

Matrix Training and Development Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

17–18 May and 31 May–2 June 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Safeguarding arrangements are ineffective. Leaders and managers have failed to develop a culture of vigilance with regard to safeguarding all learners.
- Leaders have not provided effective strategic direction to develop the quality of the provision since the previous inspection. There is no strategy for the development of English and mathematical skills.
- Governance is weak and does not offer support or challenge to senior managers to effect improvement. The provision has deteriorated since the previous inspection.
- Managers have not used data well to examine and address the poor learner retention and declining achievement rates.
- Performance management of staff is weak and does not lead to improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The planning of learning is insufficient to ensure that the most able apprentices are challenged to extend their learning and all apprentices develop skills over and above the technical element of their qualification.
- Assessors' tracking and monitoring of apprentices' progress are weak. Managers do not challenge assessors sufficiently to ensure that apprentices make good progress with their learning programme.
- The majority of learners do not further develop their English and mathematical skills from their starting points in these areas.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers have built up a base of good employers to work with and this is enabling learners to develop good technical skills.
- The number of learners who remain in employment after completing their apprenticeship is high.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Matrix Training and Development Limited (Matrix) began delivering training in 2000. Based in Telford, Matrix is part of the group of companies of Strategic Workforce Solutions. Matrix provides government-funded programmes through a direct contract with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and as a subcontractor to Heart of Worcestershire College. Learners forming part of the subcontracting arrangements with Heart of Worcestershire College were not in scope for this inspection.
- Matrix provides intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in business administration, customer service, team leading and management, warehousing and storage, and manufacturing. The provision is mainly based in the West Midlands. Two non-executive directors own the company, while the senior team is formed by two further directors focused on business development and operations. The senior team is supported by a delivery team comprising 12 assessors and a lead quality assurance manager, in addition to a team of five recruitment and telesales staff. As well as government-funded training, Matrix also offers employers privately funded training.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers must develop a culture that prioritises the safeguarding of all learners by ensuring that relevant safe recruitment practices are always adhered to, that appropriate training takes place and health and safety risk assessments of younger and vulnerable apprentices are fully effective.
- Develop effective governance arrangements that ensure thorough scrutiny of the provision, holding senior managers to account and supporting them in securing improvement to develop rapidly the provision to a high standard.
- Leaders must urgently agree and implement a development strategy for the provision that focuses on delivering a high-quality learning experience. This should include an effective plan to support all apprentices to develop further their English and mathematical skills.
- Managers must improve their use of data to examine fully the key reasons for poor learner retention and declining achievement rates, addressing these in a challenging improvement plan that involves managers and staff.
- Managers must improve their staff performance mechanisms to ensure that their observations of teaching, learning and assessment are rigorous and lead to agreed areas for development in assessors' practice.
- Managers must increase the level of direction and challenge posed to assessors with regard to the identification of apprentices at risk of not achieving well and the support they offer to secure good learner progress.
- Ensure that tutors plan learning thoroughly, offering an appropriate challenge to apprentices and extending their acquisition of skills, to ensure that they develop wider employability skills such as communication, over and above their technical knowledge.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders have provided managers and staff with poor strategic direction to develop Matrix's own apprenticeship contract. For example, they have failed to recognise the importance of supporting apprentices to develop their English and mathematical skills. Their main focus has been on financial matters and ensuring the sustainability of contracts. Leaders have exercised insufficient oversight and provided little guidance on how to sustain the good quality of the provision found at the previous inspection in 2014.
- Managers focus almost exclusively on the day-to-day operations and the contractual relationship with the college. In doing so, they have not kept up to date with developments in the training sector. Their expectations for the apprenticeship programme have not developed since the previous inspection and are now too low. They have been too accepting of the poor retention of apprentices on the programme. Their targets for raising achievement are insufficiently ambitious and, until the short inspection took place, their tolerance for learners' poor progress was too generous.
- Leaders and managers make insufficient use of data to inform their decisions and identify improvement areas. Managers have not analysed data thoroughly to identify the underlying issues that have led to the high numbers of apprentices leaving their programmes early, or the decline in achievement rates. Furthermore, they are unable to monitor data to assure themselves that apprentices access the appropriate number of guided learning hours in their framework.
- Performance management of staff is ineffective. Managers rely heavily on the assessors' regular evaluation of their own performance without directing and guiding their performance to improve outcomes for learners. Several learners have left employment or have been dismissed from employment without Matrix's managerial involvement.
- Managers are too generous when evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment performance of their delivery team, both during observations and in their annual appraisals. Managers do not use these interventions well to agree specific activities for developing staff. Approximately a quarter of the assessors do not hold the appropriate qualifications to support apprentices in the development of their functional skills. Managers do not have an agreed development plan to tackle this.
- The evaluation of the provision, although improved, is not yet sufficiently self-critical. Until the short inspection began, managers did not disaggregate the performance of the two contracts they deliver – their direct contract and the subcontracting arrangements – and so failing to identify accurately the outcomes obtained by learners in each contract. Staff are not sufficiently involved in the evaluation process. Managers are not able to highlight those features of the provision they perceive as strengths and their impact on the quality of apprentices' learning experience.
- Leaders and managers have not used the quality improvement plan to bring about rapid improvement in apprentices' achievement, including the existing differences between the achievement rates of male and female apprentices.
- The provider has developed good employer relations that have led to many apprentices

accessing high-quality employment. Matrix's managers took decisive and prompt action to discontinue their geographical expansion plans, as they identified that they did not have the required resources to deliver the apprenticeship programme in new areas.

- Managers have started to act on the feedback they received from inspectors at the short inspection in May; as a consequence, they have reviewed many processes and policies, but it is too early to measure their impact.

The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements are weak. No effective line of governance for the apprenticeship programme is in place. The owner-directors of the organisation have delegated their governing accountability to the senior team themselves. In doing so, they have failed to ensure that senior managers are appropriately held to account for the effective delivery of the programme.
- The owner-directors do not know enough about how the provision is performing and have not offered sufficient support to build managerial capability. Their lack of challenge to managers has contributed to the slow progress made in addressing the deterioration of the provision.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders and managers have failed to set up a culture where the safeguarding of all learners is prioritised and seen as everybody's responsibility. Safeguarding is not discussed at meetings and no safeguarding reports had ever been presented to the board of directors until the conversion inspection week. Progress towards implementing the 'Prevent' duty has been too slow.
- Leaders' and managers' understanding of safeguarding requirements to protect all learners is extremely poor. They have not followed safe recruitment practices. As a consequence, some of the criminal record checks made via the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) have expired. Permits to work in the United Kingdom for long-standing staff have only now been completed.
- Leaders, managers and staff have not undertaken timely and regular training to ensure that they develop the appropriate safeguarding knowledge that is commensurate with their level of accountability. They have not developed the knowledge and confidence to identify and manage safeguarding risks effectively. Safeguarding concerns from learners have not been handled appropriately.
- The identification of any risks associated with protecting those apprentices who are vulnerable or under the age of 18 has not been fully effective. Health and safety risk assessments for these groups of learners are too generic and fail to identify clearly the supervision arrangements that will be made in the workplace, in particular, in engineering and warehousing environments.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Tutors' planning of learning programmes is inadequate. They do not provide apprentices with appropriate targets with clear and measurable learning outcomes. Tutors do not plan learning sessions with sufficient detail to offer appropriate challenge to apprentices, to extend the acquisition of their skills and to ensure that they achieve high standards. Too often, assessors focus on the completion of qualification units rather than on supporting the apprentices' wider skills development.
- Apprentices' on- and off-the-job training are not sufficiently coordinated or monitored effectively by Matrix's staff. Apprentices do not benefit from reviewing what they have learned from their employer-led training and how it relates to the development of their vocational competence. Learners view the apprenticeship as separate to the training they receive from their employer.
- Assessors do not support the large majority of apprentices sufficiently to improve their mathematical and English skills beyond their starting points. Apprentices are directed to spend most of their learning time focusing on examination requirements. Assessors do not develop apprentices' understanding and application of mathematics and English to a range of situations to give them valuable skills for employment. A few apprentices who receive specialist support from a qualified tutor are making expected progress.
- Assessors' expectations for the most able apprentices are too low and do not take account of their potential. Learning activities are not sufficiently challenging to enable apprentices to achieve a high standard consistent with their ability and their future study goals.
- The tracking, monitoring and recording of apprentices' progress are weak. Not all assessors or apprentices accurately record the learning that has taken place. Records focus too much on what the apprentices have done and not enough on their progress and attainment or the knowledge they have gained. Teaching staff do not consistently and reliably identify apprentices who fall behind and are at risk of not progressing well. They do not consistently take appropriate action to improve apprentices' progress rapidly.
- Assessment practice is appropriate, but apprentices do not receive consistently good-quality feedback on the work they complete. In the better cases, apprentices receive prompt and detailed feedback; however, too often feedback does not explain how apprentices can improve. Too few assessors correct spelling errors, grammar and syntax or encourage apprentices to proof-read their work to improve their skills in written English. As a result, apprentices tend to repeat the same errors.
- Apprentices do not have a sufficiently good knowledge of equality of opportunity and how to value diversity. Assessors lack the confidence or knowledge to discuss such topics in depth and challenge apprentices on their understanding and preconceptions.
- Employers value their apprentices and the contribution they make to their businesses. Apprentices often provide an objective approach to existing policies which encourages employers to review and improve their operating procedures. Apprentices feel safe and have a good understanding of the safe working practices that apply to their workplace.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

- Learners who are already in employment before becoming apprentices do not undertake a sufficiently challenging learning programme to develop new knowledge and wider employability skills, over and above the minimum required technical element of their framework. The apprenticeship programme merely confirms what they already know, without raising the standards of their working practices to support their future career progression.
- Apprentices do not receive enough support to improve their English and mathematical skills beyond their starting points. Although the majority of apprentices have previously achieved GCSEs at grade C or above in English and mathematics, assessors do not help them develop their skills further. They do not set them targets for development where this would help them be more effective in their job role or improve their prospects of promotion.
- Most apprentices receive useful initial advice and guidance that ensure that they are enrolled on suitable programmes. Most of the aspirations held for apprentices are about keeping their employment. There is little guidance and advice on progressing to higher level qualifications or accessing higher education courses. Too few apprentices are clear about the next steps in their career progression.
- The development of apprentices' understanding of life in modern Britain is weak. Most apprentices do not understand the dangers of radicalisation and extremism or how these are relevant to their own lives and work. Assessors do not routinely introduce these topics effectively during training sessions or progress reviews. However, apprentices working in the financial sector discuss the links between money laundering and terrorism as part of the technical elements of their apprenticeship. As a result, they have a good awareness of the associated risks.
- Those apprentices who are already employed at the start of their apprenticeship demonstrate that they have developed good technical skills as part of their existing job roles. Those who join the programme from new, equally take pride in their work and produce practical work to a good industry standard. Apprentices are punctual at work and enjoy their learning. They are confident, communicate well and develop good independent study and research skills.
- The large majority of apprentices are confident in keeping themselves safe when using online learning resources and using social networks.

Outcomes for learners

Inadequate

- Apprentices' rates of achievement have shown a declining trend since the previous full inspection in 2014. Last year, they fell below an already low national average. The number of apprentices who completed their framework within their planned timescale also declined. The achievement of apprentices in warehousing and business administration was lower than those in engineering and manufacturing technologies in 2015/16.
- According to the provider's own data, the proportion of apprentices achieving their

qualification in the current year is improving but it still remains low for approximately half of all learners, particularly those in business administration. The proportion of apprentices remaining on their programmes has declined over the last two years and, although it is improving in the current year, it is still too low.

- Last year, the few apprentices who were required to undertake a functional skills qualification in English did not achieve sufficiently well. In particular, warehousing apprentices experienced a low first-time pass rate in their English exams. In contrast, the few apprentices who took mathematics functional skills qualifications achieved well. In the current year, the very few learners who have taken their functional skills qualifications have passed them successfully.
- Far too many learners are making only expected or slow progress. Since the short inspection, managers have initiated a review of the parameters for tracking and measuring apprentices' progress as they were insufficiently challenging. However, these are not yet fully effective.
- Differences exist in the achievement of younger apprentices and between males and females. According to the latest data gathered by the provider, the achievement gap between male and female apprentices has widened, with males achieving considerably worse than females in the current year.
- The standard of learners' work meets the requirement of the framework. Apprentices undertake a variety of work activities that are captured well in their portfolios and fulfil the expectations of the apprenticeship.
- Last year, the very large majority of the learners who were recruited directly into the apprenticeship programme remained in employment at the point of finishing their apprenticeship. In the current year so far, the number of apprentices retaining their employment has experienced a small decline.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53268
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	163
Principal/CEO	Phil Hutchinson
Telephone number	01952 608 866
Website	https://matrixtraining.org.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+
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	55	81	0	23	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	N/A							

Information about this inspection

This was a short inspection that converted into a full inspection. The initial inspection team was formed by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector, assisted by the provider's operations director, as nominee. The subsequent conversion phase of the inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by the provider's business development director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used individual interviews 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 provision for which the provider holds a direct contract.

Inspection team

Maria Navarro, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Her Majesty's Inspector
Barbara Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Mottram	Ofsted Inspector

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