

Inspection of Progress to Excellence Ltd

Inspection dates: 11–16 December 2019

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Progress to Excellence Limited (PtE) is an independent learning provider that was established in 1997. The head office is in Birkenhead on the Wirral. PtE provides education and training across the country to apprentices and adult learners. There are a very small number of learners on traineeship programmes.

At the time of inspection there were 2,008 apprentices, of which two thirds are on frameworks and one third on standards-based apprenticeships. They study apprenticeship programmes from levels 2 to 5. Around a half of apprentices study at level 3. Two thirds study health and care apprenticeships. Most other apprentices are on apprenticeships in business, and engineering and manufacturing. PtE subcontracts out around 250 apprentices to four subcontractors.

There are 609 adult learners. All use government-funded advanced learner loans to pay for their courses. Two thirds study courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy, nail technology and media make-up. Around one third are studying towards a qualification in fitness instructing and personal training. Most learners study programmes at level 3, with a few at level 4.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Too many apprentices and learners have experienced disruption to their learning because of staffing issues. They are frustrated by how poorly PtE staff keep them informed. Apprentices complain that they have had many different training and assessment officers (TAOs).

Apprentices and learners do not benefit from a challenging and broad curriculum. Learning is too narrowly focused on meeting the minimum requirements of the qualification, with little opportunity to extend their knowledge.

A large majority of apprentices do not develop sufficient new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They do not routinely get enough off-the-job training. Consequently, apprentices make slow progress. They fail to contribute to their employers' businesses as effectively as they could.

Most adult learners are non-working parents, unemployed or ex-offenders. They appreciate the time that TAOs take to support them personally and in their studies. Learners gain confidence in their practical skills because of the feedback they receive from TAOs. They are rightly proud of the improvements they make and the skills they develop.

Apprentices and learners are not prepared well enough for their next steps because the advice they receive from their TAOs is not impartial. Careers advice and guidance to apprentices are not comprehensive or aspirational enough.

Apprentices and learners are polite, respectful and articulate. They feel safe on their programmes and at work. They put their health and safety knowledge into practice. For example, port operative apprentices follow health and safety procedures whilst using a crane to unload steel from a ship.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders' and governors' growth strategy to expand the curriculum has had a negative impact on the quality of education and training that apprentices and learners receive. Leaders failed to recruit enough high-quality staff to meet the increased range of vocational programmes on offer. They did not identify the decline in quality quickly enough and were too slow to intervene when they did. In 2017/18, over one third of apprentices did not achieve their apprenticeship. The recently appointed acting chief executive officer (CEO) has accurately identified why the quality declined further in 2018/19 and has put actions in place for improvement. Currently, too many apprentices continue to tell us they are having a poor experience. Around one fifth of current apprentices are beyond their planned end dates.

Governors failed to hold previous senior leaders to account for the poor quality of the curriculum. They supported leaders' strategic decision to recruit apprentices and

learners despite significant issues with staffing and performance. Governors have not focused sufficiently on the quality of education. They have recently begun to work with the new CEO to rationalise the curriculum to refocus on health and care, which was the original curriculum focus of PtE.

Leaders and managers fail to ensure that apprentices receive their entitlement to well-planned on- and off-the-job training. Most employers are not involved in the development and planning of their apprentices' curriculum. Leaders and managers have not had enough oversight of the apprenticeship curriculum. This has resulted in the apprenticeship provision not meeting the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship programme.

Apprentices are not routinely placed on the right apprenticeship based on their prior experience and knowledge of their role. For example, port operative subcontracted apprentices who have been working in the sector for several years report that they do not develop any new knowledge or skills as part of the apprenticeship.

Apprentices do not benefit from an ambitious curriculum. Leaders and managers place too much focus on the completion of units. Apprentices do not consolidate consistently their learning before moving onto a new topic. TAOs do not focus enough on what apprentices need to know and be able to do to be successful. For example, TAOs do not set challenging-enough tasks and activities for level 5 care leadership and management framework apprentices.

Leaders, managers and TAOs do not consider apprentices' starting points when they plan the curriculum. Apprentices, therefore, do not develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, level 3 lead adult care standard apprentices repeat units they have already achieved at a different provider.

Assessment for apprentices is not fit for purpose. TAOs do not use the information from the assessment task to support apprentices to improve their knowledge and skills. In some cases, TAOs provided incorrect information to apprentices as they did not have appropriate vocational knowledge and expertise.

TAOs do not support apprentices who have additional learning needs well enough. This results in these apprentices making very slow progress on their apprenticeship.

Most managers and tutors plan the curriculum for adult learners in a logical and progressive sequence. They review the curriculum and make changes to improve it for new groups of learners.

Most learners get developmental feedback from their TAOs that helps them to improve their skills over time. For example, learners on make-up artistry programmes improve their technique in creating a neat cut crease along the eye socket following advice from their TAOs.

The majority of learners develop new knowledge and skills on their programme. For example, learners on nail courses produce neat smile lines when carrying out French

enamelling techniques. In a minority of cases, TAOs move onto a new subject too quickly before learners have consolidated what they are learning.

TAOs do not ensure that all learners are on the correct programme. Over half of learners on the level 3 diploma in fitness instructing and personal training do not achieve the full programme. Many leave after achieving the level 2 fitness instructing components.

Most apprentices and learners develop their confidence as they progress through their course. They feel well-supported by their TAOs to improve their skills and, as a result, gain confidence personally. Learners are professional in their interaction with clients and their appearance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors, leaders and managers place a high priority in ensuring the safety of their apprentices and learners. Staff benefit from regular updates and training on emerging issues such as hate crime and county lines. They follow PtE procedures to report any safeguarding concerns. The safeguarding team follow these up promptly and appropriately. They work with external agencies such as the police and social services when needed. Apprentices and learners know how and to whom they should report any concerns.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that there are enough well-qualified and well-trained TAOs to provide high-quality training and education to apprentices and learners.
- Rapidly put in place an ambitious and high-quality curriculum that enables apprentices and learners to be successful.
- Ensure that the apprenticeship curriculum is planned and coordinated with employers so that apprentices receive their entitlement to well-planned on- and off-the-job training and assessment.
- Improve the quality of initial and ongoing advice and guidance so that apprentices and learners are on the right programme, achieve their learning goals and move onto their aspirational next steps.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58260
Address	G8 Pacific Road Birkenhead CH41 1LJ
Contact number	0151 650 6933
Website	ptoetraining.co.uk
Acting CEO	Katy Lennon
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	10–13 November 2015
Main subcontractors	Glass and Fenestration Training Solutions Ltd Kids Planet Day Nurseries Springfield Training Ltd Taylor Made Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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