

# Inspection of Alliance Learning

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 June 2024

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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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	Inadequate

## Information about this provider

Alliance Learning (Alliance) is an independent learning provider based in Horwich, near Bolton. It is part of the University of Bolton Group. Alliance provides apprenticeship training in engineering, administration and business management for around 150 employers, mainly based in the North West.

At the time of the visit, Alliance had 304 apprentices studying apprenticeships at levels 2, 3, 5 and 7. Just over half of the apprentices were 16 to 18 years old. There were 231 apprentices on a range of level 3 engineering standards-based apprenticeships. Almost half of these apprentices studied the metal fabricator apprenticeship. Other apprentices studied engineering technician, maintenance and operations engineering technician and engineering fitter. Additionally, there were 61 apprentices studying business administrator, operations or departmental manager and senior leader apprenticeship standards. A very small number of apprentices were studying the team leader or supervisor standard, the customer service practitioner standard and the level 3 engineering framework. Alliance had a few apprentices completing their apprenticeship with one subcontractor.

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

Apprentices benefit from well-equipped workshops, tools and resources that replicate those used in industry. They are very well supported by tutors who are responsive to their needs and approachable. Tutors know apprentices and the organisations they work for very well and use this knowledge effectively to contextualise learning. This helps apprentices to develop significant new knowledge and skills that directly relate to what they do at work.

Apprentices share a positive working environment with peers and staff. They develop professional, work-ready behaviours and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Engineering apprentices are attentive, contribute professionally to class discussion and are courteous. Management apprentices present their ideas professionally. They explain how their newly developed insight helps them to be mindful of, and celebrate, the similarities and differences in the people they manage. Apprentices' attendance at work and in training is high. They become valued employees, regarded as integral to the future success of their organisations.

Apprentices enjoy their apprenticeships. Most apprentices now benefit from a varied personal development programme relevant to their apprenticeship and life experiences. They have guest speaker sessions about finance, unions, the minimum wage, working hours, annual leave, and support for gambling. Apprentices learn about healthy relationships, sexual harassment, coercive and controlling relationships and domestic violence.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have. They learn in an inclusive and respectful environment. Staff ensure that apprentices are well looked after and cared for and that their concerns are reported, recorded and actioned effectively.

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

Leaders have a clear vision for the curriculums they offer, using their expertise in engineering and business management to provide apprentices with the training that they need to be successful at work. Leaders design ambitious curriculums that meet the needs of employers, apprentices and their industry sectors. Staff regularly review the curriculums with employers to fill skills gaps and emerging training needs. They adapt and alter delivery models, teaching in blocks, day release and the workplace to meet the bespoke demands of apprentices and their employers.

Tutors plan and teach curriculums in a logical order so that the work apprentices complete develops in complexity over time. They have lengthened induction to check on what apprentices already know and can do and to introduce them to the personal development curriculum. In addition to vocational training, tutors provide apprentices with the study skills that they need to deal with the academic demands of their apprenticeship. Engineers study advanced mathematics, operational managers become effective communicators, and senior leaders improve their

academic writing. Leaders have restructured the teaching of English and mathematics so that apprentices develop these skills earlier in their apprenticeship.

Tutors are subject experts with significant industry experience. They use their expertise to help apprentices understand how theory relates to practice. Metal fabricator apprentices learn how to use manual metal arc welding equipment to complete butt and fillet welds on steel plates. They change the equipment settings to experience the impact that using varying amperage makes to weld quality. Apprentices use their knowledge and skills in the workplace with increasing competence, confidence and independence.

Tutors use carefully considered strategies and activities to assess the progress apprentices make and to ensure they remember more for longer. They use academic assignments, presentations, written reports, case studies and practical tasks. Tutors address misconceptions in lessons and provide clear explanations to help apprentices to understand where they make mistakes. They use questions skilfully to ensure that apprentices reflect and progress. In advanced mathematics, engineering technicians study how to calculate logarithmic forms. They practise calculations to develop fluency and accuracy. Senior leader apprentices complete research to consolidate their new learning and help them apply leadership theory at work.

Most tutors provide effective developmental feedback that helps apprentices to improve the quality of their work. Metal fabricator apprentices receive verbal feedback in the workshop that helps them improve their welding techniques and business administrators are challenged to expand answers and resubmit assignment work. However, some tutors identify strengths in apprentices' work but do not provide them with the precise feedback they need to improve the quality of their work. In a few assessments, feedback is overly positive.

Tutors ensure the curriculums include personal development opportunities for apprentices. Most apprentices have access to a broad range of activities on topics including mental health awareness, team building, problem solving and healthy eating. They develop character and resilience. Apprentices become well-rounded individuals, who can sustain employment.

Most apprentices now receive regular, appropriate and bespoke careers advice and guidance. Tutors have recently implemented a 'right course' review to ensure that apprentices are on the most appropriate apprenticeship pathway, gaining the specific knowledge, skills and behaviours they need for a successful future. Apprentices benefit from an on-site careers adviser and a range of external speakers and create online profiles to broaden their horizons. They are supported well to develop their interview techniques and write effective CVs. Management apprentices access executive recruitment companies to explore their next steps. However, apprentices who started their apprenticeships before September 2023, prior to the implementation of the new personal development curriculum, do not routinely benefit from the same level of careers education, information, advice and guidance as their newer peers.

Tutors receive well-planned staff development that helps them to improve their teaching practices. Leaders use lesson observations, learning walks, self-assessment, tutor self-reflection and apprentice surveys to identify strengths and weaknesses in learning and teaching. They use this information to plan responsive and relevant staff training. Staff new to teaching benefit from teacher training, work shadowing and mentoring to develop and enhance their teaching skills. Tutors benefit from back to the floor industry days and bespoke training to maintain their currency and ensure that apprentices receive high-quality teaching and training.

Leaders prioritise staff welfare and workload. Staff benefit from approachable and supportive managers, access to mental health support and counselling. Leaders run events such as the Rivington Pike walk, provide well-being boxes and talks, and produce a staff newsletter to celebrate good news. They provide a caring culture at work. Staff are proud to work at Alliance Learning.

Leaders and managers have taken steps to increase the number of apprentices who stay on their apprenticeship and achieve. They monitor and track closely to ensure an accurate oversight of the progress apprentices make and the quality of training they receive. Most apprentices stay on their apprenticeship and make their expected progress. Apprentices who complete their business management apprenticeships achieve distinction grades. However, on a few apprenticeships in 2022/23, too many apprentices left their programme early and did not achieve. Too many engineering fitter apprentices will complete their apprenticeship later than planned.

Governance arrangements have strengthened considerably since the previous inspection and are now effective. Leaders have recruited specialists from education to ensure the board meets its statutory duties, notably around safeguarding. Governors know the provision well. They receive useful reports and information that enable effective scrutiny and challenge on the quality of education. Governors work closely with senior leaders to bring about swift and sustainable improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Ensure that tutors consistently provide useful developmental feedback so that apprentices know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Continue to develop the personal development curriculum for all apprentices, including those who have been on programme for more than a year.
- Ensure that all apprentices benefit from effective careers advice and guidance.
- Increase the number of apprentices who remain on programme and achieve their apprenticeship on time.

## 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>	Dr Gill Waugh
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	7 to 10 February 2023
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Bolton College

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief executive 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

Alastair Mollon, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Zoe Ibbotson	His Majesty's Inspector
Scott Cubitt	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Butt	Ofsted Inspector
Bev Barlow	Ofsted Inspector

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