

Pilot IMS Limited

Independent learning provider



Inspection dates	1–4 December 2015
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have taken decisive action since the previous inspection which has brought about rapid improvement. They understand the needs of employers and local communities very precisely so that they match employers', apprentices' and learners' needs accurately.
- Employers support their apprentices very well. They help them link theory with the workplace and to progress through their qualifications at an appropriate pace.
- Managers provide a wide and well-designed range of programmes, which very effectively develop apprentices' and learners' employability skills.
- Staff ensure that apprentices complete functional skills early in their programme, and most achieve appropriate English and mathematics qualifications at the first attempt.
- Managers ensure that all apprentices and learners use safe working practices and learn in supportive and safe environments.
- The achievement of qualifications is good on apprenticeship programmes and many progress onto higher level programmes. Achievement of qualifications on adult learning programmes is very high and a large majority of learners on the logistics skills programme move into permanent employment.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Not all apprentices complete their qualifications within expected and planned timescales.
- Not enough teaching and learning enable all learners to make the rapid progress they can.
- Written feedback to a minority of apprentices and the majority of adult learners is not precise enough to help them improve their performance.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Pilot IMS Limited (Pilot) is an independent learning provider with its main offices in central Birmingham. Pilot also has logistics and manufacturing skills academies in Stafford and Birmingham which offer adult learning programmes. Apprenticeships, designed to suit the needs of a wide range of employers, account for over half of the provision across the West Midlands.
- Around 600 adult learners and apprentices are enrolled onto programmes each year. Adult learners are on part-time courses aimed at supporting pathways to employment and providing nationally accredited work skills.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of apprentices who complete their frameworks within expected and planned timescales by thoroughly reviewing and monitoring their progress and setting clear targets for achievement.
- Leaders and managers should ensure there is a continued focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and share good practice to promote high standards, so that all learners make rapid progress in their learning.
- Tutors, trainers and assessors should provide apprentices and learners with more detailed written feedback, so they are clear about how to improve both their English skills and overall performance.
- Tutors, trainers and assessors should provide the most-able adult learners with increasingly challenging theory and practical exercises to enable them to make more rapid progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The managing director has set a clear mission and vision to establish Pilot as a provider that excels at delivering high-quality training to local and regional employers. All staff have high aspirations for learners. Staff share a passion for excellence and provide high-quality and successful training programmes. Leaders and managers support employers well by training employees as assessors, and providing free training to some learners who are ineligible for public funding.
- Staff and managers are very skilful at identifying the training needs of local businesses. They have a detailed understanding of the needs of the employers they work with, and are extremely knowledgeable about employment opportunities and skills shortages. For example, leaders and managers work closely with over 20 employers from diverse sectors such as logistics and manufacturing in three local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) covering Greater Birmingham, the Black Country, and Stoke and Staffordshire. The resulting skills academies have been very well received by employers with the result that many adult learners have gained permanent employment.
- Leaders and managers have made concerted and successful efforts to improve the provision. As a result of thorough and precise action planning, most areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection are now strong aspects of the provision. Apprentices' achievements have significantly improved since the previous inspection and increased numbers of apprentices stay on their programmes and complete their qualifications within expected and planned timescales.
- Management of staff performance has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Managers hold staff, including self-employed trainer assessors, to account particularly well for completion of their duties. Managers have devised a highly effective performance management structure that measures the progress of apprentices against each component of the apprenticeship framework. Staff are challenged to explain any underperformance on a weekly and monthly basis. This high level of scrutiny has led to a significant improvement in success rates and attendance.
- Leaders manage programmes very well. They have invested in good-quality learning resources that are used effectively. Staff are deployed in some employers' premises to make it easier for apprentices to attend training. Employers receive a detailed and very useful monthly report on the attendance and progress of their apprentices. Staff resolve any issues promptly, and as a result apprentices make quicker progress than was the case at the previous inspection.
- Managers have improved the process of observing teaching, learning and assessment. They now observe all aspects of the apprentices' and learners' experience. Actions to support staff after observations are relevant and meaningful and lead to improvements in practice. Teaching and learning have improved well since the previous inspection, but the most-able learners in particular do not always make the rapid progress they can in their learning.
- Managers and staff promote diversity well. All staff have received useful updates on equality and diversity issues. Managers have also updated the apprentices' and learners' handbook to extend the scope of diversity. Learners are better prepared for life in modern British society. Managers and leaders have narrowed the achievement gaps between different groups; however they do not routinely monitor the relative performance of learners from the different geographical areas in which Pilot offers training, which would enable them to identify any significant variation in the quality of provision.
- Leaders and managers evaluate their provision well. They take account of the broad range of evidence from employers, learners and staff, data, and observations of teaching and learning to produce an accurate account of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The quality development plan is clear and focuses strongly on the identified weaknesses found during the previous inspection and the priorities that senior managers identified, for example, in improving success rates and prioritising the timing of functional skills in English and mathematics.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Pilot is an independent learning provider with a sole director and small senior management team. At the previous inspection, the director and managers worked together to develop strategies to ensure that employers, apprentices and learners gained maximum benefit from the provision. The management structure of Pilot has now changed significantly. The director is now responsible for strategic decision making and is well informed about the quality of provision. He has a wide range of experience and he supports and challenges managers effectively to improve and develop the provision.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Senior managers place a high priority on safeguarding apprentices and learners. They recruit appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Having undertaken good-quality and thought-provoking training, staff are well aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. This enables them to fulfil their Prevent duty. Staff feel more confident to explore these subjects with apprentices and learners, who confirm their heightened awareness of extremism and the dangers of radicalisation.
- Managers ensure that all learners work in safe workplaces and adopt safe working practices. Managers use information technology well to block inappropriate websites on computers used by learners. While most apprentices and learners have adequate awareness of cyber-bullying, managers have not actively promoted e-safety to all learners.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The good teaching, learning and assessment practices are reflected in the very good outcomes for adult learners, the improving outcomes for apprentices and the large numbers of learners who gain sustainable employment.
- Most apprentices and learners are motivated and keen to learn new skills, gain qualifications and develop work-related skills. Most enjoy their learning, particularly the practical activities. The large majority make rapid progress in improving their skills and knowledge. Trainer assessors work extremely well with external agencies such as Pathway to support a minority of learners who have multiple barriers to learning, most of whom make very good progress and achieve well.
- Managers have improved the provision since the previous inspection and most apprentices are now making good progress towards achieving their frameworks. Most achieve their English and mathematics functional skills qualifications early in the programme. The vast majority of apprentices achieve at the first attempt. Most apprentices' progress reviews are detailed and used very well to set and monitor targets for improvement. Apprentices and employers understand fully what is expected to meet the requirements of each framework. Adult learners' reviews are less effective and place insufficient emphasis on what learners need to do to improve at a faster pace.
- Trainer assessors are well qualified and have extensive vocational experience. They use their experience and skills well to plan and provide learning that meets the needs of learners, apprentices and employers. As a result, most apprentices develop very good work skills and progress to higher level learning and/or gain promotion. Learners on the adult learning programmes make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. However, the small minority of the most-able learners are not challenged sufficiently, and do not always make the quicker progress they are capable of.
- Trainer assessors use a good range of assessment strategies to check apprentices' and learners' understanding and progress towards their learning outcomes. Most apprentices and learners benefit from detailed and effective oral feedback on their work. However, staff do not always provide sufficiently precise written feedback to help apprentices and learners improve more quickly.
- Staff use the results of learners' initial assessment of English and mathematics well. The majority of learners improve their levels of English and mathematics well throughout the programme. However, staff do not routinely and systematically correct spelling and grammatical errors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Apprentices and learners enjoy their learning and behave very well in learning sessions. They have a high regard for health and safety and this is reinforced effectively by trainer assessors who act as excellent role models. Apprentices and learners are very aware of the difference learning makes to their job prospects. The majority of learners on the logistics skills programme gain a good range of work-related qualifications and then employment with the partner employer. Apprentices gain valuable skills and behaviours and many move onto higher level qualifications and/or gain promotion.
- Attendance and punctuality on the adult learning programmes are particularly good. The large majority of learners develop new vocational, academic and business skills designed to meet local and national skills shortages and support their employment prospects. The majority of apprentices and other learners make the planned and expected progress in achieving functional skills qualifications. About a quarter of apprentices achieve functional skills at least one level higher than the level required by their frameworks.

- Pilot staff and employers provide good advice and guidance to support apprentices' and learners' progression. Many apprentices progress onto higher level learning programmes while employed. Learners on manufacturing skills programmes receive informal support from Pilot staff to find employment or move on to further training.
- Apprentices and learners feel safe and able to discuss personal issues with Pilot or their employers' staff. Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and most learners have a sufficiently detailed awareness of the threat of extremism and radicalisation. However, training in e-safety for apprentices and learners is insufficiently thorough, and most apprentices' and learners' knowledge comes from personal experience.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Adult learners achieve their learning aims particularly well. Programmes offer a wide and very useful range of work-related qualifications. Many learners have multiple barriers to learning; however, the proportion achieving their qualifications is very high and well above national rates.
- Apprentices' success rates for 2013/14 were below national rates and required improvement. The number of apprentices who achieved their qualification in 2014/15 increased significantly and is now slightly above national rates. Most apprentices make good and expected progress towards the completion of their qualification aims.
- There are no significant achievement gaps between different groups of apprentices and learners. Managers monitor the performance of different groups well. However, they do not routinely compare apprentices' performance across different geographical areas.
- The development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills is good and the large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications in English and mathematics at their first attempt. However, spelling and grammatical errors are not always corrected accurately.
- Apprentices are respected and highly valued by employers who support them well. This results in apprentices gaining high-quality vocational skills and additional qualifications. For example, apprentices have used elements of their accredited training in the workplace to improve processes and reduce costs.
- Many apprentices progress to higher level qualifications and motivate other employees to take up training. Employers acknowledge the benefits of apprentices' skills development and many are promoted to roles such as business manager, team leader and supervisor. Three quarters of learners on the logistics skills programmes enter employment with the partner employer.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

are good

- The adult learning provision comprises short, intensive courses for unemployed people aiming to progress into employment. The logistics skills programme includes a range of warehousing, work-flow and employability qualifications and high-quality work experience with a partner employer. Learners attending the manufacturing skills programme gain valuable manufacturing, work-flow and employability qualifications.
- Most adult learners achieve their qualifications, and the large majority of learners who attend the logistics skills programme gain employment. They improve their personal and social skills and behaviours quickly. Learners, many of whom have been unemployed for a long time, gain self-esteem and confidence very rapidly. They are very optimistic about their future prospects as a result of participating in the programme.
- Trainer assessors act as excellent role models and use their high levels of knowledge and industry expertise to make learning relevant. At the logistics skills academy, they utilise employers' resources, such as policies, procedures and application forms to help prepare learners for work in warehousing and distribution.
- Trainer assessors deliver highly effective theory sessions, particularly on health and safety. Learners retain and use this learning well; for example in the logistics skills academy when assessing risks at work, learners drew on the previous week's sessions about hazardous substances. In the manufacturing academy, learners were able to identify quickly and successfully potential hazards in workshops.

- Logistics learners complete excellent and highly relevant work experience with the partner employer. This helps them put their theory learning into the context of working in a warehouse and to gain valuable work experience and skills.
- Learners receive very effective individual support. Trainer assessors work very productively to ensure all learners receive the help they need to make good progress. Learners use the correct workplace terminology early in their programme because staff reinforce this well during learning sessions. As a result, learners talk knowledgeably about terms such as 'absorption' and 'ingestion' when considering health and safety risks at work. Learners participate well during training sessions and enjoy learning new skills. Attendance at training sessions is very good.
- Mathematics teaching is very effective. Learners understand quickly the need to measure work flow and its relationship with time and cost savings. Manufacturing learners apply mathematical skills when making chess boards, checking tolerances and drawing right angles accurately. However, staff do not always challenge the significant minority of most-able learners sufficiently. As a result, these learners do not always have the chance to achieve at the higher level of which they are capable.
- Trainer assessors do not give learners enough written feedback to help them improve. They seldom correct spelling and grammatical errors. However, they motivate learners well to achieve through instant and positive oral feedback on their work.
- Trainer assessors on the manufacturing skills programme support learners well to search for employment. They provide an up-to-date job vacancy board in the workshop. The programme does not include any externally funded time to help learners with job-search support. Learners appreciate the informal support that staff provide, often during breaks from work or when the working day finishes.
- Learners enjoy the safe and friendly learning environment. Those attending the logistics skills academy are able to discuss diversity issues openly, confidently and respectfully. Trainer assessors do not always challenge learners' views in the manufacturing skills academy about diversity and stereotypes. They do not ensure that all learning resources promote diversity, which has resulted in a few materials endorsing male stereotypes at work.
- Both skills academies are managed well. Partner employers have had a significant role in helping Pilot to develop programmes that meet local industry needs very well, which results in many learners gaining jobs. Managers are not able to judge the full impact of the manufacturing skills academy, as they do not gather complete data about learners who gain employment.

Apprenticeships are good

- Pilot IMS has more than 240 apprentices, the majority of whom are engaged in warehousing, business administration, team leading and management programmes. Approximately half are on intermediate-level apprenticeships and the remainder are on advanced and higher apprenticeships. Almost all apprentices are adults.
- The management and delivery of the apprenticeship programme have improved significantly in the last year and are now good. Managers have made significant and effective interventions, including the recruitment of new trainer assessors and managers, and more frequent observations of teaching, learning and assessment. These improvements have had a positive impact and the large majority of current apprentices are making at least the progress expected of them.
- Trainer assessors have good occupational and subject knowledge and they use this well in coaching and assessment sessions. They use a wide variety of assessment methods including professional discussion, direct observation and written assignments effectively to capture apprentices' performance and learning. Apprentices have a choice of using an e-portfolio or paper-based portfolio depending on personal preference or restrictions placed by employers on electronic devices in the workplace. Many apprentices are highly motivated and arrive before their shifts start and stay late to work on their portfolios. Learners' portfolios are of a very good standard.
- Apprentices develop their workplace skills very well. They become more confident and develop good teamwork and communication skills. They improve their understanding of progression opportunities from the good information and advice provided both by trainer assessors and their employers. The large majority of apprentices remain in employment on completion of their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices demonstrate a high standard of professionalism in their job roles and a small number have been promoted to more senior positions or have completed a higher level qualification. For example, one apprentice has developed excellent communications skills and self-confidence, and as a result has taken on the role of health and safety representative and fire warden.
- Employers value highly the contribution apprentices make to their business. One business administration apprentice has made significant savings to her company by delivering within the company services that were previously outsourced.

- Most apprentices achieve functional skills qualifications early in their apprenticeship. This has had a significant impact on success rates. Most apprentices make good progress with their English and mathematical skills due to the very effective support from trainer assessors.
- Apprentices benefit from good written and oral feedback on their work skills and are clear about how to improve further. Managers have improved the quality of apprentice reviews which contain significantly more detail. Apprentices are now set, and meet, clear and challenging targets.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	624
Director	Andrew Muscardo-Parker
Website address	www.pilotims.co.uk

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	9	0	14	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	12	126	0	69	0	36		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ none 							

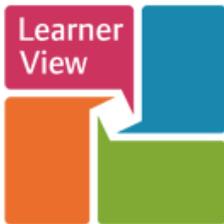
Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Bob Cowdrey, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector
Janet Rodgers	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ian Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Clive Blanchette	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the quality manager, 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 learners 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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