

# Learndirect Ltd

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 55141

**Name of lead inspector:** Charles Searle, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Inspection date(s):** 27–28 February 2018

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

This was the second 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 second monitoring visit, the provider had 9,556 apprentices and 7,823 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?**      **Reasonable progress**

Directors and senior managers have increased the pace of improvement since the first monitoring visit. They now use a set of challenging but realistic targets against which to evaluate the performance of their directly delivered provision and the provision delivered by the large number of subcontractors. Directors' close involvement in monitoring performance means that they understand the strengths and areas for further development well. Despite this overall improvement, there remain key aspects of the provision, such as the quality of the off-the-job training that apprentices receive and the engagement of employers in supporting the development of their apprentices' skills, where progress has been insufficient.

The most significant improvement has been the increase in the proportion of apprentices and adult learners who now achieve their qualifications. Managers now have effective systems with which to monitor the progress of apprentices, both on directly delivered provision and at subcontractors, and are better able to identify and support those apprentices at risk of not completing their programmes. As a result, the number of apprentices who successfully complete their programmes is now greater than the number who withdraw, a reversal of the situation at the time of the inspection. The number of apprentices on breaks in learning, which had a negative impact on overall achievement, has reduced significantly. The proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes within their planned timescales remains very low, but this is mainly a legacy of the large number of apprentices who still remain in learning despite having passed the end date of their programmes.

The proportion of adult learners who achieve their qualifications continues to increase steadily, with the in-year achievement of learners on short courses now at the same level as that of similar providers. Higher proportions of learners are achieving their English and mathematics qualifications, and the number of learners moving into employment after attending courses is increasing. The attendance of learners at centres has improved slightly since the last monitoring visit, but there is still too much variation between centres, and overall attendance remains too low.

Managers now implement the recently developed performance management arrangements for teachers and assessors consistently well across all regions and for all types of provision. As a result, they are supporting teachers and assessors to improve the quality of their delivery. However, sustained improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is hampered by the rapid turnover of staff, particularly among assessors in the south of the country. This is resulting in too many apprentices being left for periods of time without sufficient support, with the result that many of them fail to progress or drop out completely.

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

**Reasonable progress**

Directors and senior managers have strengthened further the arrangements for managing the performance of the great majority of subcontractors since the previous monitoring visit. Contract managers of the remaining nine apprenticeship subcontractors scrutinise in great detail and on a regular basis the individual progress of each apprentice at these subcontractors. They intervene swiftly when they identify that apprentices are failing to make expected progress, and they support subcontractors to tackle the causes of the lack of progress. If subcontractors fail to respond to this support, managers impose proportionate sanctions.

The managers of adult learning subcontractors apply the same rigour to the 34 providers of adult learning, and monitor progress closely against a set of challenging targets. Subcontractors are prevented from enrolling new adult learners onto underperforming courses and can only restart courses when they have taken agreed quality improvement actions. As a result of this close monitoring, the proportions of adults and apprentices achieving their qualifications at the great majority of subcontractors has increased since the previous inspection.

Despite the overall strengthening in contract management, a small number of subcontractors persistently underperform without sufficient action being taken against them. These subcontractors have not improved since the first monitoring visit, and their apprentices and learners continue to make slow progress.

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

**Reasonable progress**

Directors and senior managers have well-advanced plans to transfer apprentices to alternative providers by the contract end date of 31 July 2018. Negotiations are taking place currently to transfer subcontractors' apprentices who have not completed their programmes by this date to other prime contract holders with which the subcontractors already work. Other negotiations are about to be concluded to transfer the large majority of apprentices who remain on directly delivered programmes to one national provider.

Directors and managers have identified that certain apprentices, such as dental technicians and clinical nurses, can only be trained by specialist providers. Nearly 800 apprentices in these vocational areas are about to be transferred to two specialist providers.

Over 450 apprentices on directly delivered provision have been transferred recently to subcontractors to ensure continuity for the apprentices concerned as Learndirect Ltd winds down its capacity to deliver apprenticeships in advance of the contract end date.

A small number of apprentices are unclear about how they will complete their programmes once contracts with Learndirect Ltd comes to an end. As a result, they feel anxious and demotivated, as do their employers. Directors and managers acknowledge that they need to communicate the final transfer arrangements to all employers and apprentices as soon as they are certain that the transfers will go ahead.

**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?**

**Insufficient progress**

Since the previous monitoring visit, managers have continued to reinforce with assessors the requirement for them to plan, deliver and record high-quality off-the-job training for all apprentices. As a result, there has been an increase in the proportion of employers who support their apprentices by providing protected time for off-the-job training.

However, not enough employers have made this commitment. Learndirect Ltd's own management information confirms that not enough apprentices receive good-quality off-the-job training. The frequent changes to assessors that employers and apprentices experience results in too much off-the-job training being poorly planned or of limited value.

More assessors are now using the recently introduced learning and development log to record the development of apprentices' skills and how this relates to their job role. However, in too many cases the logs are only used to record hours spent

undertaking revision and self-study activities rather than to reflect on the new skills and knowledge that apprentices acquire.

Too many apprentices do not receive sufficient off-the-job training or support to improve their English, mathematical and information and communication technology skills, except through the completion of past examination papers or referrals to websites.

**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?** **Insufficient progress**

At the time of the previous monitoring visit, managers had introduced new approaches to monitoring the extent of employers' engagement in the planning of apprentices' programmes and reviews of their progress. Managers reinforce the need for assessors to engage employers in their regular supervision sessions. Despite this renewed focus, too many employers continue not to participate or contribute to reviews of their apprentices' progress. This lack of participation has been exacerbated by the frequent changes in assessors that employers and apprentices have experienced, as assessors provide the main source of communication with employers about their apprentices' training needs.

Where employers value learning and development, they play a direct and active role in determining the focus and direction of the apprenticeships that their employees follow. For example, clinical assistant apprentices in health centres gain much from undertaking additional training organised by their employers in immunisation, mental health and managing blood pressure. As a result, they extend their knowledge and skills beyond those required to achieve their qualification.

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

Managers monitor effectively the progress of apprentices using the systems introduced as a consequence of the previous monitoring visit. All apprentices on directly delivered programmes are now included on the tracking system, compared with only half at the time of the first visit. As a result, directors and managers know the progress that current apprentices are making.

Managers can monitor in detail the progress of apprentices and the degree to which assessors adhere to quality standards through a range of clear performance indicators. Information on performance can be analysed by regions, areas and individual assessors, providing a much-improved degree of accountability. Based on this enhanced data, leaders and managers recognise that, while improvements have

been made to aspects of delivery and apprentices' progress, they are still failing to meet many of their key targets, often by a considerable margin.

As a result of the improvements in the monitoring of apprentices' progress, the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications has increased. However, a high number of apprentices, many of whom have experienced one or more changes to their allocated assessor, remain in learning beyond their planned completion date. Many of these apprentices are being put under considerable pressure to complete large volumes of additional work to catch up and complete their programmes within a very short space of time.

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