

Aspiration Training Limited (ATL)

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

29 November–2 December 2016

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have secured significant improvements since the previous inspection, so that the quality of the provision is good.
- Governance arrangements are particularly strong; very knowledgeable board members have provided strong challenge, scrutiny and support to the senior managers to accelerate the pace of improvements, resulting in high standards of learning and support for learners.
- Partnerships with employers are particularly effective and as a result programmes are very well designed and delivered flexibly to meet the business and skills needs of many small- and medium-sized employers. Leaders and managers meet the priority training needs of the local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) well.
- Deploying a clear strategy, leaders and managers have significantly increased the participation in apprenticeships of young people who were previously not in employment, education or training (NEET), enabling them to make a valuable contribution to the economy.
- Learners, including those on adult learning programmes, develop new skills and knowledge to a good level; they apply the skills learned to produce a high standard of work, raise their productivity and provide better customer and business support services, care and childcare.
- Leaders and managers have made considerable investment to recruit experienced staff who provide good additional learning support to learners. As a result, learners with additional needs achieve as well as their peers.
- Most learners do not have the required qualifications in English and mathematics at entry. They benefit from good-quality support to achieve qualifications in the functional skills of literacy, numeracy and information communication technology (ICT).
- All staff keep a vigilant focus on learners' achievement. Consequently the large majority of learners achieve their qualification in the planned period.
- Learners feel safe and are fully aware of the dangers of internet and cyber-security.
- Learners develop a broad range of vocational, personal and social skills. They are very well supported by high-quality employers and progress further in their careers.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Aspiration Training Limited (ATL) is an independent learning provider, based in Redditch, primarily serving the West Midlands and South West, with some additional learners in the East Midlands. A sister company, Aspiration Training (Wales) Limited, is based in Cardiff. The company provides intermediate, advanced and higher apprenticeships in health and social care, early years and more recently in the business services sectors.
- Learning Curve, the subcontractor, provides a range of adult learning programmes through distance learning. Approximately 14% of ATL's funding is allocated to these programmes. The courses are focused on providing professional updating for employees, as well as a small minority of current or ex-apprentices, primarily in the health and social care sector. Apprenticeship training is provided for more than 300 employers, the majority of which are small- to medium-sized enterprises, often in rural locations. In the past two years, the company has significantly increased the proportion of younger apprentices aged 16 to 18 who were previously NEET.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the management of the subcontractor and their delivery of programmes by:
 - setting them challenging targets so that learners on all courses, particularly those where fewer learners complete their qualifications, achieve in the planned timescale
 - appropriately monitoring and evaluating the teaching, learning and assessment that the subcontractor provides, so that it is of good or better quality.
- Ensure that tutors and assessors secure higher standards of work from learners by
 - confirming detailed verbal feedback in writing so that learners have an accurate record of what they need to improve and how they should do it
 - seeking improvements to the written assignments including re-submissions to include how learners have applied their skills to their employers' businesses
 - routinely correcting learners' work for spelling and grammar so that learners value the importance of English in their professional roles.
- Enhance the managers' and staff's abilities to recognise and measure learning appropriately so that they focus on the areas for improvement that will have the greatest impact on teaching and assessment practice and on learners' progress.
- Develop tutors' and assessors' confidence and competence so that they are well equipped to develop learners' understanding of what the local risks of extremism and radicalisation are in their communities, while reinforcing the role that fundamental British values play in modern society.
- Leaders and managers should further improve the detailed collection of learners' destinations into further education, training and employment to assess more fully the impact of the training on the overall career development of ATL's learners.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The effectiveness of the leadership and management of Aspiration Training Limited (ATL) is good. Leaders and managers have implemented significant and well-paced improvements since the previous inspection, which have led to the transformation of mediocre learning programmes of long-standing into good-quality provision. They have made a considerable investment in strengthening the leadership function by appointing a new executive director and a substantial number of support roles. These help learners particularly well with their additional learning needs and the development of their functional skills in English and mathematics.
- Leaders have put into action a comprehensive strategy that successfully meets the economic development priorities of the LEPs and employers in the areas where they provide learning. They have stopped providing employability programmes and have closed their Birmingham site. Since the previous inspection, managers have employed a dedicated employer engagement team with the aim of enhancing links with employers. The team has been highly successful in recruiting a large number of learners who were previously NEET and placing them with high-performing and successful employers. Here they develop skills and thrive. Similarly, the numbers of apprentices of Asian heritage have increased significantly due to the concerted efforts of the employer engagement team.
- Managers have responded swiftly to employers' and learners' feedback to extend the current training offer. They have expanded their apprenticeship programme into the business services sector, providing progression routes for learners into management roles. ATL has also withdrawn from direct delivery of adult learning programmes and contracted with a subcontractor with a history of reliability to meet the professional development needs of the employees in the health and social care sector, thus precisely meeting the needs of learners and employers alike.
- Leaders and managers have vastly simplified and improved the collection and use of data. Staff and managers are fully aware of each apprentice's progress against the expected stage of their learning. Staff are held to account for apprentices' progress in and completion of each unit of qualification, for their support and for progress reviews. As a result of this sharp focus, the large majority of apprentices have completed their programmes in the planned period, a weakness from the previous inspection that has been rectified. Although the managers have begun to collect data on the destinations of learners in recent months, this needs to be further improved to demonstrate the true contribution ATL's training makes to the overall career development of its learners and success of employers' businesses.
- To assure the quality of the provision they deliver directly, leaders and managers have developed and applied successfully a wide range of appropriate processes. These include frequent teaching and learning observations. These lead to valuable coaching and support for the staff and have a significant impact on tutors' and assessors' practice. However, in a few cases, observers fail to measure learning appropriately and subsequent development plans do not focus clearly enough on actions that will have the greatest impact on improvement. The mechanisms to monitor the provision delivered by the

subcontractor are insufficiently comprehensive.

- Leaders and managers know their provision well. The self-assessment report is self-critical and includes a broad range of evidence including data and learners' and employers' views. Mostly accurate, ATL's self-assessment of the provision links well to quality-improvement action planning, providing a platform that leaders and managers have used well, since the previous inspection, to effect much improvement. However, it is not sufficiently evaluative of the programme run by the subcontractor. Leaders and managers at ATL over-rely on the subcontractor's own evaluation based on their high qualification achievement rates.

The governance of the provider

- Governance at ATL is good.
- Governance has been greatly improved with the appointment of an external non-executive director who has supported leaders further in developing the vision and strategy for the provision.
- The board members are well informed about the performance of the training programmes. Members dedicate time accompanying tutors on their visits to learners, which is helping them to form their own views first-hand on the quality of learning delivered at ATL.
- After a thorough scrutiny of the reports, board members challenge the managers to instigate improvements to learners' experience of the provision. For example, last year the board recognised the training and development needs of tutors in delivering functional skills and ensured that tutors undertook targeted professional development in this area.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers promote successfully a culture of safe working and safeguarding. The managing director and the board members take an active interest in the safety and welfare of the learners and staff. They receive frequent and regular reports on the effectiveness of the safeguarding policies and ensure that actions are implemented promptly.
- Learners feel safe and have developed a good knowledge of safeguarding with regards to the children and service users that come into their care, matching closely employers' expectations in the health and care industry sector.
- Learners are made aware of e-safety and staff protect learners from the dangers of the internet by prohibiting access to inappropriate and suspect websites.
- Learners' knowledge of what fundamental British values mean is shallow, as it is in the case of tutors and assessors who lack confidence in the practical application to working practices of this topic. In addition, learners' knowledge of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation is insufficiently developed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The vast majority of apprentices enjoy their learning and are keen to learn. Many work independently between assessors' visits to ensure that they make good progress towards their qualifications. Learners on adult learning programmes use distance-learning modules and study independently to acquire new knowledge to help with their job roles. As a result, most learners achieve their intended qualifications.
- Employers support their apprentices' development through a valuable ongoing dialogue with the staff. They receive monthly reports from the provider that are informative, allowing them to understand what progress their apprentices have made. Not all employers take part in selecting the optional units that their apprentices study, but they are actively involved in discussions about apprentices' progress through regular reviews.
- Employers value highly their apprentices' contribution to their business. Many employers carefully plan and deliver on-the-job training that supports apprentices' wider skills development, such as an employer supporting a business administration apprentice with online training about the Data Protection Act 1998, and a childcare apprentice receiving support to complete a course about special educational needs. This high-quality additional training allows apprentices to take on more challenging tasks at work. However, this is not always recorded in apprentices' portfolios accurately, and so the picture of the learning that has taken place is not consistently clear.
- Vocational tutors support apprentices well. Tutors are flexible as to when they carry out their visits, often planning early morning or twilight visits to accommodate apprentices' shift patterns. Tutors review apprentices' progress regularly. Leaders have a clear overview of individual apprentices' progress, challenging assessors where apprentices have fallen behind in their expected progress. Consequently, apprentices are encouraged to stay on track and most make at least the progress expected of them.
- Support for learners with additional learning needs is good. Vocational tutors promptly identify those with support needs and refer them to specialist tutors who provide highly effective one-to-one support. This was an area for development in the previous inspection, when the staff did not know the scale of the need. Currently around 10% of learners have additional learning needs. They achieve as well as their peers.
- The majority of tutors skilfully use open questions to encourage discussion and enable apprentices to engage in the learning sessions and make good progress. Where tutors use questioning well, apprentices enthusiastically demonstrate their knowledge and take part in detailed conversations, developing their learning. However, in a small minority of cases, tutors use closed and leading questions that result in passive, disengaged learners who make less progress than they are capable of.
- Staff are experienced industry professionals from care, nursing, business and early years backgrounds. They use their up-to-date industry knowledge well to contextualise discussions around specific job roles and tasks, and challenge learners to do better. Tutors benefit from bespoke training to enhance their teaching skills by linking theory and practice coherently. This enables apprentices to understand difficult concepts and apply these to their work situations.
- Feedback is not consistently good, particularly for apprentices. Tutors deliver detailed and constructive feedback verbally that indicates what apprentices have done well and where

they need to improve further. However, written feedback to apprentices does not consistently reinforce the verbal feedback. As a consequence, apprentices are unable to routinely use the feedback given to make further improvements and produce a higher standard of work that they are capable of producing. Written feedback to adults is generally good, presented in a timely manner and enables learners to improve their performance.

- Vocational and specialist tutors are successful in helping apprentices improve their English and mathematics skills. For most learners who do not have the necessary GCSE grades at entry into apprenticeship, staff provide helpful individual coaching and taught sessions to support the development of skills as well as achieving the qualifications. This helps apprentices develop good technical vocabularies that enable them to work well professionally. However, tutors do not routinely and systematically correct spelling, punctuation and grammar errors within apprentices' written assignments.
- The most able learners do not consistently achieve their full potential. Vocational tutors do not sufficiently take into account the skills needed in order to meet learners' future aspirations or to help them to develop a wider range of skills. While most apprentices have a sound knowledge of the opportunities available in their sector, too few know what skills they need to achieve and how to gain them to realise their ambitions.
- Learners are respectful of each other and the people they work with. Apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity in their workplaces and work roles is strong. Recent training for tutors on British values and the 'Prevent' duty has increased their awareness in these areas, but most currently lack the confidence to support apprentices in making the links between these topics and their working practices.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners enjoy their learning, are well motivated during learning sessions, work independently between sessions and have a positive attitude to learning. The vast majority of learners enjoy their programmes and gain in confidence as well as achieving their work-related qualifications.
- Learners are very aware of the difference learning makes to their job prospects. ATL staff and employers provide valuable advice and guidance to support learners' progression. Learners are encouraged to consider their future plans and the skills they will need to progress. Many learners progress onto higher level qualifications while employed and often gain promotion as a result of their studies.
- Attendance at sessions is good, although punctuality is not always good, particularly in group sessions.
- Learners and employers appreciate the flexibility of the training programmes, particularly where teaching sessions have to be moved to meet business needs. This is important in the health and social care and early years employment sectors, where employers have to maintain appropriate ratios between staff and service users.
- Employers and learners value the communication and support from assessors who visit them often. Learners appreciate the regular visits and the additional help they are given between sessions by telephone and email that helps them to complete their work in time.
- Learners' success is celebrated well, for example through a 'learner of the month'

competition. One learner in a children's nursery was pleased to have featured in the local newspaper and to have received a tablet computer as a reward for her exceptionally hard work. Learners gain confidence and take pride in their achievements. For example, one learner had completed a project of collecting unwanted toys to be distributed to disadvantaged children through a local church.

- Tutors make good use of the findings of initial assessment in English and mathematics to plan learning for those learners undertaking qualifications in these subjects. A large majority of learners are successful in gaining these qualifications. A few of the learners who already have appropriate levels of qualifications in these subjects do not always have the opportunity to develop these skills further. This is because the tutors do not use the findings of initial assessment routinely to plan sessions to develop these skills for individual learners.
- Learners feel safe and able to discuss personal issues with their assessor or their employers. Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and most learners have a reasonable and, in some cases, detailed awareness of the threat of extremism and radicalisation. However, training in British values for learners is insufficiently thorough, and most learners' knowledge comes only from personal experience.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The rates of achievement of qualifications for apprentices are high and have been maintained over the past three years. A key improvement since the previous inspection has been in the much improved rates of achievement of qualifications in the planned period. Currently these rates are high.
- A vast majority of learners on adult learning programmes achieve their qualifications. This enhances their knowledge and understanding of the developments in the health and social care sector and how these affect their clients. They use this knowledge to apply their skills to provide better care for their clients and their family members. A small number of the current cohort of apprentices and previous apprentices have benefited greatly from professional updating.
- Intermediate and advanced apprentices achieve well. However, the rates of achievement are low for higher level apprentices, who make up less than 10% of all apprentices. Leaders and managers have analysed the reasons for this and have taken well-considered steps to deal with the underlying causes.
- The large majority of learners develop new vocational skills designed to meet local and national skills shortages and support their employment prospects. The majority of learners make good progress in achieving qualifications.
- Functional skills achievement rates are very high. Some 80% of the apprentices do not have the required qualifications in English and mathematics at entry into apprenticeship. Experienced and skilled tutors provide the necessary support with study skills and examination preparation for apprentices who are studying GCSE programmes externally at local colleges.
- Between 15% and 20% of the learners leave their programmes early, mainly because of loss of employment and other factors beyond the control of staff and managers at ATL.

Staff have high aspirations for their learners and expect all of them to achieve qualifications. Leaders and managers have stopped working with a few employers who have a poor reputation for staff retention and a lack of commitment to training.

- There are no significant differences in the achievement of qualifications between groups of apprentices. Apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities now achieve qualifications on par with their peers. Their achievement was poor at the previous inspection. Managers have eliminated this achievement gap.
- Learners' progression into higher levels of qualifications, education or into higher level jobs is positive and improving. Staff have recently started monitoring the destinations of learners who progress into full employment or higher level study. Staff and managers need to further develop this area of work to assess the impact of learning on their careers.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Good

- The qualification achievement rates for learners on level 2 adult learning provision are very high. These programmes include often mandatory and useful qualifications that enhance learners' skills, knowledge and confidence to work in the health and social care sector. Some of the examples of qualifications include: understanding the safe handling of medicines; awareness of mental health issues; principles of end-of-life care; understanding autism; and the principles of dementia care. At the time of inspection, 730 learners are undertaking the qualifications listed above.
- Learners benefit professionally from completing courses such as in the care and management of diabetes, understanding autism and in equality and diversity. For example, a care worker is now more confident in identifying more easily symptoms of a client's low blood sugar. Another care worker understands the triggers of service users with autism so that she can plan activities better and take necessary precautions. A trade union representative, having acquired a good understanding of the Equality Act 2010, now feels more competent to give more accurate advice to members.
- Staff promote courses widely to employers and employees working in the sectors, with relevant topics that meet local and national priorities. The courses are invaluable for learners to provide a safety-critical and sensitive service to their clients and their families.
- Learning and assessment are good. Learners develop their skills through independent learning that is supported by workbooks and pre-prepared online learning resources. Learners obtain helpful guidance and advice from an assigned tutor to clarify any problems or queries. Tutors provide an independent assessment of the learners' work with helpful suggestions for further improvements. The Learning Curve team conducts robust moderations of the feedback to maintain high standards.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective for learners, who all receive information in their learner handbook.
- The only group session where learners meet their tutor on induction is focused on mainly administrative tasks and on how to complete the programme. Learners find this boring and dull, with little new learning. Tutors fail to enthuse and motivate learners to get the

most benefit from distance learning, an approach to learning that may not be suitable for all learners.

- Tutor feedback on learners' written assignments is not consistently good across tutors and courses. Written feedback is detailed and comments on each section of the workbook. However, it is often insufficiently individualised to enable learners to make changes and improve their skills and knowledge further, and in particular demonstrate how they have applied their skills and knowledge in real-work situations.
- Tutors do not make good use of the findings of the initial assessment of learners' English and mathematics skills. For example, tutors do not stress the importance of the development of learners' English language skills and, in the marked work sampled, tutors had not highlighted or commented on spelling and punctuation errors.

Apprenticeships

Good

- At the time of inspection, 950 apprentices are in learning, undertaking intermediate, advanced and higher level apprenticeships in health and social care, childcare and business services. Business services apprenticeships include business administration, customer service, team leading and management. Some 57% of apprentices are undertaking apprenticeships in health and social care, followed by 22% in business services and 21% in childcare. Intermediate apprentices make up 52% of the provision, advanced apprentices constitute 40% of the provision and the remainder are higher level apprentices.
- Apprenticeship programmes are planned and managed well in order to meet the apprenticeship requirements. Visiting tutors have very good vocational knowledge and experience that they use well to aid apprentices' progress. Tutors are enthusiastic and motivate the vast majority of apprentices to develop a good understanding of their vocational subject and produce a good standard of work. Apprentices apply practical skills competently and confidently in their workplaces, adding value to the business and preparing them for sustained employment.
- Tutors use information learning technology effectively to promote and assess learning. Leaders and managers have invested generously by rationalising three different sets of virtual learning environments into one that all apprentices and their employers, tutors and managers can access. Learners access frequently a broad range of learning resources from the portal to research topics and enhance their learning. Learners use an appropriately broad range of evidence to upload to the portal to demonstrate their competence. Tutors provide feedback on learners' work promptly. Employers, staff and managers are able to check the progress of an apprentice at any given time and take corrective action to deal with any underperformance. Where apprentices have limited access to technology, ATL has loaned laptops and recording devices so that learners can gather evidence quickly and submit assignments on time. This has accelerated the pace of completion of qualifications in the planned period.
- Staff routinely test learners for any additional learning support needs and meet their needs promptly. Staff also use alternative methods of communication if learners have difficulties with using electronic portfolios. Dyslexic learners are provided with necessary support, including the use of coloured paper.

- Apprentices are set clear and specific targets to ensure they complete their qualifications on time. However, these are often around completing tasks, instead of focusing on skills development, and do not consistently challenge the most able apprentices. Targets do not routinely and systematically enough take into consideration learners' aspirations for their future, or support them to reach their full potential.

Provider details

Unique reference number	57680
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,111
Principal/CEO	Mr Malcolm Free
Telephone number	01527 359646
Website	www.aspirationtraining.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	730	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	130	365	36	343	-	76		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	The Learning Curve							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the executive director, as nominee. 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.

Inspection team

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