

# Inspection of Mercuri International (UK) Limited

Inspection dates: 18 to 21 October 2022

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Requires improvement</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

Mercuri International (UK) Limited has held a contract to deliver apprenticeships since 2018. They started to deliver their first apprenticeship programmes in September 2019. At the time of the inspection there were 229 apprentices following standards-based apprenticeships, which included 17 on a break-in-learning. One hundred and seventeen apprentices were on the level 4 sales executive, 37 on level 3 team leader, 25 on level 5 operations or departmental manager, nine on level 3 early years educator, two on level 2 early years practitioner and 10 on level 3 improvement technician. A small number of apprentices were on level 2 large goods vehicle driver and waste resource operative programmes. There were 30 apprentices aged 16 to 18 years old. Nearly all teaching is remote. The provider works with 70 different employers across England.

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

Of the apprentices who started before October 2021, too many did not receive good initial advice and guidance or coaching support. Apprentices and some employers did not understand the requirements of an apprenticeship. Apprentices did not complete the work that was required between training sessions. As a result, too many apprentices made slow progress and withdrew from the course.

Apprentices who have been enrolled more recently now benefit from improved initial advice and guidance. Consequently, fewer apprentices leave the course.

Apprentices on the early years educator and practitioner apprenticeships still do not receive the training and support they need to make their expected progress. These apprentices rely heavily on their on-the-job learning.

Young apprentices do not receive the guidance they need to understand how to develop healthy relationships. Apprentices do not receive the unbiased independent careers advice and guidance they need to understand the wide range of options available to them on completion of the apprenticeship.

Apprentices benefit from good training from coaches who have been recruited more recently. However, too many apprentices do not attend the planned teaching sessions and reviews. A small number of apprentices who speak English as an additional language do not receive the specialist support they need.

Where coaching is better, apprentices are motivated by the way coaches link theory to practice. In these sessions, apprentices gain knowledge and skills that they can use in their workplaces. Level 5 apprentices develop their operational planning skills. For example, one apprentice reviewed and improved the process for exchanging contracts within their business.

Coaches provide helpful feedback. Apprentices understand what they need to do to improve their work and make the expected progress, and a few achieve the highest grade. Coaches respond promptly to requests from apprentices for additional support.

Coaches set clear and appropriate expectations for professional conduct. Apprentices develop confidence. For example, apprentices develop and make presentations to familiar and then unfamiliar audiences. Apprentices participate in constructive and respectful discussions. They demonstrate positive attitudes towards colleagues and customers.

Apprentices understand their responsibilities relating to equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion, and the dangers of extremism. Apprentices feel safe in their learning and at work, including when they learn online.

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

Senior leaders have a clear purpose but are unclear about their long-term vision for their training. Since the pandemic, they have delivered apprenticeships remotely. They have expanded the range of apprenticeships to include early years. They have not provided early years apprentices with the specialist training and support they need to make swift progress. Across all apprenticeships, senior leaders do not ensure that trainers provide consistently good remote training. Senior leaders have yet to finalise their future strategic decisions on which apprenticeships to teach and how best to teach them.

Until recently, coaches did not provide the consistent, high-quality teaching that apprentices need to support their online learning. Apprentices' attendance at support sessions and reviews has been low. As a result, too many apprentices have not completed their apprenticeship on time, and many have withdrawn.

Since November 2021, leaders have improved the process for the recruitment of apprentices and ensured that employers understand their responsibilities to support the apprentice. Importantly, since February 2022, leaders have recruited new coaches to provide better teaching and guidance for apprentices between training sessions. As a result, current apprentices are staying on the course and making better progress. However, there is more work to do.

Most coaches are knowledgeable and experienced in sales and management roles, but they need more training in the craft of teaching and extending their understanding of recent developments in their vocational area.

Senior leaders do not use data well enough to improve the quality of education that apprentices receive. Leaders do not produce headline information about apprentices' enrolments, withdrawals and achievements. They do not set appropriate targets or measure the impact of management actions. Leaders hold information in a variety of places and in a variety of formats. The actions of managers are not well coordinated, planned or reported. Until recently, managers have not acted swiftly enough to respond to the high levels of withdrawals and the weak achievement of apprentices.

Those who are appointed to the roles of governors have the relevant skills and background in education. However, they do not receive enough information from senior leaders about how apprentices are progressing or the quality of education that they receive on their apprenticeship. This prevents governors from providing helpful challenge to senior leaders and being able to hold them to account for the quality of education that apprentices receive.

Managers use a range of quality assurance and improvement processes. They monitor compliance with processes such as completion of initial assessment and recording of off-the-job training hours effectively. Managers have recently used

outcomes from quality assurance processes to inform the performance management of coaches. However, this has yet to have any impact.

Managers' assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation is too positive. Managers' actions for improvement are not sufficiently focused on improving the quality of education.

Leaders and managers have recently improved their methods of capturing the progress that the apprentices are making. As a result, managers are now making precise interventions to help apprentices make better progress. Recently, more apprentices are completing their apprenticeship, including some with the highest grades.

In sales, leadership and business improvement, leaders design apprenticeships that are coherently planned and sequenced. For example, coaches demonstrate how to build trust with a customer before teaching the skills of negotiation. Within the business improvement apprenticeship, coaches teach the topics of legal compliance and health and safety in preparation for the practical projects.

In early years apprenticeships, leaders do not provide sufficient regular and frequent teaching and assessment. They do not provide the young apprentices with sufficient face-to-face support, direct observation and feedback to enable the apprentices to make expected progress.

Leaders work hard to develop relationships with employers. The pandemic and recent economic challenges have made communication more difficult in the sales sector. Leaders are increasingly working with employers to provide better support for apprentices in the workplace. Not enough employers participate in progress reviews, and they do not respond quickly enough to requests from coaches to support their apprentices in the workplace.

Most coaches do not use assessment consistently well. Too often they start with an assessment or assignment and expect the apprentice to find out the solution using online resources or by conducting their own research. Coaches do not provide precise enough guidance on how to conduct independent research. Too many apprentices do not work with focus and pace.

Coaches who have been appointed recently provide a better quality of education. These coaches present information clearly, check on misconceptions and help the apprentices to apply their knowledge to the workplace. For example, operational managers can explain fluently how they use gap analysis to shape the forthcoming recruitment process for their team. However, coaches do not spend sufficient time extending apprentices' knowledge and skills beyond the setting of the apprentices' workplace. As a result, apprentices' understanding and experience are too narrow.

Where apprentices consistently attend their training sessions and reviews, they learn new knowledge and skills. Some sales apprentices start without their level 2 functional skills in English and complete their apprenticeship with a large work-

based project. Coaches provide the structured support that apprentices need to improve their writing over time. Apprentices who need to achieve their functional skills at level 2 receive the additional teaching they need to make expected progress.

Most apprentices who stay on the course make good progress at work, and some gain promotion.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are fully aware of their responsibilities to safeguard apprentices. Leaders have developed a culture of safety. The designated lead is appropriately trained and knows to whom they should report any incidents. Leaders have established the appropriate checks when employing coaches. Apprentices have a sound understanding of safeguarding and how they can apply it as managers in the workplace. Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe, including online. They know how to report concerns about themselves and others. Apprentices feel safe and secure in their learning and working environments.

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

- Leaders should rapidly improve the use of data so that they have clear and appropriate measures against which they can regularly monitor and report progress.
- As a priority, leaders should ensure that, following performance reviews, coaches receive the professional development they need to improve their teaching, use of assessment, and update their occupational practice.
- Leaders should provide governors with the information they need to hold leaders to account.
- Leaders should provide young apprentices with expert, detailed information about how to develop healthy relationships.
- Leaders should provide apprentices with access to high-quality, unbiased careers advice and guidance.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	2625231
<b>Address</b>	Forward House 17 High Street Henley in Arden Warwickshire B95 5AA
<b>Contact number</b>	0330 9000 800
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.mercuri.co.uk">www.mercuri.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Barry Hilton
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent Learning Provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality 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.

### Inspection team

Martin Ward, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rachel Clark	His Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Osmaston	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Parton	His Majesty's Inspector
Ravinder Jhite	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

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