

Prostart Training

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Information and communications technology
- Employability training
- Business, administration and law

Description of the provider

1. Prostart Training (Prostart) was established in 1999 as a trading arm of Millbrook Management Services Limited. Prostart is based in Long Eaton where it has offices and training facilities. It contracts with Nottinghamshire LSC and Derbyshire LSC to provide training for apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and Entry to Employment (E2E). These contracts account for 90% of income. Prostart is part of the Nottinghamshire Training Network consortium for Train to Gain.
2. Prostart provides training for 233 learners most of whom are involved in business administration programmes. There are also 18 learners following information and communications technology (ICT) programmes and 13 learners in E2E. Other programmes with small numbers of learners not within the sample for this inspection include retail and commercial enterprise, contact centre operations and learning and development.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

Information and communications technology	Good: Grade 2
Employability training	Good: Grade 2
Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, the quality of the provision and leadership and management are good. The arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. The provision for apprenticeship training in business administration, and information and communications technology is good, as is the provision for employability training.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

4. Prostart has demonstrated that it has good capacity to improve. It has made good use of improvement indicators to closely monitor its three year development plan and to inform its strategic approach to improvement. Over the last three years, Prostart has worked hard to improve strategic management, planning and evaluation. It has developed a range of more effective quality assurance arrangements, in particular, more effective internal verification arrangements. Management information systems are used well to support managers in their reviews of performance and in their decision-making. Overall apprenticeship success rates, E2E progression rates and key skills pass rates have all improved significantly over the last three years. An increasing number of learners now progress onto higher level qualifications.
5. The self-assessment process is particularly thorough and fully supports good quality improvement planning procedures. Overall, quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory and Prostart is aware of the developments still needed in this area. The self-assessment process includes the views of both the staff team and learners at Prostart. The current report is adequately critical and uses data well to support its judgements. Inspectors agreed with many of the report findings.

Key strengths

- High apprenticeship success rates
- Good development of workplace skills in apprenticeship programmes
- Good E2E progression rates
- Good short term action-planning in apprenticeship programmes
- Good teaching and learning in E2E
- Good support for all learners
- Particularly effective improvement strategy
- Strong focus on promoting learners' well-being and success

Key areas for improvement

- Low E2E key skill achievement rates
- Unsatisfactory recording of reviews

- Insufficiently effective arrangements to improve on- and off-the-job learning

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

6. Achievement and standards are good, with high success rates in business administration programmes and some outstanding success rates in ICT programmes. The timeliness of

learners' achievements is satisfactory or better. Good skills development takes place across all programmes. The progression to employment, further education or training in E2E programmes is good, although key skill achievement rates are low. The self-assessment process identifies the strengths and the main areas for improvement.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

7. The quality of provision is good with good teaching and learning in E2E programmes. Good short-term action and assessment planning enables learners to progress quickly and achieve well on apprenticeship programmes. Support for learners in all programmes is good, particularly the support and promotion of learners' health and well-being. Individual learning support needs and interests are identified and met appropriately in all programmes. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Prostart provides a satisfactory range of programmes, which is responsive to the needs of learners' and employers'. The recording of learner progress reviews is unsatisfactory in all programmes. The self-assessment process identifies the strengths and main areas for improvement.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. Leadership and management are good. Leadership and management provide clear direction for overall improvement. Prostart has implemented particularly effective improvement strategies and the staff team understand clearly their part in the strategies. Quality improvement processes are very well integrated with development planning and business operations. A three year plan is used to support the achievement of strategic objectives. Since the previous inspection key weaknesses have been addressed successfully. A clear focus on performance has contributed to significant improvement in the apprenticeship overall and timely success rates. Appropriate and well constructed improvement indicators have been established to support the objectives outlined in Prostart's three year development plan. These indicators are reviewed regularly by the management team. The staff team are clear about the targets for improvement. Resources for learning have improved recently, however, Prostart are aware that they need to further develop the way resources are managed.
9. Prostart has a strong focus on supporting learners' well-being and success through promoting good overall support and involving learners at all stages of their development. This focus is clear throughout all the arrangements for leadership and management and in the practices of the staff. The staff team and employers are strongly committed to supporting learners' progress and achievement. Prostart has a good learner involvement strategy, where learner feedback is collected in a variety of ways to contribute to improvement. Learners benefit from individual quality reviews and this helps Prostart to respond quickly to the learners' experience. Learners' success is promoted and celebrated enthusiastically.

10. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. Prostart has effective arrangements to promote learners' well-being and security, which are carried out diligently and effectively by staff. Learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities and who they need to contact when unsure. Their interests are considered at all stages by staff. Other policies and practices, such as those for skills for life provision and the independent information and guidance services, are effective in providing good support for individual learners. Prostart ensures that the language they use in marketing and other communication is clear and informative.
11. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory overall. Data is used effectively to manage continuous improvement and inform the self-assessment process. Internal audit arrangements work effectively to monitor key procedures. Prostart is aware that it needs to further develop its feedback arrangements to engage a wider group of stakeholders, including employers, into its self-assessment process.
12. The current arrangements for quality assurance do not include sufficiently clear arrangements to monitor and improve on- and off-the-job learning. The current arrangements to observe teaching and learning sessions are not consistent and lack any full evaluation of their impact on learning. Less formal learning sessions, such as those that take place with learners at work, are not observed and do not form part of the quality improvement process. Learner progress review records lack sufficient detail to clarify what learning has taken place and in what context.
13. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Prostart has a strong commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity and appropriate policies and procedures are in place. Staff and learners are involved in the development of equality and diversity at Prostart. Staff participate in regular updates, training and development to support their role in promoting equality and diversity. Recruitment, qualification progression and the performance of different learner types is monitored closely and actions taken to promote opportunities for different groups of learners.
14. Prostart has a designated equal opportunities officer who co-ordinates the work of the equality and diversity team. The equality and diversity strategy and action plan are regularly reviewed, however, progress and changes are not always recorded clearly and insufficient use is made of data to fully evaluate the impact of actions taken. Prostart review arrangements fail to further promote and develop learners understanding of equality of opportunity. Access to some training rooms at the main centre is difficult for people with mobility restrictions. Prostart is aware of these limitations and is seeking to move to new premises in the area.

What learners like:

- ‘Assessors are all very helpful’
- The frequent visits by staff to the workplace
- Relaxed and friendly staff
- ‘Tutors are excellent, they treat us like adults’
- ‘I can learn at my own pace’
- ‘Helps me balance my college and NVQ studies with my work’
- ‘Prostart helped me get a job’
- ‘My qualification was explained very clearly’

What learners think could improve:

No improvements identified by learners

Sector subject areas

Information and communications technology

Good: Grade 2

Context

15. Prostart has 18 learners on the ICT work-based learning programme, all of whom are employed. One learner is female and nine are advanced apprentices.

Strengths

- Outstanding success rates
- Good development of workplace skills
- Good short term action-planning

Areas for improvement

- Unsatisfactory recording of reviews

Achievement and standards

16. Achievement and standards are outstanding. The self-assessment report recognised this as a strong feature of the provision. Apprenticeship success rates improved from 50% in 2004/05 to 100% in 2006/07. Timely achievement has also improved significantly. Learners progress quickly through the programme and current learners are on target to complete their apprenticeship within their planned training period. Many learners progress from a Level 2 qualification to a Level 3 while at Prostart.

17. Learners develop good workplace skills. All learners are employed in responsible positions. The skills they have developed ensure they mainly work using their own initiative and some learners are in supervisory roles. One learner, who originally started working as a receptionist, progressed onto a trainee civil engineering technician programme and now has a range of very specialist skills in three dimensional design. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is generally satisfactory or better. The self-assessment report cited this as a strength.

Quality of provision

18. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners regularly access good coaching and use the learning resources to support their progress. Some learners attend off-the-job training at a local college of further education.

19. Good short term action-planning provides learners with clear direction, motivation and the support to achieve good skill levels and complete their vocational qualifications. Assessment is carried out effectively using a good range of methods, for example, visits occur at least monthly, although they can be more frequent at the learners' request. Assessment action plans are completed after each visit to which both the employer and learner contribute effectively. Targets are specific, clear and relevant to the learners needs.

Targets are written on the plan, reinforced verbally and reviewed at the next assessment. Both learners and employers are well informed of the short-term assessment targets and what needs to be completed before the assessor's next visit. The self-assessment report did not recognise this as a strength.

20. The recording of progress reviews, including the details of on- and off-the-job learning, is unsatisfactory. Individual learning and action plans lack sufficient information about the planned training or the work context that this training should take place in. Review records often lack information about what training has been taking place and what is planned for the future. Employer comments are recorded but not always put into action. Insufficient recording takes place to fully contextualise the national vocational standards with the skills or knowledge attained at work. Reviews lack discussion about how equality and diversity principles are applied in the working environment. The self-assessment report did not report this as an area for improvement.
21. Programmes meet learners' and employers' needs well. Most learners are aware of the progression routes available to them, particularly the possibility of progressing from a Level 2 to a Level 3 qualification. The range of qualifications currently available is appropriate.
22. Prostart supports and encourages learners to adopt a mature approach to their training and helps learners in their ambitions to advance in their current jobs. The provision of advice and guidance is satisfactory. Arrangements for additional literacy, numeracy or language support are made when required.

Leadership and management

23. Leadership and management are good. Managers evaluate the programme carefully and identify and successfully prepare appropriate actions to improve the provision. Learner and employer feedback is used well to inform improvements. The quality assurance arrangements that underpin assessment arrangements are managed well and are effective in maintaining good assessment practices. Prostart has very good links with local employers and they highly value the service and support provided by Prostart. The self-assessment report was generally accurate and used data well to support judgements. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded.

Employability training

Good: Grade 2

Context

24. Prostart has 13 learners following the E2E programme at the training centre in Long Eaton. Learners are referred to Prostart either by a Connexions personal adviser or through self-referral. The programmes last for 20 weeks on average and include training in personal and life skills, vocational training and literacy and numeracy. Learners can take vocational and literacy and numeracy qualifications at Level 1. Most learners progress onto apprenticeship programmes in business administration or customer service, or they enter further education or employment. Learners take part in planned work experience during their programme.

Strengths

- Good progression rates
- Good teaching and learning
- Very good support for learners

Areas for improvement

- Low key skill achievement rates
- Inconsistent application of the review process

Achievement and standards

25. Achievement and standards are good. The rate of progression into employment, further education and training is high. The overall rate for three years is good. The numbers of learners achieving the key objectives of their E2E programme has remained satisfactory. Learners develop appropriate employability and jobsearch skills. The work produced by learners in some off-the-job sessions is generally satisfactory and in some cases good. Other learners develop good levels of self-confidence and make an effective contribution when on work placement. The numbers of learners who have achieved a full Level 1 key skill qualification in literacy or numeracy is low.

Quality of provision

26. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and carefully managed. The tutors make the lessons interesting for the learners by providing a range of imaginative and challenging activities. The learners engage well in these activities and most are well-motivated. Lessons are lively and there is excellent communication between tutors and learners. Tutors provide good individual guidance during the lessons and cater well for a wide range of individual learning support needs. The accommodation used for the E2E learners is comfortable and offers a welcoming learning environment. All learners have access to a computer and there is a satisfactory range of learning aids and resources. The provision for literacy, numeracy and language training is appropriate and effective.

27. The review process is not applied consistently for all learners. Individual progress targets are discussed during the monthly progress reviews between the learner and their tutor. An appropriate record of any discussions during the reviews is maintained. However, there is insufficient monitoring of progress against any previously set targets and when this does take place they are not supported by clear records. In some cases, learner reviews are too infrequent.
28. Programmes and activities meet learners' and employers' needs well. The range and style of personal and social learning activities are well suited to the learners needs. Individual needs are well understood by staff and appropriate learning plans are prepared. Prostart has sufficient work placement opportunities for learners following the E2E programme. The placements support their learners well and provide good on-the-job learning opportunities.
29. Support arrangements are very good. Learners have access to a personal counsellor throughout their time on the E2E programme. Prostart have also developed very effective links with external agencies who provide support for learners with issues such as drug and alcohol misuse, family and personal relationships, homelessness, sexual health and pregnancy. Throughout their programme, learners also receive very valuable personal support and social development. These include sessions on building self-confidence and self-esteem, anger management and team working. Food parcels and temporary accommodation are available for learners who are experiencing problems at home.
30. Staff at Prostart provide well-focused advice and guidance for learners on employment options and progression routes. For example, one learner who had severe depression and drug problems while on the E2E programme was provided with help and support from staff and an external counsellor and then progressed on to a GCE A level programme and a degree programme at a local university. Very useful work tasters are available at an early stage of the programme to allow learners to sample different areas of work and help them make career decisions. Appropriate information, advice and guidance is provided throughout the programme. The weekly jobsearch sessions at the training centre are well managed and enjoyed by learners.

Leadership and management

31. Leadership and management of the E2E programme are good. The roles and responsibilities of the staff are clearly defined and there is very effective communication between all members of the team. Prostart have developed a skills for life support strategy, which each member of the team follows. This covers all aspects of the programme, including initial assessment, learner support, resources and accommodation and staff training and development. The self-assessment process for E2E is generally accurate, with many of the identified strengths and areas for improvement being confirmed by the inspectors. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners receive initial training during their induction and this is reinforced during the monthly reviews.

Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

32. Prostart has 70 administration and 46 customer service learners. Of these, 34 were advanced apprentices in administration and 17 advanced apprentices in customer service. Nearly all learners are employed and most of the training takes place at work. The small numbers of learners who are not employed or on a work placement attend the Prostart training centre.

Strengths

- Good success rates
- Particularly effective assessment
- Very good support for learners

Areas for improvement

- Unsatisfactory recording of reviews

Achievement and standards

33. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates for advanced apprentices are good and have risen over the last three years from 37% to 80% for administration and 44% to 100% for customer service. Apprentices' success rates are also good and have risen from 55% to 75% for administration and 58% to 71% for customer services. Current learners are making satisfactory or good progress towards their qualification. The quality of evidence presented in learners' portfolios is satisfactory. Programmes are good at helping learners to improve their confidence and self-esteem. Development of learners' workplace skills is satisfactory. Many apprentices are in their first job since leaving school, often with few achievements, and they make good progress at work towards their career goals. The self-assessment report recognised the good success rates.

Quality of provision

34. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning is satisfactory. Much of the learning takes place on-the-job, with some learners attending off-the job sessions at the training centre. These sessions are well planned and tutors respond well to meet individual learner needs. Learners who attend the training centre enjoy the individual attention they receive during their training and welcome the opportunity to practice skills away from a busy work environment. Learners use the well equipped training centre learning resources to develop their understanding and skills.

35. The assessment process is highly effective in improving learners' confidence and competence. Assessments are carefully planned with the learners and the learners' supervisors. Workplace visits by assessors are particularly effective in meeting the needs of the learner. Assessors use a wide range of assessment methods to promote progress and

achievement. Particularly good use is made of the observations of learners in the workplace to capture the evidence of performance invaluable in the assessment of progress towards skills development. All assessment outcomes are used well to help develop learner's confidence. Assessment details are carefully recorded, agreed with the learners and supervisors and fully cross referenced to support qualification progression. Detailed targets are set for the next assessment visit with copies left for both the learners and supervisors. The self-assessment report recognised this as a strength.

36. The recording of progress reviews is unsatisfactory. Too many progress review records do not sufficiently record discussions or actions taken to promote or reinforce equality of opportunity or matters related to health and safety. The documentation used does not encourage the reviewer to record the questions they ask or learners' responses in sufficient detail to indicate the level of the learners' understanding. Learners and employers are fully involved in the planning and reviewing of learning, however, very little of the training required in the workplace or what has been achieved on-the-job are recorded. The self-assessment report did not recognise this as an area for improvement.
37. The initial assessment arrangements are satisfactory. All learners complete initial literacy and numeracy assessments. Arrangements for diagnostic tests and the provision for additional support for learners with literacy, numeracy and language needs are good. Learners receive good key skills support as part of the individual coaching from their assessors within the workplace.
38. Programmes and activities satisfactorily meet the needs of learners and employers. There is a close match between learners' aspirations and employment or placement opportunities. Employers are involved well in the review and learning process and provide appropriate individual coaching in the workplace. Employers are carefully chosen and vetted to ensure that learners benefit from employment that is well matched to their career aspirations.
39. Prostart provides learners with particularly effective support. This includes information, advice and guidance and regular and frequent visits to learners in the workplace. Visits are flexible and tailored to meet the requirements of the learner and employer. Learners and staff communicate well. Learners can contact staff at all times by email and phone. Staff carefully listen to learners needs and respond quickly and effectively when required. Learners requiring additional learning or social support receive a swift, supportive and caring response. They also receive support from external specialists if required and have access to a counsellor at Prostart. Staff are highly committed to helping learners and are responsive to their needs. Learners value the guidance and support they receive from staff. Many apprentices are in their first full time job since leaving school and clearly match their progress and achievements to the support and frequent contact they receive from staff at Prostart. The self-assessment report recognised this as strength.

Leadership and management

40. Leadership and management are good. Programmes are well managed and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Management strategies have been effective in improving the provision and in increasing learner success rates. Learners benefit from staff who are well qualified, experienced and who undertake regular staff development. Managers at Prostart carry out quality reviews which identify if the learners' experience is

up to the standards set by Prostart and through this also obtain learner and employer feedback. Management information is used well to monitor the progress of learners and to manage the performance of staff. Team meetings are frequent with a strong focus on discussing learners' progress and success rates. The quality assurance arrangements that underpin the assessment process strategy are appropriate. The development planning process is effective in monitoring the programme and securing improvements. The self-assessment process is comprehensive. The self-assessment report is generally accurate and correctly identifies most of the strengths but not the area for improvement. Inspectors gave a higher grade than that in the self-assessment report.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by Prostart **2004 to 2007**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	74	55	48	35	34
		timely	75	41	31	25	22
	05-06	overall	24	58	53	54	44
		timely	26	42	34	38	27
	06-07	overall	27	96	64	89	58
		timely	28	86	43	79	37
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	117	59	51	50	39
		timely	127	35	29	28	22
	05-06	overall	151	69	58	64	52
		timely	151	50	38	43	34
	06-07	overall	163	75	65	69	61
		timely	143	52	47	51	44

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record

Outcomes on **Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes** managed by Prostart **2005 to 2008**

Year	Number of leavers in the year	Achieved objectives rate*	Progression rate**
2005-06	57	75	68
2006-07	33	67	55
2007-08 (6 months)	12	89	92

Note: 2007-08 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the three months or greater of the LSC contract year

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period