

Inspection of Ixion Holdings (Contracts) Limited

Inspection dates:

7 to 10 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Ixion Holdings (Contracts) Ltd (Ixion) is an independent learning provider and part of Shaw Trust, the not-for-profit social enterprise organisation. Ixion's head office is in Chelmsford, and it provides training across England. There are 1,344 apprentices, of whom 1,209 are on apprenticeship standards and 135 are on apprenticeship frameworks. The largest apprenticeship programmes are in adult care and team leader or team supervisor. There are 243 adult learners. The largest adult programmes are in hair and beauty, funded through advanced learner loans. There are 46 young learners on traineeships and 29 learners with high needs studying supported internships.

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

Apprentices take pride in their work, and many achieve high grades in their final assessments. They value the opportunities that learning gives them to develop their skills and increase their life chances.

Learners and apprentices are highly motivated. They attend settings, both in person and online, that are conducive to learning and development. Adult learners in hair and beauty learn and practise in well-resourced training salons. The learning environment closely resembles the workplaces in which they aspire to secure jobs. As a result, adult learners develop confidence and quickly become skilled in professional treatments, such as applying manicures and providing massage treatments.

Learners value the care and support that staff provide to ensure their well-being. Young learners on traineeships make personal progress through overcoming anxieties and developing independence and resilience. They develop the confidence to travel alone on public transport to broaden the area in which they can go on a placement or find work. As a result, they expand the opportunities to use their skills and progress to sustainable employment.

Learners on adult programmes and young learners in traineeships take part in activities that help them to develop their sense of community and their understanding of current affairs. Young learners on construction programmes discuss the earthquake affecting Turkey and Syria while learning about the design and purpose of foundations. Adult learners on barbering courses organise charitable fundraising events for local branches of the Sea Cadets and Veterans Club. Young learners use their new skills successfully to raise funds for their local communities.

Learners and apprentices feel, and are, safe when learning or at work. They know how to report concerns to staff and feel confident that staff will deal with these effectively. Most are also aware of and can explain how to keep themselves safe online, and how to be vigilant for signs of potential grooming. Learners and apprentices understand the importance of not sharing personal information online and of using password protection appropriately.

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

Senior leaders have developed and refined a clear and ambitious strategic vision for Ixion. They have successfully realised this vision to reflect the provider's values of positive social change and corporate responsibility. As a result, young people and adults previously not in education, employment or training are able to progress to meaningful, sustained employment that significantly improves their life chances. Senior leaders have a keen focus on meeting regional skills shortages. They analyse data from local authorities, employers and other stakeholders to design and provide the most relevant programmes for learners and employers.

The new senior leadership team actively identified poorly performing areas of learning and moved swiftly to improve these. Leaders accurately identified that the quality of provision had declined since the previous inspection. A significant proportion of apprentices were making slow progress. Too few learners on traineeships continued in their learning. Following the pandemic restrictions, leaders diligently targeted areas for improvement and took effective action to implement change. For example, they suspended traineeship programmes and closed a training centre for adults in Birmingham. Leaders worked with learners and parents and carers to understand how best to improve the quality of the learners' experience before restarting the traineeship programme. As a result, trainees now remain in learning and thrive. They develop new, relevant skills and behaviours to improve their life chances. Apprentices working in the care sector were significantly disadvantaged by the impact of COVID-19. Leaders and staff worked to ensure that apprentices completed their qualifications successfully.

Leaders and managers work with employers and their apprentices to offer highly relevant programmes. Many apprentices complete useful additional qualifications. For example, apprentices employed by the National Autistic Society take a level 2 certificate in understanding autism spectrum disorder alongside their apprenticeship. Apprentices studying learning and development and human resources gain qualifications with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Managers and staff ensure that training sessions and assessment opportunities occur at the time best suited to apprentices' shift patterns. This could be early in the day or late at night.

Most trainers assess learners' and apprentices' starting points appropriately to plan learning. Staff explore prior learning during initial assessments and sequence programmes to suit individual learners. As a result, learners develop new skills and knowledge quickly. Adult learners studying barbering who already have cutting skills complete complex cuts. Those who start without cutting skills spend more time developing their scissoring techniques. Young apprentices in business administration quickly learn how to chair meetings effectively and manage diaries. They know the importance of positive attitudes in creating a collaborative workplace. Learners on supported internships learn work-ready behaviours, such as being punctual and enthusiastic, before moving into more complex aspects, such as learning how to travel independently to their work-experience placement.

Most teachers use a good variety of assessment methods usefully to determine learners' and apprentices' progress and to plan further learning. Teachers use effective questioning techniques to check and develop learners' and apprentices' understanding. Learners and apprentices respond well and are highly focused and enthusiastic, often asking and answering questions. Teachers reinforce learning through repetition and revisiting previous work to build on prior knowledge and extend learning. Many teachers promote discussions to enable learners and apprentices to share their ideas and apply their knowledge to new situations.

Learners and apprentices appreciate the importance of learning about equality, diversity and inclusion. They apply these principles to their work effectively.

Apprentices studying teaching assistant standards discuss with confidence ways to ensure that the learning planned motivates pupils. Team leader apprentices reflect usefully on any potential unconscious bias in their workplace or ways of working. They take effective action to eradicate any bias as a result. Learners with high needs in supported internships recognise how people's differences and experiences lead them to make different choices, and how important it is for society to reflect these differences. Adults on short courses demonstrate consideration for difference and show empathy for people facing challenges such as substance misuse or physical disability.

Leaders have invested significantly in staff development. Leaders have developed a comprehensive induction programme for new staff to embed the values to which the company aspires. Staff receive targeted professional development to improve the quality of teaching and learning, such as how to better support apprentices to personalise their learning using online software. Staff now record sessions so that apprentices can revisit their work and prepare more effectively for their next sessions.

Arrangements for governance are good. Leaders and managers provide governors with frequent and detailed updates on the quality of teaching and learning. Governors act quickly to ensure that areas for concern are actioned to effect improvement. Governors take a close monitoring role where it is required, such as in the decommissioning and restructuring of traineeships. Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They hold senior leaders to account to ensure that expansion of provision is not made at the expense of high-quality training.

Leaders have not created a sufficiently coherent curriculum for learners with high needs on supported internships. Too few learners progressing from one placement to the next have the chance to embed new learning, skills and knowledge. Learners who have progressed to higher level tasks in one placement, such as taking food orders from customers in a café, return to less skilled tasks, such as clearing and wiping tables, in their next placement. As a result, learners often do not develop their confidence, skills and ability to work independently rapidly.

Too few staff enable learners on supported internships to develop their independence and become work ready. Staff often use their time to check that learners attend, rather than coaching learners to develop their ability to be proactive in managing their work behaviours, for example in alerting their supervisors on the completion of tasks to show their readiness to move on to the next activity. While staff ensure that they review learners' development frequently, they often do not ensure that placement supervisors are present at the reviews.

Most learners and apprentices benefit from specialist help with their studies where it is needed. Staff ensure that additional diagnostic assessment, such as dyslexia screening, is promptly put in place. Staff adapt their teaching strategies to best

meet learners' needs. However, in a few instances, staff do not always enable apprentices to overcome their barriers and manage their learning effectively.

Too few apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance. Staff ensure that curriculum planning includes links to careers information. However, too few apprentices receive advice and guidance on their individual career plans and aspirations. Most apprentices have ambitions for their future job roles in their organisation and are clear about these. Apprentices on the lead adult care worker standard at level 3 are motivated to become senior support workers. Those on the operations/departmental manager standard at level 5 aspire to higher level roles in the schools in which they work. However, they do not understand the breadth of career choices their learning could make available to them or recognise the transferable knowledge, skills and behaviours that they have developed as a result of their studies.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Learners and apprentices rightly feel safe in learning and at work. Learners and apprentices understand the importance of safeguarding in relation to their subject. Adult learners in hairdressing extend their knowledge of safeguarding to their clients by learning to identify signs of vulnerability in clients' behaviour and body language.

Learners and apprentices develop a good understanding of how to manage their mental health. Referrals for mental health support have increased significantly over the past year, and staff quickly put in place effective support to ensure learners' and apprentices' well-being. Learners and apprentices are encouraged, where appropriate, to set personal goals related to mental well-being. Learners with high needs and apprentices are confident to report their concerns, such as suicidal thoughts and feelings.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Senior leaders need to ensure that a coherent curriculum is implemented for learners with high needs on supported internships to enable them to make good progress in developing their independence and work-readiness skills.
- Senior leaders need to ensure that apprentices understand the breadth of career choices available to them and recognise the good, transferable skills they have developed because of their education and training.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58521
Address	Halford House Coval Lane Chelmsford CM1 1TD
Contact number	01245 505630
Website	www.ixionholdings.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Sonya Anderson
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	21 to 24 November 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operational 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

Chris Bealey, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Shane Langthorne	His Majesty's Inspector
Rochelle Saneria	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Leeding	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector
Rebecca Perry	His Majesty's Inspector
Robert Bamford	His Majesty's 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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