

The Real Apprenticeship Company Limited (TRAC)

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

26–27 July and 1–2 August 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	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too many current apprentices do not complete their qualification within the specified time.
- Learner managers do not make good use of information about apprentices' starting points to plan challenging teaching and learning.
- Targets set for apprentices are not always clear, precise and demanding to ensure that they make consistently good progress in their learning.
- Feedback following assessment does not always provide apprentices with a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- Employers' involvement in the review of apprentices' progress, and their contribution towards the setting of challenging targets for apprentices requires improvement.
- Too few apprentices, particularly the most able, extend their skills in English and mathematics beyond their initial starting points.
- Too many apprentices, including those who leave the programme early, do not receive sufficient information, advice and guidance to prepare them for the next steps in their learning or career.
- Training staff do not develop or extend sufficiently apprentices' understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation, or how to protect themselves when using online or social media.
- Quality improvement arrangements have not improved the provision since the last inspection; standards and performance have declined.

The provider has the following strengths

- Most apprentices quickly develop good work-related skills, including increased self-confidence and vocational expertise that enhance their employability and career opportunities.
- Progression into employment for apprentices and the few learners on traineeships is high.
- Leaders at TRAC have successfully built strong and effective partnerships with a range of employers within the logistics and trade business services sectors which results in carefully designed curricula that meet industry needs well.
- The chief executive officer and the senior leadership team have a clear vision and set high expectations for the apprenticeship programme.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Real Apprenticeship Company (TRAC) has held a contract to train apprentices since April 2013. The company, which is owned by the chief executive, is based in Warwickshire. A team of learner managers who work from home and operate across the United Kingdom provide training and assessment for apprentices in the workplace. Apprentices who are funded by agencies within the devolved regions of Wales and Scotland were not within the scope of inspection.
- At the time of the inspection, 348 learners were on apprenticeship programmes, the large majority being in retail and commercial enterprise and the remainder following programmes in a wide range of vocational areas, including engineering and manufacturing, education and training, and business administration and customer service. The very large majority of apprentices are studying for an apprenticeship at level 2 with a very small minority working towards an advanced apprenticeship. The company has recently started to provide training to a group of 97 learners on the new employer-led apprenticeship standards in supply chain, warehousing and distribution, and customer service trades. A further three learners were on traineeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that learner managers:
 - Use the information from apprentices' initial assessment to better identify their individual starting points and to plan learning that meets individual needs and helps all apprentices to achieve their potential.
 - Set clear, detailed targets which link on- and off-the-job training, monitor apprentices' progress closely by increasing the regularity of assessment visits to the workplace to ensure that apprentices make good or better progress towards completing their qualifications in the planned time.
 - Involve employers fully in the planning and monitoring of apprentices' training, learning and assessment by ensuring that workplace managers regularly attend and contribute to the setting of challenging learning targets for their employees during progress reviews.
 - Mark apprentices' written work promptly and provide sufficiently detailed and helpful feedback in order that they have a good understanding of their progress and what they need to do to improve.
 - Make learning in virtual lessons more effective by tailoring planned tasks for individual apprentices according to their abilities and prior knowledge so that all are appropriately engaged and challenged.
 - Regularly promote the importance of English and mathematics in all learning and assessment activities, and ensure that all apprentices receive sufficient support to help them make further progress in developing these skills, including those with

higher-level qualifications.

- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
 - Apprentices receive detailed course information that precisely sets out the requirements of the programme and what is expected of them and, as they near the end of their learning or leave early, they receive prompt advice and guidance to help them decide their next steps.
 - Learner managers use activities such as progress reviews and tutorials to develop more effectively apprentices' knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation, and how to protect themselves while online and using social media.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - The quality improvement plan identifies specific targets with achievable timescales, to allow leaders and managers to closely monitor both the progress and impact of improvement activities.
 - Managers gather more detailed and precise information as to the regularity and frequency of contact that learner managers have with their allocated caseload of apprentices.
 - Managers closely review apprentices' progress against expected targets and ensure that prompt and effective action is taken where progress is behind target or where planned workplace visits have not taken place within agreed timescales.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not been successful in sustaining the good standard of provision or been fully effective in addressing all of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.
- Managers' evaluation of the quality of training, learning and assessment is not sufficiently accurate and so requires improvement. Observers do not give sufficient attention to the impact of teaching and assessment on apprentices' learning and the progress they make. Action plans provided for trainers, following observations, often contain insufficient details to precisely indicate which aspect of teaching and assessment practice requires improvement and by when. Too often, senior manager reviews of progress and the impact of these plans is delayed. For example, reviews are scheduled to be considered during planned staff appraisals that can be many months in the future.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that all apprentices receive sufficient support and challenge to attain their potential in developing their English and mathematics skills. Apprentices who already have attained GCSE English and mathematics at grades C or above do not routinely benefit from additional training and support to develop these skills further.
- Senior managers do not ensure that staff accurately record the time apprentices spend undertaking learning; consequently, the monitoring of apprentices' attendance to ensure that it meets the requirements of their programme is weak.
- Senior managers have taken effective action to identify and deal with inadequate staff performance; however, this has resulted in disruption to apprentices' training and assessment that has slowed their progress while new training staff have been appointed.
- The self-assessment process is detailed and makes appropriate use of apprentices', employers' and other stakeholders' views to formulate judgements, strengths and areas for improvement. Senior managers appropriately monitor progress towards completing actions identified in the associated quality improvement plan; however, objectives within the plan are not adequately subject to challenging deadlines. As a result, it is not always clear if adequate progress has been made towards completing the stated outcomes.
- Leaders and senior managers have established and communicated clear strategic objectives that focus on delivering high expectations for apprentices and employers. Business and quality improvement objectives effectively focus on the achievement of TRAC's mission.
- Leaders and managers have established very productive partnership working with employers to meet local and national priorities. Senior managers have used these links well to support employers' introduction of apprenticeship programmes to address specific skills shortages, particularly in supply chain, warehousing and distribution sectors. Leaders at TRAC have been particularly proactive in helping employers to prepare well for the implications of delivering training under the new 'apprenticeship levy' arrangements.
- Senior managers have been innovative in their response to working with key industry

stakeholders in the development of new industry-led training qualifications. For example, in response to the United Kingdom's planned exit from the European Union in March 2019, TRAC is successfully working with employers and industry trade bodies to support the introduction of an advanced apprenticeship in international trade and logistics operations.

- Staff attend an appropriate range and variety of development opportunities to improve their professional practice. Managers monitor staff's attendance at these events effectively and a wide variety of learning delivery methods are used to meet individual staff needs. Managers have correctly identified that they need to further align learner managers' appraisals with available training opportunities and monitor the impact that this has on apprentices' learning.

The governance of the provider

- The chief executive officer and senior management team set the company's clear strategic direction to ensure that programmes meet local and regional priority needs within specific skill shortage sectors. The work of the senior management team is subject to challenge by a number of external organisations who provide a range of operational and strategic advice on a variety of matters, including finance, human resources and legal services.
- The chief executive officer recognises the need to strengthen the scrutiny of both strategic and operational decision-making through external oversight and challenge. During the inspection, TRAC appointed an independent member who will chair senior management meetings. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this very recent initiative.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Apprentices are safe because managers have established and implemented effective safeguarding processes. Managers keep appropriately detailed records of incidents and respond quickly to concerns raised by apprentices and staff. Good use of relevant external links by managers ensures that apprentices are quickly directed to appropriate support provided by specialist agencies.
- Apprentices develop a good appreciation of health and safety practices and how these apply to themselves personally and to their work environment. Apprentices report that they feel safe and are confident they can discuss concerns with learner managers or the designated welfare and after-care officer.
- Learner managers do not pay sufficient attention to developing or extending all apprentices' understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. For a small minority of apprentices, the completion of planned 'Prevent' duty training has been delayed. Consequently, they do not have a sufficient understanding of how to protect themselves when, for example, online or using social media. In addition, apprentices' knowledge of fundamental British values is not consistently developed. As a result, a small minority only have a rudimentary knowledge of how these values apply to

themselves at work and in their personal lives.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The planning of on- and off-the-job training for apprentices is not organised or coordinated effectively, consequently not enough apprentices make the progress that they are capable of. Too many apprentices have experienced disruption to their learning because of changes to their allocated learner manager or because training staff do not visit them frequently enough. As a result, apprentices lose momentum and motivation. For example, one apprentice had four different learner managers over a five-month period, while another apprentice had not been visited by TRAC staff at all in a similar time frame. The very small number of traineeship learners benefit from an appropriately designed programme that prepares them effectively for progressing into employment.
- Training and individual coaching practices require improvement. Since the last inspection, TRAC has introduced virtual lessons delivered online in order to support the delivery and development of apprentices' vocational knowledge and understanding. However, while having the potential to be a valuable communication tool to impart new information, set tasks and evaluate apprentices' views and opinions, lessons delivered electronically are not yet sufficiently interactive, personalised or followed up effectively. For example, apprentices must wait until their next scheduled contact with their designated learner manager to be able to discuss what they have learned from the virtual lesson which can be many weeks after attending the online session. In addition, the screen on the portable tablet computers, provided to apprentices to access the virtual learning resources, is too small to see a range of presented documents and diagrams.
- Learner managers do not use the information gathered from the assessment of apprentices' skills at the start of their programmes sufficiently well to plan personalised learning. They do not set apprentices clear and detailed learning and personal development targets, or monitor their progress against these targets regularly enough. A small minority of apprentices are experiencing a more thorough initial assessment, including a diagnostic self-reflection tool on managing their apprenticeship journey and balancing personal and work priorities.
- Targets set by learner managers, in the majority of progress reviews, are insufficiently precise or sharply focused and do not set out clearly enough what apprentices need to do to complete tasks and make the progress required to complete their qualifications in the planned time. For example, progress reviews do not identify what apprentices have gained from on- and off-the-job training and how it relates to their apprenticeship. This is contributing to their slow progress.
- The planning, promotion and development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills are weak. Apprentices gain the necessary English and mathematics skills to achieve the functional skills elements of their apprenticeship frameworks, but learner managers do not emphasise sufficiently the importance of mathematics and English, particularly within the context of the workplace. The most able apprentices, who join the course with GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics at grade C or better, are not routinely challenged by training staff to extend their learning in these essential skills beyond their

initial starting points. TRAC has recently appointed a specialist tutor to improve the delivery and embedding of English and mathematics into the apprenticeship programme, but it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative.

- Assessment of learning requires improvement. Learner managers do not systematically assess apprentices' work in good time and do not always provide detailed feedback on their assignments to help them to improve and make good progress towards achievement. For example, where written feedback is provided, this is generally very brief and lacks appropriate detail and depth necessary for apprentices to appreciate what is needed to improve their work. Where oral feedback is provided, this is constructive in most cases and apprentices find it informative and helpful.
- Most employers provide good training opportunities in the workplace and value the contribution apprentices make to their businesses. Apprentices benefit from working in a variety of retail trade business, warehousing and logistics settings that provides them with a broad overview of different job roles within their chosen industry. However, although employers are highly supportive, a small minority of workplace managers are not sufficiently involved in the review of their apprentices' performance and therefore do not have a good enough understanding of the progress that they make or what they can do to help. A small minority of employers do not provide sufficient time for apprentices to learn away from the immediate pressures of the workplace; consequently, these apprentices have to complete their workbooks in their lunchtime or at home.
- Learner managers are knowledgeable and experienced in their subjects and they skilfully assist employers to select optional units of learning that are most suited to the workplace roles undertaken by their apprentices. The large majority of apprentices develop good occupational skills in the workplace, including stock management, administration, fitted kitchen design, supporting sales, monitoring accounts and providing customer service. They quickly become competent at carrying out these work roles and, as a result, become valued employees and increase their prospects of gaining permanent employment following completion of their course.
- Most learner managers discuss equality and diversity issues appropriately through teaching and learning. However, not all monitor, challenge and extend apprentices' knowledge of equality and diversity; for example, how it improves their effectiveness at work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too many apprentices do not extend or improve their independent learning and research skills to enable them to excel in all aspects of the learning and skills development. For example, apprentices do not know how to make the most of virtual learning by using effective study skills, such as note taking, time management and practicing techniques such as self-reflection.
- Apprentices' involvement in and ownership of their e-portfolio are not consistently strong, with too many making slow progress due to not submitting work in line with agreed deadlines.
- Apprentices do not develop their English and mathematical skills sufficiently beyond their

initial starting points and, as a result, too few appreciate the importance of these skills for sustaining employment and their career progression. A minority of learner managers lack the confidence and expertise to help apprentices improve their punctuation, grammar, spelling and calculations.

- Apprentices, including those who leave early, do not receive sufficient detail about the course or guidance information to prepare them for their next steps in learning. For example, a small minority of apprentices do not have a detailed understanding of what the apprenticeship programme entails despite being on programme for a period of time. While many apprentices benefit from useful interventions from training staff and employers, not all apprentices, including a minority who leave before completing their course, receive adequate help to prepare them effectively to think about available career options and next steps.
- In the workplace, apprentices demonstrate good behaviours, reflecting the high standards set for them by their employers. They are respectful and punctual and their attendance is high. Most apprentices have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. For example, they know how to work safely and to be safe, and can confidently explain the importance of closely following company policies and procedures, such as when processing financial transactions or how to issue credit notes for returned goods.
- A minority of apprentices take part in further training organised by their employer and achieve relevant additional qualifications, such as how to operate a forklift truck in the warehouse, which aid their employability and usefulness within the workplace.
- Most apprentices, including those on the new standards, benefit from effective pastoral care and support. During planned workplace reviews, apprentices engage in rich discussions and review their own progress in relation to health, well-being, finance and personal relationships using the 'wheel of life' tool with their allocated learner managers.
- Apprentices feel safe and show good awareness of health and safety and their rights and responsibilities as an employee in the workplace. They know how to report any concerns they may have, either to their line managers or to TRAC staff. However, training staff do not sufficiently develop apprentices' understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation, including while online, or extend their understanding of life in modern Britain during planned training sessions and progress reviews.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Achievement rates for apprentices require improvement. Published data for 2015/16 indicates that the proportion of apprentices on both intermediate- and advanced-level apprenticeships who achieved within the planned time was above that for similar providers. However, in-year provider data available at the time of inspection indicated that provisional timely outcomes were only around the low national rates. Very few apprentices progress to the next level of learning.
- Apprentices' progress is too slow. Too few apprentices, most of whom are on apprenticeships in retail and commercial enterprises, are making good or better progress in successfully gaining their qualifications on time. While managers have recently implemented appropriate measures to increase the speed at which current apprentices

complete their frameworks, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these actions.

- No significant discernible gaps exist between most different groups of apprentices, including by gender and for those apprentices who have additional support needs. Where gaps exist, these are reducing and are now modest. There are too few apprentices from minority ethnic groups to make any meaningful comparison. However, in-year data provided by TRAC indicates that the achievement of the very few apprentices aged 24+ years of age has declined sharply and is now poor. Apprentices aged 16 to 19 and those aged 19 to 23 achieve at a similar rate to each other.
- Apprentices' achievement in functional skills is good. The small minority of apprentices who entered functional skills examinations at level 1 and level 2 successfully achieved these qualifications on their first attempt.
- Most apprentices quickly develop highly relevant and useful workplace skills and demonstrate confidence in applying these in a wide variety of trade business and commercial settings. A very high number of apprentices who successfully complete their qualifications move on to full-time permanent employment and a few gain additional responsibilities or carry out more demanding roles within the workplace.
- A minority of apprentices in the current year have gained additional qualifications above the minimum requirement of the apprenticeship qualification, such as driving goods vehicles qualifications or additional vocational units that enhance the scope of the roles that they can undertake within the workplace.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59162
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	429
Principal/CEO	Debbie Shandley
Telephone number	01323 810590
Website	www.therealapprenticeship.com/

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+		
	217	90	11	30	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		3		3			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

This was a short inspection that converted into a full inspection. The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality, regulation and compliance, 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 apprentices and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection considered all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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