of provision.
- Managers should ensure that all staff provide suitable support to apprentices to develop their literacy and numeracy skills more effectively.
- Managers should review the quality and detail of written feedback provided to apprentices, in particular on the written work in their portfolios. They should work with staff to generate a common understanding on how to provide high-quality, constructive feedback, and how to set meaningful goals and objectives for apprentices. They should monitor the improvements over time.
- Managers should work with staff to identify strategies whereby apprentices take greater responsibility for compiling and presenting the paper-based evidence in their portfolios, so that their understanding of all components of the programme is secure and that they develop greater independence, essential to their progression into sustained employment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Managers have not placed sufficient emphasis on apprentices gaining all elements of the apprenticeship framework in a timely manner. As a result, while apprentices are able to gain their licences and work as bus drivers within a comparatively short timeframe, they are too slow to achieve the full apprenticeship. In particular, managers do not place sufficient emphasis on the importance of apprentices developing and achieving their functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Quality assurance procedures are insufficiently developed to support effectively the continuing improvement of the provision. Managers recognise the potential strengths and shortcomings of the apprenticeship programme; however, the formal review process and quality improvement action plan lack a sharply focused and critical edge. Action plans do not indicate sufficiently clearly the key activities or timescales for improvement and do not make clear how managers will assess the impact of the improvement activities.
- Leaders and managers are strongly committed to developing the company's workforce, to produce competent and confident drivers able to meet the challenging requirements of the role, and to provide a high-quality bus service across the city. Managers have designed a fully integrated recruitment, selection, training, support and continuous development programme that helps underpin the high quality of the service. As a result, the company has repeatedly gained national recognition as 'UK bus operator of the year', for four out of the last eight years.
- The company has a rolling programme of recruitment and training to ensure that it can meet its business needs. Due to the responsible nature of the work and the requirements of the company for high-calibre staff, managers have designed a very challenging selection procedure, with only around one in four applicants successful in being offered employment with the company and a place on the apprenticeship programme.
- All staff actively promote apprentices' awareness of equality and diversity. Managers are strongly committed to maintaining a driver workforce which is representative of the culturally diverse community of Nottingham. The workforce is broadly representative of the ethnic community within the city; however, managers struggle to attract female applicants, due predominantly to the shift-work associated with the role.
- Arrangements for performance management, staff development and continuous professional development opportunities within the company are very good for all staff, including drivers, administrative staff and managers. Staff have extensive access to a broad range of ongoing training, support and guidance that helps maintain their skills and extend their knowledge. Managers are keen to ensure that they maintain the highly competent pool of well-qualified assessors and instructors. Assessors and instructors have valuable knowledge and expertise of the industry, as well as the interpersonal skills which enable them to deliver high-quality training to new recruits.
- Managers maintain strong and effective links with other organisations in the city. For example, they work closely with Jobcentre Plus as part of the ongoing recruitment campaign for new drivers. Managers also liaise closely with the local council and police to help ensure suitable contingency arrangements are in place in the event of a serious incident in the city, or to take action should there be a heightened threat from terrorism.

Apprentices' knowledge and understanding of these risks are secure.

- Managers at NCT play a significant national role in the development of the new apprenticeship frameworks associated with the public transport sector. This is highly beneficial to the company and to future recruits as it enables managers to help design and shape the qualifications of the future, thereby ensuring they provide the range of skills required by the company.

The governance of the provider

- The organisation's senior management team (SMT) carries out the governance role for the training programmes. Managers responsible for the training and development of all staff, including the apprenticeship programme, regularly report to the SMT on the performance of apprentices on the programme. The SMT provides suitable checks and balances to the operational management of the apprenticeship programme, as well as helping to shape the longer-term strategic direction of the training and continuous professional development of the workforce. SMT members clearly support the training with a high level of investment and commitment and recognise the significant value it brings to the company.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers ensure that all staff, including apprentices, receive comprehensive induction, training and regular updating on safeguarding, health and safety and risk assessment relevant to the industry. Standards and expectations associated with ensuring that employees and customers stay safe are a high priority at all times. Apprentices receive thorough guidance on the 'Prevent' duty, and the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. This is particularly relevant to help ensure that all drivers remain vigilant about the risks associated with potential terrorist threats to members of the public in the city.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of particular elements of theory teaching requires improvement to be good. When apprentices are compiling their portfolios and written evidence, teachers often provide them with too much guidance and support. As a result, apprentices do not show sufficient self-motivation or independence in their own learning and development and do not always demonstrate clearly that they fully grasp all components of the course. Assessors and trainers have recognised this problem and have started to devise well-considered strategies and procedures to address this issue.
- Staff do not consistently ensure that written workplace reviews capture or evaluate accurately apprentices' progress across all parts of their programme. While assessors record apprentices' progress on their practical bus driving qualifications effectively, too many apprentices do not have a clear indication of how well they are progressing in their English and mathematics qualifications or on elements of their technical qualifications. Targets for improvement are not clear enough, and do not relate to all aspects of

apprentices' qualifications.

- Trainers and assessors do not provide enough support to apprentices to develop effectively their literacy and numeracy skills, essential to help underpin their future professional development. As a result, too much of apprentices' written work continues to contain spelling, punctuation and grammar errors and is poorly presented.
- Trainers provide apprentices with a very good level of verbal feedback, particularly while undertaking practical training on public highways. As a result, apprentices make rapid and effective improvement to their driving skills.
- Assessors and teachers use their excellent sector knowledge and questioning techniques to check, develop and extend apprentices' driving and customer care skills, knowledge and understanding.
- All apprentices have very good access to excellent resources to enhance their training. For example, four very well-equipped training buses with dual controls and 'classroom' areas provide apprentices with the opportunity to practise their driving skills on both private and public highways, under the careful guidance of well-qualified, experienced and highly skilled instructors. Consequently, apprentices develop excellent industry-specific, practical skills and very quickly become extremely competent drivers.
- Staff provide a high level of personal and pastoral support to apprentices. In addition, staff make apprentices aware of other routes that are accessible to apprentices should they require support outside the organisation, for example on personal or legal issues. The majority of employees are also members of a union, which provides a further layer of support that the apprentices can access if required.
- Assessors and trainers develop apprentices' knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity, and how to tackle discrimination particularly well. Induction and training materials are well designed and ensure that apprentices are aware of how to keep themselves safe from bullying and radicalisation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices' attendance and punctuality on the practical elements of the framework are good. Apprentices have a very positive and professional work ethic, in part due to the very challenging selection process. When they begin their training, apprentices are very keen to develop their practical and theoretical driving skills.
- Apprentices rapidly improve their knowledge of underpinning theory. This supports the development of their practical skills well. The significant majority of apprentices successfully complete their externally ratified assessments within the first two months of the apprenticeship. This enables them to progress on to high-quality, work-related learning, driving the various bus routes across the city. They acquire purposeful work experience, which helps lead to sustained employment.
- The large majority of apprentices use the information, advice and guidance provided by dedicated staff well to plan the steps they need to take to achieve their career goals. Managers and staff work swiftly and effectively to ensure that any apprentices at risk of dropping out of learning receive a good level of support, to help them remain in learning and make progress. All apprentices receive a very supportive period of mentoring in their

early stages as newly qualified drivers.

- Apprentices indicate that they feel safe. All staff focus strongly, from the outset, on the importance of apprentices developing a thorough understanding of all relevant elements of health and safety. They quickly learn the routines and practices that will help keep themselves, colleagues and customers safe.
- Apprentices and staff demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding and well-being associated with, for example, internet safety and bullying. All apprentices have a good understanding of British values, the 'Prevent' duty and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Both staff and apprentices know how to report their concerns, should they have a safeguarding issue.
- All apprentices have access to an extensive range of professional development in addition to their core training and apprenticeship programme. This provides them with a number of transferable skills, in particular associated with customer service, such as how to deal with unexpected situations from abusive or threatening customers.
- While career progression opportunities within the company are relatively limited, the organisation is able to provide excellent career development for those drivers who exhibit the highest level of practical driving, customer service and interpersonal skills. As part of the carefully considered succession planning strategy, the most competent drivers receive very high-quality training to become assessors and instructors for the next generation of new recruits.
- Too few apprentices make good progress in extending their literacy and numeracy skills. Attendance in functional English and mathematics lessons is too low. A minority of apprentices do not attend their classroom-based training sufficiently frequently, slowing their progress towards achieving the full apprenticeship.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The progress that apprentices make on achieving all elements of the apprenticeship, including the NVQ, technical certificate and functional skills English and mathematics, is too slow. Over the past few years no learners have achieved all elements of the apprenticeship framework within the stipulated timescale. The proportion of learners who achieve outside the timeframe has improved significantly over the past 12 months and is now broadly in line with national rates.
- Managers do not place sufficient emphasis on the timely acquisition of apprentices' functional skills English and mathematics qualifications. This is often due to business pressures, and drivers being required to work, rather than attending classroom-based teaching sessions.
- Despite the very exacting recruitment and selection process, too many apprentices drop out of the programme, particularly within the first few months. Those who drop out frequently indicate that they are not happy with the shift patterns associated with the role. A small minority of apprentices are unsuccessful within the first few months because they do not demonstrate the capacity to develop the higher-level skills they require to achieve the passenger-carrying vehicle licence.
- Under the expert tutelage of the company's bus-driving instructors, the significant majority of apprentices make excellent progress in acquiring the knowledge and practical

driving skills they need to become fully operational drivers. Over the first two months of the programme, most apprentices successfully pass both the theoretical and practical elements of the driving test; they achieve their public service vehicle licence and successfully progress on to operating bus routes across the city.

- All apprentices pick up an extensive array of complementary knowledge and skills as their training progresses. For example, apprentices learn the different bus routes across the city, they complete training on hazard perception, how to manage aggression from members of the public, or deal with suspect packages, and how to operate the company's ticketing systems.
- Managers carefully track the progress of different groups of learners, for example by gender, age and ethnicity. There is no significant variation in the performance of these different groups.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1223878
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	86
Managing Director	Mark Fowles
Telephone number	0115 9766739
Website	www.nctx.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+		
	-	86	-	-	-	-		
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:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the work-based learning manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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

Peter Nelson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Barry Dolan	Ofsted Inspector

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