

VQ Solutions Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

6–8 December 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

- Leaders and managers have not yet addressed successfully all the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders do not use management information and data well enough to evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve quality. They do not have a clear view of the quality of provision or the progress that apprentices make.
- Leaders do not manage the performance of assessors well enough to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship framework programme on time.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not of a consistently high standard, particularly on apprenticeship framework programmes. Assessors do not use information about apprentices' starting points well enough to provide challenging work.
- Apprentices do not make consistently good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills to a higher level.
- Leaders and assessors do not ensure that apprentices understand sufficiently the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders and staff promote an inclusive culture; apprentices are respectful and standards of behaviour are high in the workplace.
- Arrangements for implementing the apprenticeship standards are progressing well. Leaders have secured approval as an end-point assessment centre.
- Leaders and managers work successfully with a range of employers and ensure that apprenticeship programmes meet the needs of the local community very well.
- A high proportion of apprentices gain or retain secure employment at the end of their apprenticeship, or progress to further study.
- Apprentices on standards programmes are motivated to exceed targets; they develop skills to meet current industry standards and make good progress.
- Most apprentices develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills to a high standard.

Full report

Information about the provider

- VQ Solutions Ltd is a small private training provider based in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Formed in 2008, the company originally focused on supporting the development and implementation of e-learning and e-portfolio systems. VQ Solutions Ltd offers apprenticeship framework and standards programmes predominantly in ICT, digital marketing, business administration and customer service to learners who are mostly employed in the Harrogate area. A third of current apprentices are on standards programmes. VQ Solutions Ltd is an approved end-point assessment centre for the digital marketing apprenticeship standards.
- In 2016, 59% of 16-year-olds in North Yorkshire achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. This figure is above both regional and national averages. Unemployment in North Yorkshire is below the national and regional averages.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, leaders and managers should ensure that they address all the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. In particular, they should:
 - ensure that assessors' feedback is clear and helpful, and that it shows apprentices what they have done well and where to make improvements to their work to achieve higher standards
 - deepen apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity, the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and the importance of keeping safe in their everyday lives
 - evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and apprentices' progress, more realistically, and take robust action to tackle weaker aspects
 - increase the pace of improvement so that the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeship framework within the planned timescale rapidly improves.
- Managers should strengthen the analysis and reporting of apprentices' performance, and use the data that they collect to monitor and improve apprenticeship programmes. They should implement swift actions to improve outcomes for underachieving groups, and support apprentices who are at risk of not completing their qualification.
- Assessors should ensure that they pay close attention to the needs of individual apprentices when planning and delivering training and when assessing learning, so that apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.
- Managers should improve the development of English and mathematical skills so that a greater proportion of apprentices improve their skills and achieve functional skills qualifications at a higher level.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not sustained the previously good standard of provision or been fully effective in tackling all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.
- Leaders and managers do not have a secure enough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. Self-assessment is overgenerous in its evaluation of framework programmes and does not identify well enough the weaknesses in leadership and management. Managers accurately evaluate their good progress in successfully implementing the new standards apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers do not use data on apprentices' progress and achievements well enough to monitor and improve the programmes. They calculate apprentices' achievement inaccurately and arrive at more positive conclusions than is warranted. They do not identify a number of key concerns, such as a decline in achievement rates, underachievement by male apprentices and the high proportion of apprentices who do not complete their qualification within the planned time. As a result, they do not take swift enough action to improve apprentices' achievement or support the apprentices who are at risk of not completing their qualification.
- Arrangements to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are not effective enough. Leaders and managers often focus on whether staff have implemented procedures rather than on whether their actions have improved programmes so that apprentices do better. Following observations of learning, managers do not provide assessors with sufficiently helpful feedback on aspects of their practice that require improvement and, as a result, assessors often do not know precisely how to improve their practice.
- Leaders and managers have very good partnerships with employers and other agencies and they ensure that programmes meet local and regional business needs. In partnership with employers, they have introduced and are delivering successfully a well-designed range of standards apprenticeships that support apprentices to develop high-level technical skills and knowledge. Leaders and managers have secured approval as an end-point assessment centre for the digital marketing apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers ensure that initial information, advice and guidance result in a very good match between apprentices and employers. They assess employers' needs carefully and identify a range of suitable apprenticeship applicants for employers to interview. Employers value the support that they receive and are very positive about the calibre and suitability of the apprentices that they recruit to vacancies.
- Leaders and managers comply with the principles and requirements that underpin apprenticeships. Employers are well aware of their responsibilities to develop apprentices' skills and to provide off-the-job learning during working hours.

The governance of the provider

- No formal governance arrangements are in place. Staff meet weekly to discuss apprentices' progress and other day-to-day operational issues. The organisation does not

have external input to provide challenge and support to leaders in relation to apprentices' attendance, progress, retention, achievement and progression following completion of their course. As a result, leaders do not receive rigorous challenge to respond to the recommendations made at the previous inspection.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and staff promote the safety and welfare of apprentices. Apprentices demonstrate safe working practices at work. They report that they feel safe when learning, and know to whom they should report safeguarding issues if they arise.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures for staff and apprentices are fit for purpose. Leaders and staff follow safe recruitment practice.
- Leaders implement the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty and ensure that apprentices receive training at the start of their programme about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. However, they do not develop this work further to ensure that apprentices have a sufficient understanding of the relevance of these subjects to their own lives in modern Britain.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Assessors do not challenge apprentices on framework programmes to make the progress of which they are capable or to achieve beyond the minimum requirements of the framework. They do not have high enough expectations or provide work that is difficult enough to encourage apprentices to reach their potential. Consequently, too many apprentices neither aim for nor gain the high-level technical skills and knowledge that they are capable of achieving.
- Assessors' promotion of English and mathematics within training sessions and reviews is not consistently good. Assessors do not plan well enough the development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills, or exploit naturally occurring opportunities in learning sessions to extend these skills further. Consequently, most apprentices do not develop their skills to a higher level, particularly those who already have GCSEs in English and mathematics at grades A* to C.
- Assessors do not provide feedback that helps apprentices on framework programmes to develop a secure understanding of the progress that they are making and of what they need to do to improve. They provide prompt feedback on apprentices' work but, in most cases, it merely confirms that requirements have been met. Assessors do not use assessment methods effectively, particularly questioning techniques, to ensure that apprentices express themselves more fully and participate in higher-level discussions. As a result, apprentices do not make rapid enough progress in improving their skills and knowledge.
- Assessors do not review apprentices' progress on framework programmes well enough, including progress in developing skills in the workplace. As a result, apprentices are insufficiently aware of their progress, and too many make slow progress. In too many instances, assessors leave too long a gap between progress reviews. They do not set

clear and ambitious targets to support apprentices' progress. Most apprentices do not know what their actions for development are, other than completing work within given timescales.

- Assessors successfully use activities in learning sessions that develop apprentices' confidence and their skills in working with others. For example, apprentices produced a short presentation on project management, which helped them to develop their communication skills and report on the social benefits of off-the-job training.
- Employers provide realistic work tasks that enable a high proportion of apprentices to develop technical skills that benefit their business. For example, apprentices with one employer introduced a simplified database to reduce manufacturing order errors. Apprentices report how their programme has equipped them well to extend their job role and take increased responsibility in aspects of work such as recording important meetings.
- Employers working with apprentices on standards apprenticeships challenge apprentices to achieve well. They set learning targets that relate well to apprentices' skills needs and business priorities. They work effectively with assessors to plan learning and identify long-term aspirational goals to challenge apprentices to develop new skills. These include, for example, setting up a more rapid approach to dealing with customer queries and designing web-screen reports that customers find helpful to use. As a result, apprentices on standards programmes are motivated to exceed their targets; they make good progress and develop skills to current industry standards.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Most apprentices do not have a sufficiently good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and the importance of keeping safe in their everyday lives.
- The small proportion of apprentices who have poor attendance do not develop well enough the technical skills, knowledge and language that they require for their current job or chosen career. Poor attendance does not prepare them for the demands of their workplaces.
- Too many apprentices on apprenticeship framework programmes do not extend their skills beyond the minimum requirements. They do not complete additional qualifications or participate in enrichment activities, and this limits their progress in developing their personal and work-related skills.
- Too many apprentices do not have clear targets or receive sufficient support to improve their mathematics and written English skills. As a result, apprentices do not make good enough progress towards developing skills that they need for their next steps or promotion at work.
- Most apprentices develop good communication skills and acquire the behaviours and attitudes that their employers value and which help them to succeed at work. In particular, they develop self-confidence, time-management skills and the ability to work as part of a team. A high proportion of apprentices report that they are initially nervous about speaking to customers in the business sector and digital support settings, but they quickly develop the skills to respond to customer queries, initiate discussions and resolve problems.

- Apprentices receive effective impartial careers advice at the start of programmes that helps them to make the right choice for their needs. Staff work well with employers to ensure a good match between apprentice candidates and job roles. However, most apprentices do not benefit from specialist careers advice during their programme. They receive general information about job roles within specific industries from assessors, but the lack of more specialist guidance limits their ability to make long-term career decisions.
- Apprentices benefit from a comprehensive induction to their programme, reinforced through online training material on a range of issues including apprenticeship standards, safeguarding, equalities legislation, and the threat posed by those promoting extremist views. Apprentices report that this enables them to settle in quickly on their programme and ensures that they understand what to expect from the apprenticeship.
- Apprentices on standards programmes make good progress in developing the skills and knowledge needed for their job role, such as technical, problem-solving and communication skills and their understanding of the industry. Assessors and employers use their industry experience well to plan and manage relevant training programmes and workplace activities, such as web coding and the identification of errors in software applications. As a result, apprentices gain new skills that prepare them well for their end-point assessments.
- Most apprentices develop their ICT skills to a high standard. Assessors use their specialist knowledge well and they make good use of a wide range of learning technology to deliver training, including well-produced materials for assessment in the workplace and an online portal. Apprentices take ownership for their learning and enhance their independent learning skills.
- Apprentices value their programmes highly, and are proud to take part in training that they hope will enable them to achieve their career aspirations.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have taken action to improve outcomes for learners since the previous inspection. However, these have not resulted in a consistent improvement in apprentices' progress and achievement.
- The most recent available data on achievement, from 2015/16, indicates that just over a quarter of apprentices on framework apprenticeships did not achieve their qualification, and more than half did not complete their apprenticeships before the planned end date. Male apprentices achieved less well than their female peers. Managers were unable to provide sufficiently reliable internal data on achievement for 2016/17.
- Too many current apprentices on framework programmes are not making the progress of which they are capable, including in English and mathematics.
- Approximately a third of current apprentices are on standards programmes. These apprentices are making good progress in developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for the end-point assessments.
- A high proportion of apprentices progress to sustained employment or higher levels of study at the end of their programme.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58570
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	89
Principal/CEO	Mr A Gilmour
Telephone number	01423 740006
Website	vqsolutions.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	4	-	31	50	-	4		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	N/A							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	N/A							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the 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 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

Tracey Mace-Akroyd, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pat Hornsby	Ofsted Inspector
Catharine Jackson	Ofsted Inspector

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