

Inspection of Mercury Training Services Ltd

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 November 2022

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

Information about this provider

Mercury Training Services Limited (Mercury Training) is an independent training provider based in Birmingham, in the West Midlands. Mercury Training provides both apprenticeships and programmes for adults. At the time of the inspection, there were 174 apprentices, all on standards-based apprenticeships. Of these, 85 were on the level 3 security first line manager, 20 on the level 2 customer service practitioner, 17 on the level 5 operations or departmental manager, 14 on the level 3 team leader or supervisor and 10 on the level 3 coaching professional. The remaining apprentices were on a range of apprenticeships in facilities management, business management and engineering. Mercury Training also had two sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs) taking place for adult learners; 15 learners were on a security programme and eight were on construction.

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

Leaders, coaches and trainers have high expectations of apprentices' and adult learners' behaviour. These expectations are set early in adult learners' and apprentices' programmes and are reinforced regularly. As such, the vast majority of adult learners and apprentices have positive attitudes towards their learning. They are eager to improve their knowledge and skills and are proud of their achievements.

Most apprentices and adult learners gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours as a result of their studies. This is achieved through effective collaboration with employers and the sector to ensure that the apprenticeship or programme meets their needs. For example, apprentices learn how to handle customer enquiries and complaints professionally while maintaining the values of their company.

Most apprentices and adult learners develop confidence and self-esteem throughout their programmes. Apprentices develop new techniques, which they use to make improvements at work. For example, level 3 improvement practitioner apprentices design and implement projects to improve recycling and reduce landfill waste that is created in the workplace. Learners on adult learning programmes become more confident and resilient in their ability to learn new skills and gain employment.

Apprentices and adult learners feel safe and know how to keep others safe. Coaches and trainers ensure apprentices understand and reflect on their employers' policies to help them stay safe in the workplace. However, not all apprentices and adult learners understand the dangers posed by extremist groups or have sufficient understanding of the risks in the areas in which they work and live.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum that they offer. They work with key stakeholders, including the West Midlands Combined Authority, Job Centre Plus, and national employers within the security sector, to design and provide an appropriate curriculum.

Leaders recruit apprentices and adult learners with integrity. They have developed an adult and apprenticeship curriculum that successfully supports a diverse group of learners and apprentices. Leaders ensure that the curriculum supports adult learners back into work in the construction and security sectors by providing them with qualifications and the licence to practise needed to gain employment in sectors where there is a skill need. Equally, the apprenticeship curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of local and regional employers.

Leaders recruit coaches and trainers who are highly skilled in the security and construction sectors directly from industry. They provide them with the training and

support they need to develop their skills in the craft of teaching. They carry out observations of learning sessions and one-to-one coaching sessions to improve their teaching practice. The outcome of these observations informs a range of appropriate training for coaches and trainers. Consequently, the majority of coaches and trainers improve their teaching skills over time.

Since the previous monitoring visit, the advisory board has not met frequently enough to provide sufficient support and challenge to leaders. Leaders have recently refreshed the advisory board and have introduced clear terms of reference, identifying the advisory board members' responsibilities. The advisory board now has greater opportunity to provide leaders with support and challenge at bi-monthly meetings. However, as these arrangements are new, their impact cannot yet be seen.

The curriculum is logically ordered. Adult learners revisit, relearn and combine key knowledge that they have learned, resulting in them remembering more and being able to apply their knowledge in the context of complex security work scenarios. In apprenticeships, leaders work effectively with most employers to plan and develop the curriculum, focusing on specific areas, such as the importance of increased vigilance when working in sensitive sectors such as the NHS and government departments.

Coaches and trainers have expert knowledge in the subjects that they teach. On apprenticeship programmes, coaches use real-life examples from the workplace to link abstract theories into workplace practice. As a result, apprentices gain an understanding of new concepts quickly and deepen their knowledge over time.

Coaches and trainers check apprentices' and adult learners' understanding effectively. On adult learning programmes, trainers support adult learners to articulate their understanding and the development of their skills over time. Trainers often ask probing questions about how the techniques that they have learned may be applied at work, which contextualises and deepens the understanding of apprentices and adult learners.

Apprentices and adult learners benefit from regular opportunities to revisit topics and reflect on their progress. They know what progress they have made over time, what they can do well and what they need to do to improve. However, in a few cases, where coaches provide written feedback to apprentices, this is not always sufficiently developmental to help them to improve their work in the future or set expectations of high-grade achievement.

Coaches complete an assessment of the starting points of apprentices at the beginning of the apprenticeship to assess their existing vocational knowledge and skills. However, they do not routinely use these to plan learning. Consequently, a few apprentices repeat prior learning and do not progress as quickly as they are able.

Coaches review apprentices' progress frequently. However, not all employers participate fully in apprentices' progress reviews. Consequently, on- and off-the-job training is not coordinated as effectively as it could be for these apprentices. As a result, a minority of apprentices are not able to apply theory into practice as quickly as they could and make slow progress.

Leaders do not ensure that coaches and trainers systematically develop all adult learners' and apprentices' English and mathematical skills. Staff assess adult learners' and apprentices' starting points. However, this information is not routinely used to develop individual learning plans. As a result, apprentices do not develop all of the skills that they need.

Apprentices studying functional skills are supported effectively by a recently appointed specialist trainer and are achieving their qualifications. However, a few are still unable to complete their end-point assessments as a result of not having achieved their functional skills early enough.

Coaches ensure that apprentices are prepared for their final assessments effectively. They support apprentices with a range of practise assessments and revision preparation. Consequently, the majority of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship achieve high grades. A high proportion of adults achieve their qualification and successfully progress to employment.

Employers value the new knowledge and skills that apprentices bring to their business. For example, level 5 operations or departmental manager apprentices apply their improved financial budgeting and forecasting skills to successfully provide costings for an upcoming, large-scale event.

Most apprentices are prepared for the next phase of their career development effectively. In a few cases, apprentices gain promotion or take on additional responsibility as a result of completing their apprenticeship. However, leaders do not ensure that apprentices receive sufficient, unbiased careers advice and guidance. Consequently, apprentices are not always sufficiently aware of the wider career opportunities available to them.

Adult learners benefit from valuable support to develop job search skills, such as CV writing and completing job applications to help them gain work in the security sector. Leaders use their links with employers to provide helpful advice and guidance about job opportunities and career pathways.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is appropriately qualified and ensures that all staff have introductory and refresher training on safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty. As a result, staff are vigilant to any emerging risks posed to adult learners and

apprentices associated with radicalisation and extremism. However, leaders do not work closely enough with local partners and key agencies to ensure that they have a detailed understanding of local vulnerabilities and threats that may affect adult learners and apprentices.

The DSL deals promptly with safeguarding-related referrals. The safeguarding team works with external agencies, such as counselling services and mental health charities, to ensure that adult learners and apprentices receive the support they need with issues related to their mental health.

Leaders ensure that all staff who may have contact with adult learners and apprentices receive appropriate recruitment checks and maintain up-to-date, detailed records of all employees.

Leaders ensure that adult learners and apprentices improve their understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Apprentices understand safer working practices. However, the safeguarding training provided to the very few apprentices under the age of 18 does not yet focus sufficiently on peer-on-peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviours.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that progress reviews involving the apprentice, workplace mentor and coach are implemented consistently so that apprentices are able to practise their skills in the workplace.
- Leaders should ensure that the starting points for adult learners and apprentices are considered when planning their learning so that all learners and apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices have access to impartial careers advice so that they are aware of the full range of progression opportunities available to them.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices' and adult learners' understanding of life in modern Britain and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism are continually developed throughout their apprenticeship and programmes so that they can apply this to their daily lives.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1270899
Address	Suite 115 Albert Wing, The Argent Centre 60 Frederick Street Birmingham B1 3HS
Contact number	01384482186
Website	www.mercurytrainme.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Paul Lawton-Jones
Provider type	Independent Training Provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing 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

Sharon Dowling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Ben Crook	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqui Deane	Ofsted Inspector
Kelly Perkin	His Majesty's Inspector
Martin Bennett	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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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