

# Inspection of Absolute HR Solutions Ltd

Inspection dates: 21–23 January 2020

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this provider

Absolute HR Solutions Ltd (Absolute Works) is a private limited company based in Kenilworth, Warwickshire. The company became an approved apprenticeship training provider in May 2017. The company has two strands to its work: Absolute Apprentices and Absolute Works. The latter is an outsourced human resources (HR) consultancy incorporated in 2011. It provides a range of services, such as recruitment of staff, payroll, legal and HR support, to over 80 small and medium-sized companies nationally.

Of the 34 apprentices on programmes during the inspection, 18 are levy-funded. Eight apprentices are on level 5 operational and departmental management, 12 on level 3 team leading/supervision, 10 on level 3 business administration, and four apprentices are on a level 2 customer service programme. All apprentices are on standards-based apprenticeship programmes.

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

Apprentices' confidence, motivation and communication skills improve substantially during their apprenticeship. Apprentices develop a good understanding of the business they work in and learn how to manage their time. Apprentices develop the ability to empathise and communicate with customers.

Apprentices enjoy and benefit from additional workshops on interesting and creative management theories such as Kano and Taguchi. A few confidently try out the techniques they have learned to improve the way things are done in their workplace. Assessors should strengthen this aspect of the programme by making stronger links between on- and off-the-job training.

Apprentices receive good support from staff, including for their welfare or safety. They find assessors helpful and approachable. If they have a problem, staff respond quickly to help. Apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) also receive good support and achieve their apprenticeship.

To date, too many apprentices have withdrawn early from their programme. This is particularly the case for non-levy apprentices. Those apprentices who remain on their programmes achieve their apprenticeship and often with a high grade. Nearly half of those who complete the programme gain a promotion.

A few apprentices are not challenged sufficiently on their programmes. A few level 5 managers find that they are covering very familiar theories. Customer service apprentices receive training that is too generic. It is not tailored enough to their specific work context.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear strategic vision. Their aim is to support the training and development of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in the retail sector. They use their good links with employers and other training organisations to design programmes to meet regional and national skills shortages.

Trainers and assessors use their experience and expertise to put together a course that meets the needs of the employers with which they work. However, they have not ordered the curriculum in a way that allows apprentices to make strong links between theory sessions and on-the-job training. As a result, a few apprentices are not able to state confidently how they have used their knowledge to make a difference to their jobs.

At the beginning of the programme, assessors use a range of tools to establish the knowledge, skills and behaviour of apprentices. Apprentices also evaluate their own starting points. However, assessors do not routinely use this information to monitor the progress apprentices are making against their starting points. As a result,

managers and assessors have a partial overview of the progress of apprentices. They measure progress only against the achievement of qualifications.

Assessors do not reinforce well enough the knowledge, skills and behaviours apprentices are gaining. They do not use assessment to ensure that apprentices are able to recall the knowledge that they have covered earlier in the course. In their written feedback, assessors very rarely comment on how apprentices can relate their learning to their work environment better.

Managers promote the necessity of off-the-job training well at the beginning of the programme. Nevertheless, too many employers and apprentices are unclear on what activities count towards the 20% entitlement. Assessors do not make a strong enough link between on- and off-the-job training to support apprentices' development of knowledge and skills. Due to work commitments, some apprentices have not used their allocation of hours and as a result a few apprentices have fallen behind.

Apprentices develop their interpersonal skills to a high degree. For example, apprentices understand the correct use of terminology during disciplinary hearings to ensure that their employer is not exposed to charges of unfair dismissal. In another example, apprentices on operational management programmes become effective coaches and use strategies to promote team working.

Apprentices use their English, mathematics and information technology skills particularly effectively in their everyday job roles. For example, apprentices use their mathematical skills to stay within the budget for the store and design rotas for staff and campaigns for launching seasonal products.

Apprentices learn and work in safe, calm and orderly environments. Staff promote a culture of respect and inclusion throughout the organisation. Apprentices understand their rights to a safe working environment, free from bullying and harassment. Apprentices have a good awareness of British values. They feel safe. They know the signs of changed behaviour that can lead to radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices are respectful of each other and their managers. They understand the diversity in society and how to respect the cultural sensitivities of their customers.

At or near the completion of their learning, assessors do not conduct an evaluation of the knowledge, skills and behaviour – including the transferable skills – of apprentices. Nor do apprentices routinely receive guidance on their next steps. Apprentices do not have formal access to unbiased careers advice.

Since the monitoring visit, leaders and managers have revised and strengthened the terms of reference and arrangements for governance. Leaders have appointed two new governors, who bring external experience of industry and education. Governors receive information on the performance of apprentices. However, because managers do not use the outcomes of their observations of teaching and learning well enough, governors do not yet receive clear information on the quality of teaching and training and how it informs the continual personal development of staff.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders give safeguarding a high priority. Managers keep a register of all safeguarding incidents. The register shows that apprentices feel able to raise concerns about their welfare, bullying and safety. It also shows that managers deal with incidents swiftly and appropriately.

Managers have appropriate links with external agencies, including the Coventry safeguarding hub, and refer apprentices when needed. Leaders and managers have appropriate policies for safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty. They update policies regularly. The company has a designated safeguarding officer and two deputies. All staff are appropriately trained.

### What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Trainers and assessors should ensure that they use information on apprentices' starting points throughout the duration of the programme to help them develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to succeed.
- Leaders must ensure that all apprentices receive their full entitlement of off-the-job training. Managers should monitor apprentices' take-up of this training closely and communicate more closely with employers, so that all apprentices make rapid progress.
- Managers should ensure that trainers and assessors make strong links between theory and workplace practice in reviews and assessments, so that all apprentices have a secure understanding of what they have learned.
- Managers should evaluate fully what works and what does not work in terms of teaching and training. They should make sure that outcomes of observation are linked to continuing professional development of staff and that these are reported to governors.
- Ensure that all apprentices know where they can receive access to unbiased careers advice so that they know what options and possibilities are open to them as a result of taking their course.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	1276502
<b>Address</b>	34–36 The Square Kenilworth CV8 1EB
<b>Contact number</b>	01926 355560
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://Absoluteworks.co.uk">Absoluteworks.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Joy May
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	N/A

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by a strategic consultant, 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 observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

William Baidoe-Ansah, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector

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