

Inspection of The Growth Company Limited

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

The Growth Company Limited (TGC) is a very large, not-for-profit organisation established in 1989. TGC provides education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and, more recently, high-needs provision. The senior leadership team is based at their training centre in Manchester City Centre. TGC has 11 additional training centres across the Greater Manchester region. These provide education and training predominantly for young people and adult learners. TGC provides opportunities for learning both in person and online across adult learning programmes and apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships account for almost half of TGC's total funding and are taught in all regions of England. TGC provides 62 different apprenticeships from level 2 to 6 and across all age groups. The largest apprenticeships are in specialist professional sectors such as insurance, pensions, project management and human resource management. Other subject areas include automotive, business administration, childcare, construction, and health and social care. TGC works with a variety of local enterprise partnerships nationally. In the north west of England, it focuses its

apprenticeship offer on the priorities of the Greater Manchester Work and Skills Strategy and the needs of the sub-regional labour market.

TGC offers education programmes for young people to those who may otherwise not be in education, training or employment. Programmes consist mainly of English and mathematics courses combined with a vocational subject such as construction, general employability skills, health and social care, and information and communication technology. Adult learning programmes are aimed primarily at meeting the needs of unemployed adults and at those wishing to return to education to progress to higher education. They include sector-based work academy programmes and skills bootcamps. High-needs funding is focused particularly on learners with education, health and care (EHC) plans who have social, emotional and mental health needs. All high-needs learners are integrated across a variety of education programmes for young people.

TGC works with six subcontractors to meet areas of specialised need where they do not have appropriate expertise. These include adult learning programmes in rail, apprenticeships in refrigeration, air conditioning and heat pump engineering, and skills bootcamps in green construction techniques and digital specialisms.

At the time of the inspection, TGC had 560 learners on education programmes for young people, 275 learners on adult learning programmes, 188 learners on skills bootcamps, 1,460 apprentices, and 14 learners for whom it received high-needs funding.

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

Staff create calm, supportive and welcoming environments for learners and apprentices that make them feel valued. They ensure that learners and apprentices have clear expectations about the behaviours required of them, such as respect for others and health and safety.

Most learners and apprentices appreciate the new opportunities that they discover because of attending their courses. They gain in confidence and communication skills. For example, level 4 insurance professional apprentices develop the confidence to draft and send recommendations to brokers without relying on managers to check their work. Employers notice that learners on level 1 sector-based work academy programmes demonstrate increased confidence during job interviews.

Learners and apprentices, including those who study online, feel safe and cared for. They are confident about how to report concerns and feel that staff deal with any concerns swiftly and effectively. Leaders and staff give prominence to mental health in curriculums and learning environments. Learners and apprentices feel safe to speak readily about their personal challenges. For example, tutors support adult learners studying the level 1 certificate in an introduction to the facilities industry sensitively to discuss topics such as male suicide in the construction industry. However, information and opportunities to help learners and apprentices to be physically healthy are not as well established.

Most learners and apprentices develop a clear understanding early in their studies of the importance of fundamental British values in their work and personal lives. They demonstrate tolerance and mutual respect in group work and in social areas. Level 5 HR consultant partner apprentices articulate the impact of democratic decisions in the workplace such as the use of committees in decision-making processes.

Most learners on education programmes for young people are polite and respectful in lessons. They use their time in lessons productively to complete activities. Young learners develop a clear awareness of wider society and topical issues such as Armistice Day and why people currently find it emotive. Managers and tutors are sensitive to the needs of learners, many of whom have complex lives and personal challenges. The quality of young learners' experiences varies across the different centres and on different courses.

Adult learners demonstrate high levels of motivation that increase because of their programmes. Learners on the level 3 skills bootcamp in green construction can articulate how the achievement of their qualification will create opportunities for better-paid jobs in the future. Learners on level 3 access to higher education programmes are highly motivated to achieve. Most progress successfully to appropriate higher education courses at regional universities.

Tutors have designed their apprenticeships carefully to ensure that apprentices develop the personal qualities that they need to be effective professionals in their

sectors. They align the content of the apprenticeship to fit with employers' requirements. This ensures that apprentices' training prepares them successfully to become trusted members of their teams at work.

Learners with high needs receive high levels of pastoral support that help them to manage their anxieties and remain in lessons. For example, managers use high-needs funding effectively, to provide learning mentors to support high-needs learners in lessons. Through the EHC plan progress reviews, learning mentors help learners to develop their wider understanding of the world around them. They set learners targets to help them to improve their social and communication skills, attendance and self-regulation. These help learners to develop new friendships and to gain in confidence.

Most learners and apprentices benefit from high-quality resources, including industry-standard facilities and equipment. These help them to prepare for their next steps and future employment. Adult learners and apprentices develop the skills that they need to be successful in their sector.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for the curriculums they offer. They aim to be an inclusive provider of education and training to young people and adult learners across Greater Manchester and nationally. Learners often have limited or poor educational experiences and are furthest away from the job market. Leaders have developed a cohesive range of programmes to support local, regional and national needs.

Leaders have created effective partnerships with local services, community partners and regional and national employers. These help leaders to ensure that the curriculums are relevant and responsive to local, regional and national needs. For example, adult learners gain additional sector-specific qualifications that give them an advantage in future job applications. However, while leaders rightly recognise the challenging circumstances of many of their learners, they do not have high enough expectations of what all learners can achieve.

Most tutors and skills coaches plan learning logically and carefully. They ensure that curriculums are well-sequenced and allow learners to develop broader skills beyond the course requirements even when they are on short courses. For example, adult learners on the level 2 digital skills in IT course start with an understanding of cloud data and work progressively to an understanding of coding. Young learners learn about stress management and alcohol misuse alongside their vocational courses. However, due to low attendance and poor completion of assessments, young learners do not always build up their knowledge and skills in a logical order. Too many learners fall behind with their work and strategies to help them to catch up are not always effective.

Skills coaches use information about apprentices' starting points effectively, to align curriculums to apprentices' job roles. For example, on the level 3 maintenance and operations engineering technician apprenticeship, apprentices apply their knowledge about gearbox design to fabricate a gearbox that is now used in an employer's business to lift swarf bins. However, tutors on education programmes for young people and a few adult learning programmes do not always consider the information they receive about learners' starting points carefully enough. Tutors are not always adept at dealing with the broad range of abilities of young learners in their lessons. Consequently, these learners do not make rapid or sustained progress from their starting points.

Most tutors and skills coaches carry out frequent checks on learners' and apprentices' understanding of key concepts and their ability to recall previously taught information. They consolidate learning to help learners and apprentices to memorise important key knowledge. On apprenticeships, most coaches use skilful questioning to probe and test what apprentices know and can do. Tutors on education programmes for young people use praise and encouragement discerningly to build learners' confidence. They help learners to understand key concepts through repetition and opportunities to practise through familiar circumstances such as constructing emails to friends. However, a minority of tutors do not carry out individual checks on learning or correct inaccuracies and misunderstandings.

Most tutors and skills coaches provide feedback that helps learners to identify what they need to do to improve their work. In apprenticeships, coaches provide apprentices with useful formative feedback on their work that helps them to prepare for their final assessments. In adult learning programmes, most tutors provide learners with detailed, annotated feedback that helps them to improve the quality of their work and to improve their English skills. Feedback on young learners' work often lacks specificity and is not completed quickly enough. This means that learners repeat previous mistakes. In a few instances, tutors' feedback on young learners' work contains basic spelling and grammatical errors.

Most tutors and skills coaches develop learners' and apprentices' use of appropriate technical and professional language effectively. Learners and apprentices use this vocabulary accurately in discussions and in their work. For example, young learners on the level 1 certificate in construction multi-skills course develop industry-specific vocabulary, including colloquialisms that they may come across such as "muck" as a term for mortar.

Most learners and apprentices receive appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance that helps to prepare them for their next steps or future careers. Many learners have access to external careers services and/or receive appropriate information about progression routes in their chosen careers. A minority of young learners would like to progress on to apprenticeships. However, they do not know the steps involved to achieve this ambition.

Most learners and apprentices who remain on their programme achieve their qualifications. Most apprentices on higher-level apprenticeships achieve distinction

grades in their final assessments. However, apprentices on the level 2 autocare technician apprenticeship do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable. Most adult learners who achieve their qualifications progress to either further study or employment. However, the progression of adult learners to further study or employment from programmes for the unemployed is not yet high. While evidence shows that high-needs learners make better progress in their learning than their peers, this is still not good enough with over a quarter of learners falling behind in their studies.

Leaders have a clear oversight of the quality of their subcontracted provision. They carry out regular and thorough checks to assess the quality of teaching and to provide support where appropriate.

Most tutors and skills coaches are highly qualified and experts in the subjects that they teach. Leaders ensure that staff, including subcontractor staff, benefit from a wide range of relevant staff development activities to improve their vocational knowledge and teaching practices. These include speech and language therapy and trauma-informed training to support learners with additional needs. A minority of staff are members of professional bodies. For example, skills coaches on the level 5 HR consultant partner apprenticeship are qualified Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development professionals. Coaches on the level 4 insurance professional apprenticeship are members of the Chartered Insurance Institute.

Leaders use a wide variety of appropriate measures and indicators to assess the quality of their provision at a strategic level. They have identified accurately many of the strengths and weaknesses through their self-assessment process. However, leaders' actions for improvement are not sufficiently focused on the quality of education. They do not consider fully the causes of the weaknesses and how they can rectify them quickly. Targets to support teaching staff to develop their practices are not always effective in helping them to improve swiftly.

Governance is not fully effective. While board members are suitably qualified and experienced to carry out their roles, they do not challenge leaders sufficiently around the quality of education and the progress that all learners and apprentices make. They hold leaders to account in a few areas such as apprenticeship achievement rates and safeguarding arrangements. However, leaders do not provide board members with sufficient information on other aspects of the curriculum that need to be improved.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Provide high-quality and ambitious curriculums for all learners and apprentices.

- Improve the quality and consistency of learning experiences for young people across the various training centres.
- Implement appropriate actions that ensure that young people attend their lessons regularly and make at least their expected progress.
- Review the use of starting points to create ambitious, individualised learning programmes, particularly for young learners and those with high needs.
- Improve the consistency of feedback to learners.
- Strengthen quality assurance and improvement processes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53233
Address	Lee House 90 Great Bridgewater Street M1 5JW
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Website	www.growthco.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jon-Paul Rimington
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Dates of previous inspection	30 October to 2 November 2018
Main subcontractors	Absolute Training Solutions Ltd Community Revival (UK) Ltd Plato Training (UK) Ltd Practical Refrigeration Training Centre Ltd Skills College UK Ltd University Academy 92 Ltd T/A UA92

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality, 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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