

Phoenix Training Services (Midlands) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

5–8 February 2019

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Learners' achievement on security industry courses is too low. This prevents a minority of learners from applying for jobs of their first choice.
- Tutors do not plan sessions well enough. They do not use information about learners' starting points to inform session planning and do not link theory and practical sessions. As a result, learners are not able to make as much progress as they could.
- Tutors do not assess accurately or provide regular feedback on learners' written work, which does not support learners to improve the standards of their work.
- Senior leaders and managers have not evaluated with sufficient thoroughness the reasons for the underperformance of the adult programmes in receipt of learning loans and apprenticeships. This has led to their withdrawal of the offer.
- Many learners make slow progress in developing the English and mathematical skills needed to meet their personal and future employment needs.
- Senior managers have been too slow to identify the actions required to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The provider has the following strengths

- Achievement of most qualifications is high; learners' employment prospects are significantly increased by opportunities to acquire essential licences.
- Learners develop good practical skills and significantly improved confidence; their attendance and punctuality are good.
- Staff engage with employers well. Courses are flexible and carefully aligned to business needs, increasing the outcomes for adult learners.
- Staff and managers provide good-quality information, advice and guidance, enabling well-informed career choices.
- Senior leaders have realistic and ambitious plans for the adult learning programmes based on a good understanding of the relevant business sectors.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Phoenix Training Services (PTS) is based in Bordesley Green, Birmingham. This is close to many of the most economically deprived wards from which it recruits many of its adult learners. Around 75% of the learners are male. Learners represent a wide range of ethnicity; approximately 20% have a disability and many have a background of offending.
- Since 2017/18, PTS has offered short-course adult learning provision aimed at the unemployed. Provision consists mainly of warehousing, fork-lift truck driving and security industry pathways. Around 30% of learning is undertaken in employers' premises located outside of the West Midlands. This provision represents approximately 70% of the provider's funding allocation from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. PTS began delivery of apprenticeships in 2017/18, and long-duration qualifications for adults in receipt of learning loans in 2016/17. Both programmes have now closed down.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders and managers should improve the evaluation and subsequent quality improvement of the provision by:
 - ensuring that the targets in the quality improvement plan can be accurately measured and have timescales for improvement
 - strengthening the observation of teaching and learning processes so that staff are clear about what and how they need to improve within set timescales
 - developing the collection and analysis of data better to inform decision-making.
- Quickly raise standards in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - identifying the essential level of English and mathematical skills for each vocational pathway, and using information about learners' starting points to specify the development required to improve employment prospects
 - ensuring that tutors receive English and mathematics professional development so that they feel confident to train these subjects within their vocational areas
 - ensuring that tutors assess learners' written work more accurately and give more effective feedback to learners so that they can make better progress in improving the standard of their work
 - ensuring better linkages between theoretical and practical work so that learners can achieve higher standards.
- Identify the reasons for low achievement on security industry courses compared to similar provision by critically analysing the reasons for non-achievement and taking swift actions to address these.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders' actions and plans to develop apprenticeship training programmes and long-course qualifications have not been successful, with only very few learners completing successfully. Senior leaders acknowledge this and have withdrawn from offering these apprenticeships and longer qualifications in 2018/19, due to very low engagement and achievement rates.
- Managers have not made certain that lesson observations, quality assurance of assessment decisions and appraisals provide tutors with detailed insight as to how they can improve their practice. Action plans for improvement do not effectively identify the further training and development tutors require and the timescale for improvement.
- Senior leaders and managers have not ensured that the English and mathematics strategy has led to the required improvement in the teaching, learning and assessment of English and mathematics. Trainers and assessors are not fully confident in their own skills to develop learners in these essential subjects.
- The board's and senior leadership team's understanding of the overall quality of provision is hindered by their insufficient and poor analysis of performance data. For example, the dashboard developed to measure performance does not include data or targets relating to learners' attendance, the proportion staying on their courses, the proportion who pass or learners' destinations at the end of the course.
- Self-assessment is a well-understood, inclusive process. Many of the judgements in the self-assessment report for adult-learning short programmes are broadly accurate. However, leaders and managers have placed too little emphasis in the current report on identifying why apprenticeships and longer courses have performed so poorly. The associated improvement plan is closely linked to the areas for improvement identified. However, actions lack specific quantitative or qualitative impact measures against which improvement can be accurately gauged.
- Senior leaders are closely involved in the day-to-day running of the business and understand most of its strengths and areas for improvement. Their business planning in adult programmes is realistic and ambitious. This is informed by a thorough knowledge and understanding of the key opportunities in, and current challenges of, employment in the logistics and security sectors. Senior leaders are continually looking to improve employment prospects for adult learners.
- Senior leaders and managers engage well with employers. Employers value highly the flexibility and quality of practical skills training delivered both on- and off-site. This training is carefully aligned to their business needs and contributes to increasingly good outcomes for adult learners.
- Leaders have taken recent decisive action to improve staff performance and capability levels. The management team has been strengthened to provide more effective performance management of staff. Recent appointees in all business areas have higher levels of subject expertise and experience. These actions have already improved the collection of management information, safeguarding and governance arrangements. Plans are at an advanced stage to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Senior learners and managers have developed close links with the national careers service. These ensure that learners receive thorough and impartial careers guidance to enable them to make informed choices about their current learning and future career. This careers guidance is supporting a high proportion of learners to gain sustained employment or to move into further education.
- Leaders, managers and staff actively promote all forms of equality. They foster greater understanding of and respect for all people regardless of their faith, race, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation. Learners are protected well from potential harassment, bullying and discrimination. Learners benefit significantly from the particularly inclusive culture and this is a major contributor to their improved levels of confidence.

The governance of the provider

- Senior leaders have restructured the board of governors. Recent appointments strengthen the board's ability to scrutinise the work of the provider, to provide support and to hold senior leaders to account.
- Board membership now includes external representatives who understand the needs of employers and local communities well. The board members are informed by self-assessment, improvement plans and business plans which include the clear strategic direction of the company. Information provided to the board is improving, but senior leaders and board members have not yet fully established the requirements and contents of routine reports. Board members' scrutiny has been adversely affected by infrequent and insufficiently comprehensive analysis of performance data.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders and managers have very successfully established a strong culture of safeguarding. Safeguarding has a high priority in the company. Policies and procedures for safeguarding are thorough and comprehensive. The safeguarding manager has completed all required checks on staff and maintains a central register of these checks. All staff have received training in safeguarding procedures.
- All staff are vigilant in ensuring that learners are safe and know how to keep themselves safe. Potential safeguarding issues have been identified. The few actual incidents have been managed ably and thoroughly. The recording of low-level incidents and concerns is good. Managers use this well to identify staff training needs and required changes in practice. Staff manage incidents in a confident, calm and appropriate manner. Staff work closely with external agencies to share information that leads to multi-agency interventions for the protection of individuals when required.
- Leaders and managers have made good progress to promote learners' and staff members' awareness of the risks of extremism and radicalisation through training in the 'Prevent' duty. Staff and learners are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe from extremist views and threats. For example, managers and staff have introduced a 'lock-down' procedure, which is practised frequently, to secure the premises.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Staff do not use effectively information from learners' starting points to plan learning activities. Therefore, learners do not develop essential skills as well as they could. Tutors do not correct routinely English grammar and spelling in the majority of learning sessions. In written work, tutors do not correct spelling or writing in capitals. In a minority of learning sessions, tutors reinforce and develop well learners' use of appropriate and technical vocabulary. For example, in a security class, learners were able to explain the difference between sympathy and empathy.
- Tutors do not plan sufficiently to develop mathematical skills which are relevant to learners' vocational programme, employment prospects and personal finances. Learners are not improving these skills while on programme for use in their future employment.
- Tutors do not link theory and practice in the short-course provision sufficiently well. Practical sessions do not put previously taught theory into appropriate context for the learners' future job roles. For example, when carrying out interview practice to be a security guard, there was insufficient discussion about the personal skills needed for security staff. As a result, learners did not gain as much from this exercise as they could have.
- Learners' work observed in theory and practical sessions is of the standard expected for the level of programme they are studying. However, assessment of written work is not sufficiently accurate, and in one subject is frequently incorrect. Tutors do not provide enough feedback to enable learners to improve their work to higher standards.
- Adult learners follow a programme of short courses which prepare them well for the world of work. They gain valuable practical skills which prepare them for employment in areas of skills shortages. For example, in the West Midlands, there is a high demand for fork-lift truck drivers and warehouse operatives.
- Staff work closely with employers. Approximately 30% of learners undertake their learning at employers' premises. Courses are well planned in conjunction with the employer to meet their specific requirements. For example, in one company, a 'process champion' from the employer works alongside learners as they complete the theory elements. This means that learners feel confident and have a smooth transition into the practical aspects of their training at the company.
- Tutors ensure that learners develop high levels of confidence during their programmes. Learners enjoy their courses and have good relationships with their tutors. Tutors act as inspirational role models and have extensive up-to-date industry experience. The encouragement and support learners receive gives them confidence that they can achieve their learning outcomes and obtain employment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners' attendance and punctuality are good, and current rates are high. Learners arrive ready to learn and return punctually from their rest breaks. These aspects help prepare learners for employment.
- Learners develop their communication skills well. For example, learners carried out interview role plays on the second day of their course. Although learners felt a little

nervous, they were able to answer questions in their interviews well and demonstrate enthusiasm and motivation for employment.

- Learners enjoy their programmes. They demonstrate good behaviour in sessions. Learners come from a wide range of backgrounds. In sessions, they participate well and treat each other's views with respect. This enables all learners to contribute fully in sessions.
- Learners value the good impartial careers guidance they receive when considering their course choice, at the start, during the course and at the end of their courses. This enables learners to make the appropriate course choice. Staff make available further guidance for learners when they have finished their learning. For example, they offer refresher practice in fork-lift driving, if learners are required to take an employer skills test to gain employment.
- Learners demonstrate high levels of confidence and enthusiasm for their programme and they appreciate the opportunities they receive to go into employment. They are enthusiastic about their future career prospects, as PTS works very closely with employers to identify job vacancies prior to learners starting their course. This collaboration is enabling learners, particularly in the warehousing sector, to go straight into employment at the end of their programme.
- Learners know that their welfare is given a high priority. Many learners are vulnerable because of their circumstances and respond very well to this support. Learners feel safe. They know what to do and whom to contact in the event of an incident. Learners are diligent in health and safety practices. They know the importance of avoiding risks when using the internet at home, the training centre and in the workplace. Learners are fully aware how and when to report any concerns or what to do if they receive unwanted or inappropriate requests.
- Learners can confidently talk about fundamental British values. They can relate their own understanding to issues within their own diverse communities, such as unlicensed money lending, radicalisation and criminality.
- Learners too often make slow progress in developing their English and mathematical skills. Learners who have low literacy and numeracy skills on entry to the programme do not improve these skills well enough. A small minority of learners do not reach the level required to pass essential licence certificates.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Achievement for the small number of adult learners in receipt of a learning loan or undertaking an apprenticeship is low. Most do not stay for the duration of their programme to achieve their qualification or apprenticeship. The opportunities for the majority of these learners and apprentices to stay in learning have been affected by changes to ownership of a significant employer, and other factors beyond the control of staff and managers at PTS.
- Learners undertaking security industry qualifications do not achieve as well as other learners. Achievement for these courses is very low, which limits the opportunity for the non-achievers to apply for their preferred employment option. For example, they can apply for jobs in events security only, when their preference is for door security, which

requires a specific level of qualification or licence.

- Most learners make good progress from their starting points. Learners who are seeking to get back into work achieve well within the planned duration of the programme of their accredited learning aims. This provides learners with the necessary qualifications to apply for jobs quickly.
- The majority of learners move on to employment within four weeks of leaving their programme. They acquire skills that are valued by employers and meet industry standards closely in vocational areas with known national skills shortages. Many learners have not been in employment for a long period of time, and their economic circumstances are significantly improved.
- Learners from different groups achieve equally well, with no significant differences irrespective of starting points, ethnicity, gender or disability. This means that all learners within the same vocational area have an equal opportunity to gain employment.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1248007
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	447
CEO	Trevor Cox
Telephone number	0121 772 4551
Website	www.phoenixtraining.org

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)	-	15	-	28	-	2	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	1	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the business development manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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

Maxine Mayer, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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