

Inspection of PMA Ltd

Inspection dates: 26 to 29 April 2022

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

Information about this provider

PMA Ltd is a national independent learning provider based in Cheshire. In July 2019, the Education and Skills Funding Agency awarded PMA an apprenticeship contract.

At the time of inspection, there were 129 apprentices on apprenticeship standards. Thirty-four apprentices study level 5 operations or departmental manager (departmental manager), 22 on level 3 business administrator, 25 on level 3 team leader or supervisor (team leader), 19 on level 4 dental practice manager, 17 on level 2 healthcare support worker, seven on level 3 senior healthcare support worker and five on level 3 customer service specialist.

All apprentices work in doctors' or dentists' surgeries across the country, most of which continue to operate within stringent COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, most apprentices receive a remote curriculum.

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

Apprentices are extremely resilient and determined to succeed. They continue to work under rigorous COVID-19 restrictions. Apprentices successfully balance workplace demands with their studies. This is because they know that their courses are preparing them effectively for taking on additional responsibilities at work and progressing in their careers.

Apprentices develop the professional knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful at work. They are trusted members of their team. For example, level 2 healthcare support workers accurately check patients' blood pressure, temperature and weight, and provide appropriate care for patients who have dementia. Level 4 dental practice managers effectively and efficiently manage surgery budgets.

Apprentices develop their confidence significantly as a result of their apprenticeships. They routinely use their own initiative and work independently to make an effective contribution at their place of work. For example, level 5 departmental manager apprentices confidently manage conflict between staff and patients at the surgery.

Most apprentices are ambitious to achieve promotion or go on to further learning. However, not all apprentices are aware of the wider career opportunities available to them beyond their employers' businesses.

Apprentices feel safe. However, apprentices on level 3 team leader and level 5 departmental manager programmes do not know enough about the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism posed to them within the areas in which they live and work.

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

Leaders have a sound rationale for how to meet the skills requirements of the employers they serve. They provide an ambitious curriculum that is aligned to sustainable career pathways for the healthcare sector's non-clinical workforce.

The curriculum is ordered in a way that apprentices can incrementally build their knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, level 3 team leader apprentices initially learn about self-management. After this, they learn how to complete effective staff appraisals. Level 3 business administrator apprentices learn about the importance and value of team members' skills. They apply this knowledge when managing a project. As a result, apprentices become valued team members at work, who make significant contributions to their employers' practices.

Leaders have selected industry professionals who have the appropriate qualifications to teach apprentices. Tutors routinely update their industry knowledge. For instance, healthcare worker tutors have recently attended a course on phlebotomy. Leaders provide tutors with a range of helpful training to further develop their teaching skills. For example, how to use assessment effectively. This enables tutors to provide up-to date

training and use assessment effectively in order to identify gaps in apprentices' knowledge and inform teaching. As a result, apprentices know more and remember more throughout their programme.

A large proportion of apprentices complete additional learning modules. For example, telephone triage, understanding medical terminology, and the effects of menopause in the workplace. This extends apprentices' knowledge beyond the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship standard and meets the exacting requirements of their employers' businesses.

Tutors effectively plan and coordinate on- and off-the-job training with apprentices' managers. Managers routinely plan opportunities for apprentices to practise and hone their skills at work. As a result, apprentices develop industry-standard skills. A few apprentices gain additional responsibilities or achieve promotion.

Tutors use a range of effective strategies to teach apprentices. They bring teaching to life by using appropriate examples from the workplace. Tutors use video clips, discussion, questioning, quizzes and sample papers. As a result, apprentices retain information in their long-term memory. For example, level 5 departmental manager apprentices recall key management theories such as delegating tasks to staff based on their skills. Level 4 dental practice managers recall theory relating to emotional intelligence that helps them to meet the individual needs of their staff.

Tutors provide helpful feedback to apprentices. They tell apprentices what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Tutors often challenge apprentices to expand their answers. As a result, apprentices improve their work over time.

Tutors are passionate about the success of their apprentices. They prepare most apprentices well for their final examinations. Tutors routinely provide opportunities for apprentices to practise mock assessments. As a result, most apprentices achieve high grades.

Most apprentices use their English and mathematical skills at work. Level 3 business administrator apprentices accurately produce professional letters and emails. They confidently manage face-to-face queries from patients visiting the surgery. Level 2 healthcare support workers accurately calculate their patients' body mass index. However, leaders and tutors do not plan for all apprentices to further develop their English and mathematical skills beyond the minimum level required for the apprenticeship.

Senior leaders and managers use a range of information to gain a thorough and accurate oversight of apprentices' progress. Senior leaders set staff challenging targets to achieve and routinely monitor their progress against them. As a result, most apprentices make at least the progress expected of them. However, a small minority of apprentices have not completed their apprenticeships on time. Senior leaders have well-considered plans in place to help apprentices to swiftly catch up and complete their apprenticeships.

Board members receive good-quality information from managers which enables them to have a good understanding of the strengths and areas they need to improve. They ensure that any areas that need improving are monitored very closely, and they hold staff to account in order to make the necessary changes to improve apprentices' learning experience.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers support a culture of safeguarding and protection within their organisation. Leaders have put in place appropriate policies and processes to ensure that staff know how to keep apprentices safe. The designated safeguarding lead and deputy have the appropriate experience and training to carry out their roles effectively. They maintain up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding through the links they have developed with external agencies such as the police and local authority designated officers.

Leaders complete a range of appropriate checks when appointing new staff to make sure they are suitable to work with learners and apprentices. All staff receive appropriate training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Senior leaders need to prioritise the swift completion of the small minority of apprentices who have not achieved their apprenticeships on time.
- Leaders need to ensure that tutors systematically plan for all apprentices to further improve their English and mathematical skills beyond the minimum level required for the apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that all level 3 team leader and level 5 departmental manager apprentices understand about the potential risks posed to them within the areas in which they live and work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2578373
Address	PMA House The Old Post Office 1 Macclesfield Road Alderley Edge Cheshire SK9 7BQ
Contact number	0330 111 6459
Website	www.practicemanagersuk.org
Directors	Ian Jones & Austin Ambrose
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous monitoring visit	April 2021
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the education lead, 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.

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