

# The Via Partnership Limited

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		25–28 March 2014
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider is good because:

- Learners develop very good work-related skills that improve the quality of their work, their capacity to learn, and their future employment and qualification prospects.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care and early years and playwork are good. Assessors help learners develop their subject knowledge and skills well. This improves their work performance and benefits those in their care.
- Assessors give learners very constructive feedback on their work to help them improve further, often involving employers in this process.
- Senior managers have taken very positive steps towards raising the quality of the apprenticeship programme. In particular, improvements to the management of assessors' performance and the much greater attention to functional skills are beginning to make an impact and improve outcomes.
- Managers and assessors promote equality and diversity well through the apprenticeship programme. This helps learners working in the care sector in particular to improve the way they carry out their roles.
- The wide links that the Via Partnership Ltd (Via) has with partners and employers support its overall aim to support sustainable employment in the region.

#### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Success rates are historically too low and require improvement. Learners' progress towards achieving the apprenticeship qualification has previously been too slow.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet outstanding. Assessors do not consistently apply their skills to encourage deeper learning and reflection. They sometimes miss opportunities to give learners feedback on what they have done well and why.
- The teaching observation system is not rigorous enough to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to consistently high standards.

## Full report

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

- Monitor and review regularly the impact of actions taken in order to sustain the improved progress that learners are now making.
- Strengthen the teaching observation procedures by ensuring reports include clear and detailed evaluations of the learning that took place and the quality of assessment practice. Use this information to grade observed sessions and to identify areas for improvement.
- Improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all tutors and assessors make full use of every opportunity to develop learning through tutorials, progress reviews and assessment. Use existing staff expertise to share best practice, through peer observation and through improved observation reports where appropriate.
- Ensure assessors consistently give learners constructive feedback on how they can improve and what they have done well.
- Monitor and evaluate improvements to teaching, learning and assessment, and to consistency of practice, through the observation system.
- Develop more systematic arrangements to gather and analyse data on learners' progression to higher-level studies or to other roles as employees. Use this to evaluate the quality of provision and plan further improvements.
- Improve the self-assessment report by making the judgements on apprenticeship provision more explicit. Make better use of learners' and employers' views to support these judgements.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Requires improvement
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- Apprentice success rates have been too low in recent years and require improvement. Too few learners in health and social care, early years and playwork achieved their qualifications by the planned end date but the current learners are now making good progress. However, it will take time for this recent improvement to raise success rates above the national averages.
- Learners develop very good work-related skills that enhance the quality of care they are able to provide for their clients. They improve their performance at work and grow in confidence to take on new roles such as the development, implementation and review of care plans and to gain promotion. A high proportion of learners achieve the main vocational aim of the apprentice qualification.
- The good development of work-related skills is a significant step forward for the many learners who begin the intermediate level apprenticeship programme with no qualifications, and sometimes with a negative experience of formal education.
- The proportion of learners that stay on their programme has increased and is high for the current year.
- Learners benefit from the good opportunities to progress to higher-level qualifications offered by the company, some moving from intermediate to advanced level, or from advanced to higher-level apprenticeships. Via has formed links with a university to enable two higher-level learners to complete the first year of a university degree alongside their level 5 apprenticeship qualification.
- Learners have historically made very slow progress towards gaining the qualifications in functional skills that they need in order to complete the apprenticeship.

- There are no significant differences in the achievement or rate of progress for different groups of learners.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good in health and social care and in early years and playwork. This is consistent with the good work-related skills that learners acquire, but is not yet reflected in high success rates as too many learners have left their programme. The high-quality workplace training allows learners to develop a wide range of skills essential for the vocational area and raises learners' confidence in their ability to do the job well.
- Assessors use their good occupational experience and knowledge very well to plan learning sessions that meet learners' individual development needs. Assessors now ensure that learners understand course requirements including the important part that the functional skills of English, mathematics and information technology play. Strengthened arrangements to support the development of functional skills are helping learners make good progress towards gaining their qualifications.
- Assessors make effective use of initial assessment to plan learning, placing equal value on all aspects of the framework, including functional skills. They encourage learners to access the information available on the recently introduced electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) system, and advise on additional reading and useful websites.
- In the best practice, assessors use every opportunity during coaching, assessment or review sessions to develop learning. They use exploratory questions well to help learners link theory to their working practices, and to reflect on ways to improve. For example, one apprentice was able to articulate a much greater awareness of her clients' very specific care needs and her role in meeting those needs. However, this is not always the case and assessors sometimes miss opportunities for development.
- Assessors take opportunities to reinforce and improve functional skills. For example, they emphasise the importance of clear written English in a professional care setting and offer guidance on how to improve sentence structure. The newly introduced group sessions for English, mathematics and information technology are proving popular with learners and are helping them progress towards completing their apprenticeship.
- Most assessors give detailed, accurate and constructive feedback to help learners improve further. In the best feedback sessions, assessors encourage deeper learning by using well-focused coaching skills. Occasionally feedback does not challenge the learner sufficiently well to extend their knowledge.
- Assessors make good use of the e-portfolio system to give learners written feedback on their assignment work, highlighting areas for improvement in the comment boxes that only learners can see. Assessors are good at telling learners how to improve, but do not always explain why they have done well.
- Employers take an interest in how well learners are progressing, by accessing their records through the e-portfolio. They value the continuity of support that learners receive by having one named assessor. Assessors and workplace managers monitor the progress of their learners very effectively and take action if this begins to slow down. They recognise the positive impact the programme has on their employees' development of workplace skills.
- Assessors use opportunities arising during assessments and reviews very well to improve learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity. Learners apply this well to their everyday practice. For example, one learner in a setting for looked after children was able to describe very clearly the importance of providing continuity of care to aid children's development.
- Safeguarding practice is good. Learners have a thorough understanding of safeguarding issues. They can relate this both to their work with their clients and to themselves as employees.

Although e-safety is included in learners' induction on to the programme, their levels of awareness vary.

## The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have a very clear vision of Via's social and economic purpose to improve skills and reduce unemployment. Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to this overarching aim. Although it is a small part of the business, the apprenticeship programme fits well within this broad ethos.
- The Board of Directors has a good understanding of the business imperatives that drive the work of the company and provides effective and constructive challenge to senior leaders to support decision making. Board members and senior leaders have taken positive steps to sharpen the focus in strategic and business planning on outcomes for learners, and on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Via has used its wide links with stakeholders at national, regional and local level very effectively to shape and deliver provision. Good links with employers have been particularly valuable in supporting the apprenticeship programme.
- Managers recognise the need to improve the low success rates in apprenticeship programmes and have taken significant action to bring this about. They have identified the slow progress learners make towards gaining functional skills qualifications as a major reason for the low success rates. To address this, Via has appointed a coordinating tutor for functional skills, and brought forward training in English, mathematics and information and communication technology to the beginning of the programme. This has successfully raised the profile of functional skills across the company and increased the number of learners passing their tests. This has increased the rate of progress learners are now making towards gaining their qualifications.
- The company has improved initial assessment to help learners make a more informed choice over apprenticeship training and to reduce the risk of learners leaving the programme early. It no longer recruits learners to the apprenticeship in early years, as this did not meet the needs of learners sufficiently well. Successful learners have good opportunities to progress to higher levels of study, including to level 5 in the management of health and social care.
- Via has appointed a new team of assessors and introduced stronger procedures for managing their performance. Every month managers review with assessors the progress each learner has made towards completing their qualification. Managers and assessors agree action to take if this progress is too slow. This has already improved the rate of progress learners make.
- These arrangements form part of a robust overall framework for managing performance that include the observation of teaching and learning, regular individual discussions between line managers and assessors, and twice-yearly performance management reviews. An improved management information system provides accurate data to support these procedures.
- Although Via has made significant improvements in the use of data, it does not make enough use of information on progression to evaluate the apprenticeship programme.
- The procedures for observing teaching have led to improvements. However, the observations focus on teaching and do not consistently evaluate assessment practice or the impact of teaching on learning. As a result, the grades are not sufficiently reliable, and the potential for improvement is too limited.
- The company uses self-assessment effectively to evaluate the quality of provision and bring about improvements. The self-assessment report makes explicit how judgements link to the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework. However, the report does not reflect clearly enough how the strengths and areas for improvement relate to apprenticeships, and how learners' and employers' views affect those judgements.

- The organisation promotes equality and diversity well through professional development for staff and through the content of the apprenticeship programme. Via uses data effectively to analyse the staffing profile, patterns of recruitment and gaps in achievement. The company has taken action to improve the very low recruitment of male learners into health and social care apprenticeships, involving male carers in promoting career opportunities in schools.
- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Staff have a good understanding of the company's procedures for safeguarding young people and adults. Suitable arrangements are in place to protect the safety of learners on employers' premises.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### The Via Partnership

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	2
Early years and playwork	2

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider							
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+							
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: 0							
	Part-time: 167							
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Karen O'Donoghue							
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	October 2012							
<b>Website address</b>	www.via-uk.com							
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	7	17	0	25	0	24		
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>								
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							

## Contextual information

Via is a social business owned by Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and based in Leyland, Lancashire. The main purpose of The Via Partnership is to improve people's skills and reduce unemployment. The company was previously inspected under the name of CXL. It delivers a wide range of programmes of which the apprenticeship programme forms approximately 5%. Via took over the apprenticeship contract from another provider in 2011.

Lancashire is a large and diverse sub-region of the North West of England with a population of just under 1,500,000. Nine of the 12 districts in the county fall within the top 50% of deprived authorities in England. Small and medium businesses have largely replaced the manufacturing base that formerly provided employment.

## Information about this inspection

**Lead inspector**

Jan Smith HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Operations as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

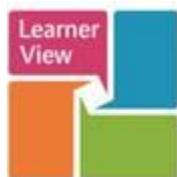
## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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