

Pearson PLC

Employer

Inspection dates

8–10 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Safeguarding arrangements are not effective; leaders and managers do not know if all apprentices are safe.
- Too many apprentices do not complete their programmes successfully. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications within the planned time is too low.
- Senior leaders have allowed the quality of the provision to decline significantly since the last inspection.
- Leaders and managers do not use data well enough to monitor the performance of all groups of apprentices and aspects of quality of the provision, including that of subcontractors.
- Leaders do not ensure apprenticeship provision meets funding requirements.
- Apprentices do not receive teaching in English and mathematics.
- A significant amount of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate.
- Assessment of apprentices' starting points is insufficient to inform the programmes of work they are given.
- Assessors' use of setting targets for apprentices is ineffective and, as a result, apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- There are insufficient opportunities for apprentices to develop their personal and social skills or their understanding of equality, diversity and the importance of British values.

The provider has the following strengths

- The inspection team found no key strengths.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Pearson PLC is part of the multinational Pearson Education group employing over 40,000 people in 70 countries. It provides educational materials, technologies, assessments and related services to teachers and students. Pearson PLC supports operations across the wider Pearson group, including areas such as customer services, finance and human resources.
- Pearson PLC has approximately 80 members of staff on apprenticeship programmes based at five regional offices across the United Kingdom. Most apprentices are adults studying programmes in business administration and customer service, with two thirds at intermediate level and the remainder at advanced level. The employer changed subcontractor in September to a sister company, Pearson TQ, which provides apprenticeship training to employees.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure as a matter of priority that all apprentices are safe. Establish robust procedures for safeguarding apprentices that detail accountability and reporting systems precisely and ensure key staff are suitably trained. Develop and implement a thorough review process to ensure that all apprentices are kept safe and ensure that senior leaders are informed of any incidents and actions taken routinely.
- Improve the quality and frequency of assessment in order to enable far more apprentices to develop their skills fully, make good progress and complete their programmes in the planned timescale.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring trainers and assessors plan sessions that interest and challenge their apprentices to excel.
- Urgently provide high-quality training for apprentices to develop their English and mathematics skills and gain English and mathematics qualifications. Ensure trainers and assessors promote the development of English and mathematics skills routinely in all aspects of the apprenticeship programme.
- Use the results from assessment of apprentices' starting points, including information on their personal and social needs, to set precise short- and long-term targets that are aligned closely to the individual apprentices' development needs.
- Ensure all apprentices have access to a wide range of personal and social skill development activities which assessors and mentors target them to complete. Ensure the provision of these activities is informed by an assessment of apprentices' individual needs, supports their understanding of equality and diversity and improves their personal and social skills.
- Rapidly improve the quality of provision by:
 - developing accurate data collection and recording systems for all aspects of provision
 - developing a performance management framework on which to assess the quality of provision
 - setting key performance indicators based on stretching but realistic targets for improvement
 - closely monitoring the performance of different groups of apprentices
 - using the data gathered to understand accurately the key areas for improvement and take immediate action to bring about rapid improvement.
- Ensure that the required components of the apprenticeship framework are put in place immediately and that leaders receive accurate information on the quality of all aspects of provision and set high expectations for the quality of training and the performance of apprentices, managers and the subcontractor.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders and managers have failed to maintain the strengths or tackle the areas of poor performance identified at the last inspection. As a result, the number of apprentices who achieve their qualifications has declined.
- Following a significant and prolonged period of decline in the number of apprentices who achieve their qualifications, senior leaders and managers have changed subcontractor. Insufficient analysis of the quality of provision prior to changing subcontractor has resulted in a much slower than expected transition period. For example, too many apprentices were working towards qualifications they were unable to achieve due to a lack of opportunities for them to provide evidence for assessment. Although staff have been working hard to address these issues there has been no significant impact on outcomes for apprentices.
- Managers do not collect sufficient data to scrutinise the quality of provision and hold the subcontractor to account for their performance. For example, managers have been unable to demonstrate how they are monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the impact this has on outcomes for apprentices. Data on the progression of apprentices are not collected and managers are unaware that the gap in performance between male and female apprentices has increased significantly.
- Performance management processes are underdeveloped and lack high expectations. Managers have not yet developed a performance framework or quality standards to monitor the performance of the subcontractor.
- Senior leaders and managers have failed to place sufficient emphasis on the key components of the apprenticeship programme. For example, managers were unable to provide any evidence that apprentices receive the required off-the-job training, and the prioritisation of English and mathematics is insufficient. As a result, apprentices who are rapidly approaching their expected completion date have yet to receive any training in these areas.
- Senior leaders and managers are unable to identify how they have planned to promote and develop apprentices' understanding of equality, diversity and British values through the curriculum.
- Apprenticeship programmes align with the needs of the business and are specific to the regional office into which they are deployed. Managers are committed to developing further apprenticeship programmes to meet the changing needs of the business.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Senior leaders do not receive sufficient detailed information on the quality of provision with which to make decisions and hold managers and subcontractors to account.
 - Strategic planning and target setting are underdeveloped; senior leaders do not set sufficiently high aspirations for the quality of provision.
 - Senior leaders do not set a sufficiently high priority for the development of English and mathematics skills.
 - Senior leaders are unaware of their responsibilities relating to safeguarding apprentices.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective**
 - While safeguarding at an organisational level is in place, arrangements for the safeguarding of apprentices do not meet statutory requirements.
 - Senior leaders have not ensured that a suitably trained member of staff is in place to oversee safeguarding procedures on the apprenticeship programme.
 - Leaders and managers do not have a system in place to collect information from apprentices related to safeguarding concerns.
 - Leaders and managers were unable to provide inspectors with a safeguarding policy or procedures for the monitoring of the safeguarding of apprentices.
 - Leaders and managers have not carried out checks on subcontractors to ensure staff are suitably vetted to work with young people.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Too many apprentices do not complete their programmes successfully. A very low proportion of apprentices achieve their qualification within the expected timescale. The large majority of apprentices

continue to make slow progress. The recent change in subcontractor arrangements has yet to have a significant impact on ensuring apprentices make good progress.

- Trainers plan too many sessions that fail to interest and challenge individual apprentices to reach their potential. Assessors' questioning techniques are often ineffective in probing and extending apprentices' knowledge and understanding; assessors accept limited responses from apprentices before moving to the next topic regularly.
- The assessment of apprentices' starting points by trainers and assessors is insufficiently robust and often fails to identify apprentices' support needs. Ongoing assessment of apprentices in the workplace is too infrequent and assessors often fail to put right any barriers to apprentices making progress.
- Too much time is spent confirming apprentices' current skills against unit criteria rather than developing their knowledge and skills further through meaningful off-the-job training activities. In a small number of better sessions, apprentices benefit from good encouragement by their assessor for their workplace performance, for example in managing a new team of staff; this helps to raise their confidence and self-esteem.
- Assessors do not plan assessment activities effectively to ensure apprentices extend their skills and make good progress. Assessors often accept minimal responses from apprentices without checking that they have understood fully; they do not challenge apprentices to reflect, solve problems and deepen their knowledge through exploring evidence routinely. Assessors lack confidence and knowledge about the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. As a result, not all apprentices understand what is required to complete all the components of their programme.
- During progress reviews, staff do not ensure all apprentices understand what progress they have made and what they need to do to excel. Assessors do not plan subsequent learning effectively to support apprentices in achieving their longer-term goals. They do not involve apprentices' line managers regularly in the review process and, as a result, employers' workplace training is not maximised to ensure apprentices develop their skills to their full potential.
- Assessors' target setting for apprentices is too limited, often focusing on completion of unit criteria, and does not provide sufficient detail to help apprentices make good progress. Assessors' written feedback on apprentices' work fails to help apprentices to develop their skills fully and make good progress.
- The development of apprentices' functional skills is inadequate. Staff do not ensure that apprentices' prior learning and assessment of their English and mathematics skills inform the planning of apprentices' learning. Trainers and assessors do not promote apprentices' development of English and mathematics routinely in the vocational subject and ensure that apprentices develop a good understanding of industry-specific terminology. Staff do not check apprentices' work for spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

- Apprentices' levels of interest and motivation decline significantly because staff do not challenge them to make good progress in a timely manner. The large majority of apprentices are not developing sufficient self-confidence to take responsibility for their learning. Too many apprentices wait for assessors to guide them on their next stage of learning without attempting to work independently and make good progress.
- The vast majority of apprentices do not receive sufficient off-the-job learning to develop their knowledge and skills and this inhibits the development of their employability skills, including their ability to scrutinise critically their own performance and manage their own learning.
- Staff do not provide effective information, advice and guidance that enable apprentices to understand how they can achieve their career goals; it is limited to checking that apprentices are on the right qualification for their current job role. There are no formal arrangements to secure apprentices' intended destinations or planned actions to help them to make informed choices about their next steps, such as promotion.
- Leaders do not ensure apprentices develop their personal and social skills sufficiently well. Assessors and mentors do not plan for the development of apprentices' understanding of equality, diversity and the importance of British values.
- Assessors do not prioritise the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills within the context of their vocational sector. A few apprentices are directed to complete online training to practise these skills; however, this is completed outside of the context of apprentices' job roles and learning programmes.

- Apprentices enjoy their job roles and are keen to progress within their chosen careers. They are confident with their workplace duties and work well as team members or leaders within their department. They are valued members of their workplace, present themselves professionally and take pride in their work duties. Apprentices know how to conduct themselves in the work environment and receive a good level of employer-led training on general health and safety matters.

Outcomes for learners

are inadequate

- Too many apprentices drop out of learning or do not make sufficient progress to complete their programmes within the agreed timescale. Provider data indicate that the proportion of apprentices who leave their programme early continues to be too high and, while the proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes successfully has improved, it remains below that of other similar providers.
- Too many apprentices have been registered on the basis of incorrect information about their qualifications and/or units. As a result, a small minority of apprentices have had to recommence their programmes entirely or transfer to different units more suitable to their work roles within the qualification framework.
- The gap between male and female achievement identified in 2013/14 data has not been resolved; the provider's own data from 2014/15 indicate that the gap between these groups has increased significantly, resulting in female apprentices being significantly less likely to achieve than their male peers.
- The standard of apprentices' work requires improvement. Apprentices do not produce work in sufficient depth to extend their knowledge beyond the requirements of the qualification and, as a result, progress is too slow.
- The acquisition of functional skills by apprentices within their learning programmes is inadequate. Apprentices do not have the opportunity to improve their skills in these areas. Inspectors were unable to find any evidence of how English and mathematics was being planned to be delivered. As a result, apprentices do not progress quickly enough.
- Although there is considerable evidence of individual apprentices' successful progression to further qualifications and within the company, managers do not track the destinations of leavers or completers systematically.

Provider details

Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	100
Principal/CEO	Mark Anderson
Website address	http://uk.pearson.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	2	57	0	23	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pearson TQ 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Shane Langthorne, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Blowman

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the director of human resources, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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