

# Learndirect Ltd

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 55141

**Name of lead inspector:** Charles Searle HMI

**Inspection date(s):** 31 October – 1 November 2017

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** Dearing House  
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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Learndirect Ltd following publication of the inspection report on 17 August 2017, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. Outcomes for learners were also judged inadequate. The effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and personal development, behaviour and welfare required improvement. Of the three provision types inspected, apprenticeships were judged inadequate, and adult learning programmes and traineeships required improvement.

Learndirect Ltd is winding down its contracts to deliver apprenticeships and adult learning. These will finish at the end of July 2018. At the time of this first monitoring visit, the provider had 14,082 apprentices and 10,937 adult learners on programmes. Learndirect Ltd no longer delivers traineeships.

### Themes

#### **What plans have senior managers put in place to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, and how successful have they been in implementing these plans?**

Directors now exert greater control and oversight over the performance and quality of the provision. The chair of the board and other directors are involved more actively in regular meetings with senior managers where they hold them to account for the implementation of quality improvement actions. Directors have supported the chief executive officer to restructure the senior management team by bringing in or redeploying people with the right skills and expertise to improve performance.

Managers have developed a set of challenging performance indicators to measure the success of their actions. They are starting to use these effectively to manage the performance of their staff and subcontractors. However, the quality improvement plans for the apprenticeship programme and the adult learning provision do not take account of these indicators, and are too focused on the completion of actions and the development of processes. As a result, these plans do not provide managers with an effective means to drive improvement, or a means to evaluate success.

The pace of improvement to the adult learning provision has been quicker, and its impact has been greater, than that for the apprenticeship provision. This is because it took longer to restructure the senior management team for the apprenticeship programme. Managers of the adult learning provision acted quickly to implement a range of initiatives immediately after the inspection that began to address the main areas of weakness. They have introduced successfully a new system for monitoring the attendance of learners, so they can now intervene more swiftly at the many centres where attendance is still too low. Improvements in the information, advice and guidance that adult learners receive have led to an increase in the proportion of learners gaining employment or going into further training. The introduction of a

centralised system for tracking adult learners' destinations and progression is enabling managers to gather more comprehensive data about the impact of their provision. Managers have invested significantly in the training and qualifications of their English and mathematics teachers, with the result that the proportion of adult learners achieving their functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics has increased.

Managers of the apprenticeship provision have established successfully systems and procedures to enable them, for the first time, to be confident about how they monitor and report on the progress of apprentices. This improvement was not established quickly enough to prevent the final overall achievement rates for apprentices in 2016/17 being even lower than in the previous year. However, since the inspection, the proportion of apprentices leaving their programmes early has reduced, and the number of apprentices on unauthorised breaks in learning, which was a major contributing factor to the poor overall achievement rates in 2016/17, has declined significantly. As a result, the proportion of apprentices completing their qualifications is beginning to increase, but from a very low base.

Managers have developed a much more rigorous process for managing the performance of staff. They use the accurate information that they now have about the progress of learners, and actions from observations of teaching, learning and assessment, to intervene more quickly to support underperforming tutors and assessors. However, this system is still too new for managers to know if it is being applied consistently across all regions of the country and areas of activity.

Senior leaders have taken positive steps to retain staff at risk of leaving early before contracts come to an end in July 2018. Recently, they have introduced mentors to support apprentices whose assessors have left the organisation. This is enabling apprentices to continue with their programmes, and is starting to reduce the number of apprentices who do not finish their qualifications. Despite these efforts, too many apprentices, both at subcontractors and on directly delivered provision, continue to experience frequent changes to their assessors, so fail to make good progress or develop their skills and knowledge.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that quality improvement plans include the same key performance indicators as those developed by senior managers so that all staff and subcontractors understand them and can use them to drive improvement.
- Increase the pace of improvement for the apprenticeship provision so that an increasing proportion of the remaining apprentices achieve their qualifications.
- Set more ambitious targets for the attendance of adult learners on courses in centres where overall attendance remains too low.
- Ensure that managers apply the new performance management arrangements consistently across all areas of provision to support tutors and assessors in improving the quality of their teaching, learning and assessment.

- Ensure that apprentices receive continuity of support from their assessors and mentors so that they are able to progress and complete their qualifications.

### **How have managers responded to the weaknesses identified in the subcontracting of provision?**

The management of subcontractors is now more effective. Performance reviews are rigorous. Managers discontinue contracts with providers that underperform and do not respond promptly enough to improvement measures. As a result, the number of subcontractors has reduced from 25 to nine. All existing subcontractors had to meet a more stringent set of criteria before their contract was renewed for this year. Managers have been careful when terminating contracts to ensure that apprentices are able to complete their programmes. However, there are a small number of subcontractors on wind-down contracts where performance is poor and apprentices are not receiving good-quality training.

Managers now have accurate and timely data with which to manage subcontractors' performance. They have taken decisive action to address the high number of apprentices at subcontractors who were beyond their expected end date for the completion of their qualifications by insisting that subcontractors carry out more thorough and regular checks on the progress of their apprentices. As a result, the proportion of apprentices who do not complete their qualifications within their planned timescales at subcontractors has started to decline.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Managers should take swift action to ensure that all remaining subcontractors, particularly those on wind-down contracts, deliver high-quality training to their apprentices.

### **How are leaders and managers ensuring a smooth transition for apprentices transferring to other providers?**

As part of the process for winding down the apprenticeship contract, Learndirect Ltd has agreed to the transfer of apprentices to alternative providers if employers request them to do so. Managers have organised this process well but, to date, only a small number of apprentices have been transferred from Learndirect Ltd to one of its subcontractors. Requests from three employers to transfer 32 apprentices to alternative providers are being implemented currently. A further round of communication with employers setting out the process of transfer is planned to take place shortly.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that all requests from employers to transfer apprentices to alternative providers are processed quickly and efficiently, with minimum disruption to the training programmes of apprentices.

### **What action has been taken to ensure that apprentices receive their entitlement to high-quality off-the-job training that is supported by and involves employers?**

Senior leaders and managers have overseen the phased introduction of a new policy to clarify how assessors are expected to plan and record apprentices' off-the-job training. This did not start until two months after the inspection. Managers have underpinned the policy by developing a new individual learning plan, learning and development log, and progress review, which require the explicit involvement of employers in setting targets for their apprentices. They have set high expectations of staff to meet the standards in the new policy, and have begun to reinforce these through training on how they should be implemented. However, to date, assessors have completed the full process with only a minority of apprentices, and this policy does not yet extend to apprentices on subcontracted provision. As a result, it is still too early to demonstrate the impact of these new processes and, for too many apprentices, it remains unclear what off-the-job training has taken place.

#### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that the new procedures and guidance for planning and recording off-the-job training are implemented effectively across all apprenticeship programmes.
- Ensure that all assessors receive training and support to plan, deliver and record high-quality off-the-job training activities.

### **What action has been taken to ensure that all employers are involved in the planning of programmes and reviews of the progress of their apprentices?**

Managers have taken action to improve the involvement of employers in planning and reviewing the programmes of apprentices through the recently revised procedure for planning learning and by requiring employers' involvement in apprentices' progress reviews. Despite supporting the implementation of this new approach through extensive training and support, managers are aware that they need to raise the level of competence and confidence of assessors in engaging with employers. As the new procedures have been introduced recently, only a minority of apprentices and employers have engaged in the process so far. As a result, too many employers are not yet involved sufficiently in reviewing apprentices' progress or enabling apprentices to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be more effective at work.

#### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that assessors use the new procedures to engage employers more effectively in the planning of apprentices' learning and assessment, and in reviewing their apprentices' progress.

## **What have managers done to improve the systems and processes for identifying apprentices' starting points and the monitoring and reporting of progress?**

Directors and senior leaders acknowledge that, at the time of the previous inspection, they had no effective system in place to enable them to track or report accurately on the progress of apprentices. Since then, managers have designed and implemented a comprehensive apprenticeship progress tracker based on a wide range of progress measures and input from assessors. Although it has been introduced very recently and so far only includes information on half of the apprentices on directly delivered provision, the new tracker significantly strengthens managers' ability to monitor apprentices' progress from their starting points. It also enables them to identify apprentices whose progress is too slow and who need additional support to get them back on target.

Directors and senior leaders now know the full extent of the challenge faced by Learndirect Ltd in improving the proportion of apprentices who make good progress and achieve. Almost half of apprentices are identified currently as being behind target, and a further fifth are at risk of falling behind target. Managers have begun to use this information to identify actions for improvement and support, but it is still too early to see the full impact of these actions.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- As a priority, leaders and managers need to enter all of the remaining apprentices onto the progress tracker so they can monitor and record the progress of all apprentices, and intervene more quickly to reduce the proportion of apprentices who are making slow progress towards the achievement of their qualifications.

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