

Inspection of Pathway First Limited

Inspection dates:

21 to 24 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Education programmes for young people

Requires improvement

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Pathway First Limited is an independent learning provider based in Birmingham. At the time of the inspection, the provider had nine learners aged 16 to 19 on traineeships. A further 31 adult trainees were studying towards an employability qualification in either customer service, hospitality and catering or caring for children and young people. In addition, 728 adult learners, of which a few were funded through advanced learner loans, were studying towards a wide range of vocational and employability-related learning pathways. Most of the learning takes place at regionally based 'pathway skill zone centres' located across England, including Bradford, Birmingham, London, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.

The company also provides training to 40 apprentices, which is taught online or at employers' premises. The majority of apprentices work towards standards-based apprenticeships, including the level 2 adult care worker, level 3 lead adult care worker or level 5 leader in adult care. Other apprentices are working towards a range of apprenticeships, including level 2 customer service practitioner, level 3 early years educator, level 3 business administrator and level 3 team leader or supervisor. A small number of apprentices study for the level 3 digital marketer or management apprenticeships at levels 5 and 7.

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

Too often, tutors do not make good enough use of the results of initial and diagnostic assessments completed at the start of the course in order to plan ambitious curriculums that challenge trainees, learners and apprentices to achieve their best.

Tutors do not routinely plan or teach beyond the requirements of the qualification or apprenticeship. In too many cases, learning activities organised by tutors for trainees, learners and apprentices are limited to the development of a narrow scope of the vocational and/or academic subject. Tutors do not routinely challenge or encourage all to deepen their knowledge and develop their curiosity for learning to achieve their full potential.

A small minority of trainees and adult learners do not attend their lessons regularly and, as a result, make slow progress towards their educational targets.

Apprentices who start their training with considerable vocational experience find their apprenticeship too easy. They do not receive sufficient challenge from their tutors to develop their vocational skills further. Tutors do not coordinate the training of the apprenticeship with the learning and skills training provided by employers.

Tutors provide effective and frequent verbal feedback to learners and apprentices. This motivates learners to practise and apply what they have learned. However, the quality of written feedback that tutors provide does not clearly identify what they need to improve.

Most trainees, learners and apprentices have a positive attitude towards learning and develop their confidence while studying. Staff create a calm environment in learning centres, particularly for trainees and learners who have low levels of self-confidence or may have had a poor experience of education.

Tutors quickly identify and provide appropriate additional learning support to learners who need help or support. Learners who need extra assistance receive effective in-class help from tutors who are skilled at providing sensitive and thoughtful support that ensures all can participate fully in planned learning activities.

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

Leaders do not ensure that curriculums are sufficiently challenging and aspirational. The planning and sequencing of learning are inconsistent and vary too much between subjects, regional locations and on different courses and apprenticeships.

Tutors use the results from the assessment of learners' and apprentices' prior knowledge and skills to place them on the correct programme and level of learning. However, tutors do not use this information well enough to plan and sequence their learning. They do not set demanding targets that enable them to excel and make

rapid and assured progress from their starting points. As a result, too many learners and apprentices do not make the expected progress or extend their learning sufficiently.

Tutors do not ensure that planned learning activities routinely consolidate and build on learners' and apprentices' knowledge and understanding before moving on to new concepts or learning topics. Consequently, a significant minority of learners and apprentices are unable to fluently recall what they have been taught or have a precise enough understanding of how this links to their current learning.

Where learning is more effective and impactful, tutors ensure that the planning of the curriculum has clear links to trainees', learners' and apprentices' needs and abilities. For example, on 16 to 19 and adult traineeships, tutors help learners develop a secure understanding of the basic knowledge and skills for the specific sectors in which they will attend work placements. As a result, trainees are quickly able to participate in meaningful and developmental tasks at their placement.

Tutors use their insight and experience to make learning interesting and relevant by ensuring that curriculums are organised into small steps of learning. Learners and apprentices value this approach as it enables them to conceptualise, practise and consolidate their knowledge and develop the skills they will require for employment or further learning. For example, on adult learning courses at entry 3 to level 2 in English and mathematics and on the level 2 award in digital skills, tutors ensure that planned learning activities enable learners to confidently extend their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. Learners seamlessly apply this new learning to everyday personal and vocational contexts, such as running a personal or household budget.

The quality of feedback provided by tutors to learners and apprentices varies too much depending on the specific subject pathway and/or location that they attend. In too many instances, both the written feedback and development targets set by tutors overly focus on the completion of vocational and/or academic tasks. Consequently, too many learners and apprentices are not clear about how they can improve their work, develop their skills or extend their knowledge.

Where tutors' feedback on trainees' and learners' work is detailed and helpful it enables them to develop a secure understanding of the progress they are making and what they need to do to reach their potential. For example, in adult learning, tutors in level 3 nail technology and beauty treatments provide highly personalised guidance on how learners can improve and extend their vocational practice, such as in the correct application of gel coats to nails.

Learners take pride in their work and what they accomplish. They become more confident and self-assured and, in many cases, realise that they have the potential to succeed in their training and achieve their career ambitions. However, a large proportion of apprentices, particularly in health and social care, feel demotivated towards their learning because of delays in recruiting suitably experienced tutors. This has negatively impacted on their confidence and aspiration to achieve the end

point assessment grades for which they are capable. While leaders have now recruited additional trainer/assessor staff to rectify this, too many care apprentices are behind in their learning.

Tutors do not provide sufficient support to develop and extend the English and mathematical skills of adult learners and apprentices who are not required to take functional skills qualifications as part of their course.

Learners with additional learning needs and/or significant personal and social issues receive particularly good assistance that reduces their anxieties around attending learning. This support helps them to remain on programmes and make progress that is at least in line with their peers. For example, learners who have difficulties with their speech are given additional time to complete assessments and benefit from additional one-to-one support sessions with tutors. Trainees and adult learners with dyslexia are routinely provided with learning resources printed in large font on coloured paper and have laptops or computers equipped with adaptive software to aid and support them.

Learners on vocational and employability courses benefit from high-quality, well-maintained learning facilities and resources at regional learning venues. For example, adult learners on level 3 nail and beauty therapy benefit from access to industry standard treatment rooms where they develop the confidence to provide clients with a range of personalised treatments, such as pedicures, nail extensions or Indian head massages.

Learners' attendance at planned learning requires improvement. Although tutors continually remind learners of the importance of regular attendance and being ready to learn, attendance is too low on too many courses, including English and mathematics functional skills and customer service. Managers' actions to improve attendance have resulted in a marginal in-year improvement, but leaders recognise that attendance is not yet good.

Tutors and assessors do not provide all learners and apprentices with sufficient independent information, advice and guidance to help them make decisions about their next steps in training and employment. Too few learners and apprentices have a precise understanding about how their training benefits them or have been given impartial guidance setting out the full range of careers and training available to them.

Tutors' and managers' commitment to the organisational-wide culture of equality and social integration helps learners and apprentices to feel valued and respected. Tutors are very adept at maintaining a positive, welcoming and harmonious learning environment for all. They plan activities that extend learners' and apprentices' understanding of how their diverse backgrounds contribute to the importance of equal opportunities and community cohesion.

Directors and senior leaders use market intelligence well to inform their understanding of local needs and how these relate to local and regional skills and

employment priorities in locations where they have operational delivery centres. Leaders and managers work closely with a broad range of partners, including other training providers, regional learning and skills networks and business partnerships to develop a curriculum that supports the improvement of the life chances of disadvantaged communities.

Leaders and managers do not have a precise understanding of all the areas that require improvement. They have not sustained many of the key strengths identified at the previous inspection, and standards in relation to apprenticeships have declined. However, senior leaders have recently invested in increasing management and staffing capacity and have clarified individual areas of responsibility to support planned improvements to curriculums.

Leaders' and managers' use of data to monitor and evaluate the full range of outcomes that learners and apprentices achieve is not yet robust or sufficiently detailed. As a result, leaders do not have an up-to-date understanding of how well current learners and apprentices are progressing against learning targets. In contrast, leaders implement appropriate sub-contracting arrangements and routinely audit the quality of delivery to ensure that it meets the need of trainees and apprentices.

The governance board meets regularly and sets a clear strategic direction for the organisation to ensure that the curriculums are well aligned to local and regional priorities. They use their industry insight and experience well in providing detailed scrutiny and challenge to leaders and managers. However, board members do not receive sufficiently detailed information on the in-year performance, quality and learning experience being provided to trainees, learners and apprentices. This curtails their ability to challenge leaders sufficiently well to improve all aspects of the provision further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers give safeguarding a high priority. Matters relating to safeguarding are a routine item at meetings of the senior leadership team and a termly safeguarding report is presented to governors. However, leaders do not ensure that young trainees receive sufficient guidance and instruction to extend their insight and understanding of matters related to misogyny, consent and healthy sexual relationships.

Designated safeguarding leads keep detailed records of safeguarding incidents and carry out detailed risk assessments, and where relevant, make appropriate and timely referrals to external agencies.

Leaders ensure that all staff receive detailed and appropriate training in safeguarding, which is refreshed on an annual basis. Staff with specific responsibility

for safeguarding benefit from appropriate training that extends their knowledge of matters associated with child protection and safer recruitment.

Leaders and managers ensure that appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out, including disclosure and barring service checks on their own staff and staff working for their subcontractor. Leaders and managers have implemented clear procedures so that tutors know how to quickly identify, deal with and report any concerns that could affect a learner's or apprentice's safety.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that tutors and skills coaches routinely use information from initial assessments and vocational skill scans completed at the start of the course or apprenticeship, to design individualised plans that meet all learners' and apprentices' specific education and training needs.
- Leaders should ensure that all tutors have high expectations of what trainees, learners and apprentices can achieve, and that they motivate them to meet demanding targets and challenging timescales, and produce work that extends their learning beyond the minimum requirements of their qualification.
- Leaders should improve the standard of tutors' written feedback and the targets for improvement set in planned learning activities and during reviews so that learners and apprentices have a precise understanding of what actions they need to take to achieve their full potential.
- Leaders should improve self-assessment and quality improvement planning by ensuring that managers make better use of data and pay closer attention to learners' and apprentices' experiences at all stages of the programme when evaluating the provision.
- Leaders should improve the attendance of learners through strict adherence to the organisation's attendance policy.
- Leaders should ensure that managers use data more effectively in order to support quality improvement. They should ensure that rigorous systems are in place and used appropriately to hold tutors and assessors to account for how well apprentices are progressing and achieving in line with their abilities.
- Leaders should implement a clear framework setting out how all learners and apprentices can access and benefit from high-quality, impartial careers advice and guidance.
- Leaders should swiftly develop and implement an effective policy to improve the sequencing, timing and delivery of English and mathematics across all learning programmes so that all are supported to develop and extend their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Leaders should ensure that learners aged 16 to 19 on the traineeship programme receive detailed and helpful guidance that extends their insight and knowledge of matters related to positive and healthy sexual relationships.

Provider details

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Website	www.pathwaygroup.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mr Safaraz Ali
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Dates of previous inspection	4 to 7 October 2016
Main subcontractor	Evolve Academy Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating officer, 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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