

# Inspection of QA Limited

Inspection dates: 28–31 January 2020

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Information about this provider

QA Limited is a large organisation that provides commercial training and apprenticeships to the technology sector. The head office, which is also a training facility, is in Slough. There are 18 other training centres across England.

QA Limited has around 6,500 apprentices, of which 5,300 were in scope for this inspection. Of these, almost all are on level 3 or level 4 standards-based apprenticeships. QA Limited delivers apprenticeships from level 3 to level 7 in information and communication technology (ICT) and business administration and law.

At the time of inspection, there were around 2,700 ICT apprentices. Around 1,000 of these are on the level 3 infrastructure technician and the rest are studying on a range of level 3 or level 4 apprenticeships. There were around 2,500 apprentices on business administration and law apprenticeships. Around 2,000 of these are on business management apprenticeships.

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

Apprentices benefit from state-of-the-art commercial training facilities. For example, the London training centre has a cyber lab where apprentices complete team challenges and experience how to react to real-life cyber threats in a safe environment.

Apprentices value the teaching from credible subject experts. Tutors have significant technical knowledge and professional experience. They use these to develop rapidly apprentices' technical skills. Apprentices become more confident and proficient at work, take on extra responsibilities and develop new skills that their employers value.

Apprentices make good progress on their apprenticeships. Many go on to achieve merit or distinction grades at the end-point assessment and achieve additional qualifications. These help them to use the technical skills required in their chosen industry. Most apprentices are ambitious, proud of their success and keen to move on to study at a higher level.

Apprentices feel safe and have a good understanding of how to protect themselves from harm. They have a good understanding of staying safe online and of the risks they may face, which are particularly relevant to the sector and employers they work with.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for the apprenticeships they offer. They focus on and specialise in technology-related apprenticeships to support a broad range of employers, including very large national public and private companies, as well as a large number of smaller employers.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. Leaders from the commercial arm of the company, supported by external advisers, offer challenge and scrutiny to the apprenticeship management team. As a result, they identify and implement improvement actions swiftly.

Leaders and managers create a well-considered, ambitious curriculum. It is effectively designed in collaboration with employers, tutors and the learning design team. As a result, apprentices gain new knowledge and skills during their off-the-job training that enhances their on-the-job training with employers.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff remain up to date with the subjects they teach. The large majority of staff complete specialist courses in addition to their individual training plans. All staff are encouraged to participate in voluntary work for two days a year at a charity of their choice. As a result, the vast majority of staff feel valued and enjoy working for the organisation.

Tutors use a variety of teaching activities that result in apprentices mastering key concepts and applying them across their learning and at work. Most apprentices are given good opportunities to use their new knowledge and skills in work-related challenges and real-client projects. For example, business analyst apprentices apply their skills in live, work-based projects. For one of the projects, they used a cost benefit analysis to produce a business case for managers' consideration.

Apprentices respond quickly to the useful feedback from tutors. As a result, apprentices know what they need to do to be successful and improve their analytical and critical thinking skills.

Tutors use assessment skilfully to check apprentices' understanding and to challenge them. For example, cybersecurity apprentices are assessed on their ability to connect devices, troubleshoot connectivity issues and carry out necessary configurations. As a result, they develop new knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in their jobs.

Skills coaches work well with the vast majority of employers to support apprentices. Most employers are involved in planning apprentices' on- and off-the-job training and participate in apprentices' progress reviews. However, this is not consistently reflected in the quality of written reviews. Too many are weak and do not record the discussions apprentices have with skills coaches and employers. Because of this, staff are not always clear about the progress apprentices are making.

The vast majority of apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well to achieve. Leaders and managers have recently invested in a learning support team but it is too early to measure the impact of this. Apprentices who are currently working with the team are positive about the strategies they have been introduced to and the impact they have on their progress, for example practical techniques to support their presentation skills and the recording of classroom sessions to help with reflection. However, a small minority are yet to benefit from this support.

Staff quickly establish apprentices' starting points to consider prior knowledge and experience. They use this information to plan and deliver learning. Most apprentices continue to develop their mathematics and English skills, regardless of whether they are completing a qualification or not. For example, infrastructure technician apprentices apply numeracy skills to determine cable lengths and speeds when working on a network.

Attendance at taught sessions and one-to-one workplace visits is high. Apprentices behave professionally in the classroom and value learning together in diverse groups from a broad number of employers. As a result, they make good progress and develop an appreciation of the diversity of the communities they work in.

Apprentices receive good careers advice and guidance. Because of this, most apprentices have a good understanding of what they need to do to prepare them for their next steps. For example, apprentices are given the opportunity to specialise in

specific areas of interest, such as penetration testing, before they complete their apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers are committed to increasing the profile of apprenticeships. They have successfully created an alumni community to support each other and attract more apprentices to the technology sector.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that staff and apprentices feel safe. They know how to report safeguarding concerns and have a good understanding of the national and local risks they may face in their communities.

Leaders follow safe recruitment practices and train all staff appropriately so that they know what to do if an incident occurs. Leaders and managers record and monitor concerns effectively and make referrals where required.

Leaders and managers meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. They have created a useful risk assessment, reflecting local risks, that they use to keep apprentices safe.

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

- Leaders and managers should ensure that all apprentices requiring extra support receive it so that they can achieve their apprenticeship and their full potential.
- Leaders and managers should make sure that support from skills coaches is consistently good and written reviews are improved so that tutors and employers are aware of the progress of apprentices.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	54022
<b>Address</b>	Rath House 55–65 Uxbridge Road Slough Berkshire SL1 1SG
<b>Contact number</b>	08450 747 829
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.qa.com">www.qa.com</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Darren Bance
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	23–25 October 2013
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## 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 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

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