

# Inspection of Alliance Learning

Inspection dates:

7 to 10 February 2023

## Overall effectiveness

## Inadequate

The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Apprenticeships

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

## Information about this provider

Alliance Learning operates from Horwich, Bolton, and recruits apprentices from the north west of England. It provides training in engineering, manufacturing technologies, building and construction, administration and business management for around 150 employers, which includes large and small- to medium-sized organisations.

Alliance Learning is part of the University of Bolton Group. The Groups' aim is to develop progression pathways aligned to employer skills requirements in Greater Manchester and beyond.

At the time of the inspection, there were 353 apprentices enrolled on apprenticeships. There were 216 apprentices on a range of level 3 engineering standards-based apprenticeships. Of these, 98 were on the level 3 metal fabricator, 52 on the level 3 maintenance and operations engineering technician, 35 on the level 3 engineering technician and 31 on the level 3 engineering fitter. Additionally, there were 42 apprentices on the level 3 business administrator, 25 on the level 5 operations or departmental manager, 18 on the level 7 senior leader, 11 on the level 3 team leader or supervisor, six on the level 2 customer service practitioner and three on the level 3 customer service specialist apprenticeship standards. There are a small number of apprentices studying the level 3 engineering framework apprenticeship.

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

Apprentices develop professional behaviours and positive attitudes that prepare them well for work. They demonstrate respect for their peers and tutors. Level 3 metal fabricator apprentices are considerate of their peers when operating machinery in the workshop. Apprentices understand the importance of attendance and punctuality at the training centre and at work. Attendance for most apprentices is high.

Apprentices value the support they receive from their tutors. They benefit from one-to-one support sessions by tutors which help them to understand theoretical concepts and to catch up if they fall behind. Level 3 business administrator apprentices appreciate the flexibility of online learning resources and use recorded training sessions to consolidate their learning.

Apprentices develop their confidence because of their apprenticeship. This results in apprentices making a positive contribution to their employers' businesses. Level 3 maintenance and operations engineering technician apprentices can independently replace a bearing on a set of rollers for a blower motor at work.

Engineering apprentices have experienced significant disruption to their learning. They have experienced numerous changes to staff and infrequent progress reviews which has impeded the progress they have made on their apprenticeship. While new staff have now been appointed to strengthen and stabilise apprentices' learning experiences, this has not yet ensured that all apprentices receive the same high-quality training.

Most apprentices do not have the opportunity to complete additional activities beyond their main vocational curriculum. Apprentices are unable to develop their interests and talents further. More recently, first year engineering apprentices have participated in an outward-bound team-building activity to form positive relationships with their peers.

Apprentices do not benefit from well-planned independent careers information. They do not have all the information they need to make informed decisions on their potential career choices. However, apprentices are aware of higher-level study opportunities within the University of Bolton group.

Apprentices know how and to whom they should report safeguarding concerns. However, when apprentices raise concerns, leaders do not ensure that staff follow the correct procedures. This has resulted in apprentices' safeguarding concerns not being followed up or recorded. Leaders and managers cannot assure themselves that all apprentices are safe.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale and vision for the apprenticeship training that they provide. The apprenticeships they offer are aligned to the priority skill sectors within the Greater Manchester region. Leaders engage effectively with a range of stakeholders and employers to inform apprenticeship curriculums.

Leaders' quality improvement processes are not yet effective. They have not identified in their own self-assessment all the weaknesses in the quality of training that they provide for apprentices. The recently appointed chief executive officer (CEO) has swiftly implemented a range of quality improvement processes to improve the education and training that apprentices receive. However, it is too soon to measure the impact that this is having on bringing about the swift improvements needed.

The CEO has recently put in place a comprehensive staff development programme, 'be phenomenal', to develop the teaching skills of all staff. Newly appointed staff are supported to complete their teacher training qualifications. Most tutors use their subject expertise effectively to coach and guide apprentices. However, there is no formal plan in place to ensure that staff complete industrial updating for the vocational subject specialisms that they teach.

Most apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours as a direct result of their apprenticeship. Level 3 metal fabricator apprentices develop core skills such as health and safety and how to use tools and equipment safely before progressing to more-complex tasks such as hopper fabrication. This results in apprentices becoming more independent at work. However, many level 3 maintenance and operations engineering technician apprentices spend a disproportionate amount of time observing other apprentices in the workshop and do not develop their own skills swiftly.

Leaders do not ensure that tutors use the starting points of apprentices at the beginning of their apprenticeship to plan an individualised and ambitious curriculum. Most engineering apprentices with prior qualifications and experience complete the same training, at the same pace, regardless of what they already know and can do. For example, level 3 maintenance and operations engineering technician apprentices experience sessions that are slow paced; many are unable to explain the purpose of what they are doing or what they are learning. This results in apprentices not making the progress for which they are capable.

Managers do not coordinate on- and off-the-job training effectively. This means that apprentices do not swiftly practise and hone their skills at work. Employers of level 3 metal fabricator apprentices do not always know what apprentices are learning at the training centre and cannot align their training with tasks at work. Most level 7 senior leader apprentices do not receive structured on-the-job training and frequently complete their off-the-job training in their own time.

The development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills is not effective for all apprentices. Tutors do not routinely provide sufficient feedback to help apprentices improve. Apprentices' errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are not routinely identified. Consequently, engineering technician apprentices continue to repeat the same mistakes in their work. Apprentices' written work does not improve swiftly enough. Often, apprentices completing functional skills do not start their learning early enough in their apprenticeship. These apprentices do not develop the English and mathematical skills that they need to pass their examinations at the earliest opportunity.

Tutors do not prepare engineering apprentices well for their final assessments. Apprentices are not aware of what they need to do to gain higher grades in their final assessments. Conversely, most level 3 business administrator apprentices who complete their final assessments achieve distinction grades.

Governance is not effective. Members of the board recognise that there has been a decline in the quality of training for engineering apprentices. However, they do not provide sufficient challenge to leaders or hold them to account to ensure that rapid improvements to the engineering curriculum are put in place.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders do not ensure that all staff within the safeguarding team are sufficiently trained. When apprentices raise safeguarding concerns, they are not acted upon swiftly by staff. The recording and monitoring of safeguarding referrals is systemically weak. Historically, leaders have not ensured that staff always follow the safeguarding policies and procedures, and document all concerns raised by apprentices.

Leaders have in place a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) who is appropriately trained. There is a designated board member who is responsible for safeguarding. The DSL has established effective links with a range of external agencies to help keep apprentices safe. For example, local organisations support apprentices who need support with housing or require mental health services.

Leaders ensure that there are appropriate pre-employment checks carried out so that staff are suitable to work with apprentices.

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

- As a matter of utmost urgency, leaders should strengthen their safeguarding processes and procedures to ensure that apprentices are safe.
- Leaders should ensure that all staff have the knowledge and understanding they need to identify, report and follow up safeguarding concerns effectively.

- Leaders and managers should ensure that tutors use apprentices' starting points effectively to plan an individualised curriculum for all apprentices.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices' on- and off-the-job training is planned and coordinated effectively so that apprentices can swiftly practise, improve and master the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be a productive employee.
- Leaders should ensure that tutors provide apprentices with effective feedback on their written work, so that they know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all apprentices have a thorough understanding of the requirements of their final assessments and the grades that they could achieve in their apprenticeship.
- Tutors should plan to teach English and mathematics functional skills earlier in the apprenticeship to develop apprentices' English and mathematical skills swiftly.
- Leaders should ensure that they provide a personal development curriculum that apprentices can participate in and benefit from to broaden their experience beyond the requirements of their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should provide high-quality, impartial careers information, advice and guidance to apprentices throughout their programme, so that apprentices know the full range of opportunities and career pathways that are available to them.
- Board members should provide sufficient challenge to leaders and hold them to account to ensure that rapid improvements to safeguarding arrangements and the engineering curriculum are put in place.

## **Provider details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	50387
<b>Address</b>	The Hurst Building Horwich Business Park Chorley New Road BL6 5UE
<b>Contact number</b>	01204 696744
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.alliancelearning.com">www.alliancelearning.com</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Lyn Bolton
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	23 May 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Bolton College

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the CEO, 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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