

Inspection of The Development Manager Ltd

Inspection dates: 1 to 4 March 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

The Development Manager Ltd (TDM) is an independent learning provider based in Worcester, Worcestershire. After a number of years running apprenticeships as a subcontractor, TDM secured a contract for the direct delivery of apprenticeships in 2018, and, subsequently, for the teaching of adult learning programmes in 2021. At the time of inspection, there were 28 adult learners, mostly studying information and communication technology (ICT) systems and principles qualifications at levels 2 and 3. There were 153 apprentices following ICT and digital apprenticeship standards at levels 3, 4 and 6. The largest cohorts of these were 39 apprentices following the digital marketer standard at level 3, 26 apprentices following the digital and technology solutions professional (integrated degree) standard at level 6 and 29 apprentices following the infrastructure technician standard at level 3. The large majority of the provider's work is focused in the Worcestershire and the West Midlands areas and is delivered almost entirely online. At the time of inspection, the provider was running a small number of skills boot camp programmes which were not in scope for this inspection.

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

Leaders and managers have high expectations for learners and apprentices and encourage them to achieve their best. Learners and apprentices are highly motivated and have a positive attitude to their learning. They demonstrate a clear commitment to their studies and can articulate how their courses are preparing them well for their future careers.

Leaders set high expectations for attendance, and, consequently, attendance in lessons is high. Where learners or apprentices miss a lesson, they have access to catch-up sessions so that they can continue to make good progress.

Coaches create a positive online learning environment. Learners and apprentices feel encouraged to share their views and know that these will be listened to. This results in learners and apprentices confidently taking part in discussions in which they value and respect each other's views.

Apprentices quickly develop the professional behaviours they need to be successful at work. They learn how to conduct themselves confidently and work well independently. For example, apprentices on degree programmes have swiftly gained line-management responsibilities and now manage other apprentices. As a result, apprentices quickly become highly valued by their employers and have a positive impact on the workplace.

Coaches ensure that adult learners develop a clear understanding of the career opportunities available to them. However, not all apprentices are clear about the wider opportunities available outside of their current employer and, as a result, cannot always make informed judgements on their next steps.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have. However, apprentices are not sufficiently aware of the potential risks posed by extremist behaviour in the areas in which they live and work or about topics such as county lines. As a result, not all apprentices can take steps to protect themselves from these risks.

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

Leaders and managers have selected a curriculum for both apprentices and adults which is clearly aligned with local, regional and national skills priorities within the digital sector. They have worked well with key local stakeholders, including local employment partnerships, local authorities, specialist organisations within the ICT sector and employers, to develop the curriculum to meet the specific emerging skills needs of the areas they serve.

Leaders and managers have developed a highly effective curriculum that supports both adults and apprentices to develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours rapidly. As a result, they are able to perform technical and analytical tasks with

increasing autonomy. For example, one digital marketing apprentice was able to analyse and rectify the website speed of an employer's client.

Leaders have taken an ambitious approach to the teaching of their level 6 integrated degree apprenticeships. By writing their own level 6 taught curriculum, designed to align closely the degree content with the core knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship standard, leaders have developed programmes that are sharply focused on the skills employers and apprentices need. As a result, employers highly value the level 6 curriculum and apprenticeship programmes as a whole.

Leaders have established a suitably experienced board of governance to hold them to account for the quality of education they provide. However, the information that governors receive is not sufficiently focused on allowing them to understand the progress learners and apprentices are making. As a result, governors do not always have a sufficient focus on challenging leaders on the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive.

Leaders and technical coaches have ensured that the curriculum is logically ordered. For example, digital marketing apprentices learn about the basics of marketing before they move on to coding, web design and then digital marketing to a target audience. Consequently, apprentices build their knowledge and skills in meaningful steps over time.

Coaches are qualified and experienced experts in their field. They are well supported by leaders to undertake additional training to support the development of both their teaching and vocational skills, which they use very well in their teaching. As a result, learners and apprentices receive up-to-date teaching which is highly relevant to the workplace.

Coaches conduct a thorough analysis of apprentices' vocational starting points and use this well to plan an individual programme of learning, which challenges learners to meet their potential. Consequently, the significant majority of apprentices make rapid and sustained progress from their starting points.

Coaches use 'flipped learning' well – focusing on practical learning in the classroom while assigning apprentices knowledge resources to study outside the classroom. They routinely check the knowledge that apprentices are developing and remembering over the longer term. As a result, apprentices can recall and use key knowledge that they have learned earlier in their course. For example, one level 6 apprentice was able to use project management skills learned during their first year to drive a project at work.

Coaches provide helpful feedback to learners and apprentices, which shows them what they need to do to improve. They provide precise information on the areas that could be further developed and quickly respond to dispel any misconceptions. As a result, learners and apprentices produce work of a high standard, which shows improvement over time.

Coaches work well with employers to plan highly relevant personal development activities in the workplace which complement apprentices' programmes. For example, employer mentors encourage level 3 apprentices to communicate with colleagues using video calls instead of emails, so that they become more confident with their communication. As a result, apprentices develop highly professional behaviours in the workplace.

Apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours which they are quickly able to put into practice in the workplace. For example, some level 3 apprentices have created bespoke systems for their employers to meet business needs. As a result, apprentices have a positive impact in the workplace from early on in their programmes.

Development coaches work well with adult learners to develop the skills they need to move on to apprenticeships with employers with whom the provider already works. They support learners in identifying roles within these employers that they would be interested in and develop their understanding of the skills requirements of undertaking an apprenticeship at the next level. However, as the adult programme is relatively new, no learners have yet successfully made this progression and, as such, it is too soon to judge the impact.

Leaders and coaches offer a range of additional courses to adult learners designed to complement the curriculum and further develop their skills and interests. For example, learners can choose to study additional specialist technical courses in addition to their main programme. They can also access professional development workshops on topics such as assertiveness, mental health awareness and team working. As a result, adult learners are being well prepared for their next steps.

Coaches engage learners and apprentices well in their learning by contextualising their teaching content to real-life scenarios and developing learners' understanding of industry-standard frameworks often found in the workplace. As a result, learners and apprentices are able to link what they are learning with the workplace, and apprentices can clearly articulate how their learning is helping them be more effective in their day-to-day work.

Coaches provide effective support for learners and apprentices with learning difficulties/special educational needs. For example, a specialist develops individualised support plans for apprentices with autism spectrum disorder, and coaches provide these apprentices with regular breaks so that they are able to focus on lessons. As a result, these apprentices stay engaged in their lessons and make the same progress as their peers.

Learners and apprentices have access to high-quality learning resources and systems to support their learning. Coaches use these well to develop their understanding of key topics and, through the use of simulations, develop industry-standard practical skills, which prepare learners and apprentices well to apply these skills in the workplace.

Apprentices are well informed of the requirements to pass their end-point assessments and know what they need to do to achieve a high grade. Apprentices at level 6 clearly understand the link between achieving well in their degree component and achieving a high grade at the end of their apprenticeship. Coaches set ambitious targets for learners, and, consequently, many apprentices can articulate how they are being well supported to aim for high grades.

Coaches do not yet support all apprentices well enough to develop routinely their English and mathematics skills throughout their programmes. Leaders have identified this and are taking steps to address this issue by ensuring there are appropriate plans in place for all apprentices. However, the impact of this cannot yet be seen.

Learners and apprentices are prepared well for life in modern Britain. Coaches encourage apprentices through lively seminar discussions to explore diversity themes such as women in technology. Apprentices also explore wider environmental themes in their portfolio projects, such as the move to 'Net Zero', which helps them to understand the role they have to play in society. From early in their programmes, learners and apprentices develop an understanding of fundamental British values, the risks of radicalisation and extremism and how to keep themselves safe from harm. However, not all topics, such as those relating to sexual abuse, are fully explored. Leaders have identified this and are taking steps to address this. As a result, learners and apprentices are starting to demonstrate a broader understanding of these topics. However, this is not yet well enough developed.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have created a largely effective culture of safeguarding across the organisation and rightly place a high priority on the safety of learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers have put in place a largely appropriate policy for safeguarding, including the safe recruitment of staff and the appointment of an appropriately qualified designated safeguarding lead. However, the policy does not place sufficient focus on the steps the provider is taking to protect learners from sexual abuse and the need to create a culture of intolerance to these behaviours.

Learners and apprentices have a clear understanding of who they need to speak to if they have any concerns. In the few instances where referrals have taken place, learners have received the support they need. However, the safeguarding referral process does not ensure that all relevant details are recorded, and, consequently, leaders do not always have a clear view of the actions that have been taken to support learners. Leaders recognised this and addressed this issue during the inspection.

Managers have been slow to respond to the findings of the sexual abuse review and to provide appropriate training for staff which will help them to develop learners' and apprentices' understanding of these topics. While this training has now taken place, it is still too early to see its impact.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that all apprentices routinely develop their English and mathematics skills throughout their programme.
- Leaders must ensure that all apprentices receive unbiased careers information to enable them to make informed decisions about their next steps.
- Leaders must ensure that those responsible for governance receive appropriately detailed information about the progress learners and apprentices are making, to enable them to hold leaders to account for the quality of education they provide.
- Leaders must ensure that they meet their obligations fully following the findings of the sexual abuse review. They must make sure that learners and apprentices develop an appropriate understanding of these topics and are able to keep themselves safe.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1270853
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Contact number	0333 101 0040
Website	https://thedevelopmentmanager.com/
CEO	Derrin Kent
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operations director, 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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