

# Inspection of The Press Association Limited

Inspection dates: 18 to 21 September 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this provider

The Press Association, through its training division PA Training, has a long history of offering training to the media and public relations industries. In 2019, PA Training gained its own apprenticeship contract. PA Training trains apprentices at just under 20 high-profile organisations, including the BBC, News UK and ITN.

Apprentices complete standards-based apprenticeship programmes. At the time of the inspection, there were 54 apprentices on the level 5 journalist apprenticeship and eight apprentices on the level 4 public relations and communication assistant apprenticeship. Fewer than five apprentices were studying mathematics qualifications. All apprentices are over 18 years old.

PA Training recently started to work with one subcontractor. Runway Training teaches mathematics to a very small number of apprentices.

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

Apprentices are respectful, punctual and have good attendance. Apprentices have a positive attitude, are motivated and enjoy their training. For example, they attend early morning live newsroom conferences punctually, take part in them and reflect on the day's news thoughtfully.

Apprentices develop and display the professional behaviours necessary to be successful in their workplace. For example, they collaborate respectfully with specialist policymakers to create press releases in time-pressured environments. Employers value apprentices' contributions and encourage them to share ideas with colleagues, which helps to upskill their workforce.

Apprentices receive industry-related advice about how to secure work and the types of job roles available to them from trainers and industry professionals. However, apprentices do not receive sufficient information about alternative study choices, for example in further or higher education.

Apprentices benefit from a good range of personal development opportunities. For example, some take part in the national trade awards and national apprenticeship celebrations. Apprentices have direct contact with senior industry professionals, including news editors, picture editors and broadcast journalists, and hear directly from them about how they reached their positions in the media.

Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe, including while working online. Level 5 apprentices complete online safety and protection training as part of their studies. As a result, apprentices feel safe and are clear on whom they would speak to if they had a concern.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale for choosing the apprenticeship standards they teach. Leaders recognise that there is a decline in the public's trust in journalism. Leaders understand their role in working with the industry to ensure that journalists of the future are trained effectively.

Leaders and trainers plan the curriculum in a logical order. For example, level 5 apprentices first learn the essential principles of journalism, such as what is news, then the basics of storytelling, before moving on to more complex technical skills, such as media law. Level 4 apprentices first learn the background of public relations, then move on to setting out the purpose of roles such as media and press relations, marketing, and reputation management. As a result, apprentices gain new knowledge and skills, and the majority complete their apprenticeship, and many achieve high grades.

Trainers are practising industry experts. They use their in-depth media knowledge effectively to make sure that apprentices follow the rules relating to journalism. For example, they teach apprentices what a reporter can and cannot report in court to minimise the risks of legal proceedings. As a result, apprentices know what facts and direct quotes they can use when creating content for public readership.

Apprentices quickly develop new knowledge and skills. Trainers support and encourage apprentices to carry out increasingly complex projects over time. For example, apprentices create social media videos for a farming organisation, and research and analyse how many times they have been viewed.

Trainers plan effective activities and use resources well to help apprentices recall what they are taught. For example, trainers plan debates where apprentices discuss the pros and cons of private and public education. Apprentices put forward well-thought-out points in relation to driving up education standards nationally and the impact of funding and school fees on wealthy parents. Trainers plan simulated learning activities at real live studios where apprentices practise their verbal delivery skills and questioning techniques.

Trainers use assessment well to find and fill any gaps in apprentices' knowledge and skills. For example, trainers use practical and written assessments to test the speed and accuracy of apprentices' shorthand note taking. Trainers provide apprentices with detailed written and verbal feedback on how to improve their work. As a result, the large majority of apprentices' work steadily improves during their training.

Leaders and employers plan effective on-the-job training for most apprentices. For example, employers set level 4 apprentices tasks, such as how to develop internal communication strategies. However, some level 5 apprentices working at large media organisations do not have job roles or work in departments that match the breadth of their training. As a result, these apprentices do not consistently have the opportunity to put the new skills they learn, such as video editing, into practice at work.

Trainers and employers meet frequently with apprentices to review their progress. Trainers focus effectively on apprentices' well-being and the progress they make. However, trainers do not consistently set and record formal targets in progress reviews to make it clear to apprentices how they can improve their work.

Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe at work and in their personal lives. For example, trainers sensitively discuss with apprentices cases of harassment and manipulation by high-profile and powerful personalities within the media industry. As a result, apprentices feel equipped to recognise and challenge these behaviours should they occur to them when at work.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of their apprenticeships, including those of their subcontractor. However, due to staffing shortages, leaders have not responded quickly enough to tackle areas for

improvement. For example, leaders have been slow to improve the quality of target setting at progress reviews.

Leaders care about the well-being and workload of their staff. Leaders provide effective support to staff when needed, such as one-to-ones and peer support sessions. Trainers value the support they receive. Trainers particularly value the opportunity of flexible working hours to allow them to continue to work in journalism. As a result, staff are happy and proud to work for PA Training.

Leaders have put in place effective governance arrangements. Governors have expertise in finance, human resources and journalism. Governors are well informed by leaders about the strengths and areas for development. Governors provide effective challenge to leaders at their frequent meetings. For example, following feedback from apprentices, governors challenged leaders on the teaching of shorthand to all apprentices as some felt it was unnecessary. As a result, leaders now provide additional video production sessions for apprentices not wishing to study shorthand.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Make sure that apprentices have access to high-quality impartial careers, advice and guidance, including information about further and higher education opportunities.
- Make sure that trainers set apprentices clear targets that help them to improve their work over time.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	2625237
<b>Address</b>	Third Floor 61, Queen Street London EC4R 1AE
<b>Contact number</b>	020 7963 7920
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://pa.media/training/apprenticeships">pa.media/training/apprenticeships</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Vicky Frost
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent Learning Provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Runway Training

## 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

Paul Manning, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Christina Christou	Ofsted Inspector
Errol Ince	Ofsted Inspector

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